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Cultural Mechanisms in Neighborhood Effects Research in the United States¹

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Cultural Mechanisms in Neighborhood Effects Research in the United States

Abstract

This paper discusses the current state of the U.S. literature on cultural mechanisms in neighborhood effects research. We first define what we mean by neighborhood effects and by cultural mechanisms. We then review and critique two theoretical perspectives on the cultural context of disadvantaged neighborhoods that are explicitly integrated into recent neighborhood effects literature in the U.S.: “deviant subculture” and “cultural heterogeneity.” We then draw on other related U.S. literatures from urban studies, cultural sociology, and culture and inequality to suggest some other conceptualizations that may be useful in advancing our understanding of the role of culture in neighborhood effects. We discuss the conceptual and methodological issues that will have to be grappled with in order to move this literature forward and conclude by offering concrete suggestions, both short-term and long-term, for a research agenda.

The literature on neighborhood effects in the United States is primarily concerned with understanding the consequences of living in a high poverty, high violence, or otherwise “disadvantaged” neighborhood on individual outcomes such as educational attainment, employment, health, or fertility. While the key dimensions of disadvantage may vary considerably from country to country, in the U.S. case neighborhood disadvantage is shorthand for a number of characteristics that tend to occur together, including poverty, joblessness, racial segregation, single-parent households, welfare receipt, and low levels of education. A fundamental premise of this literature is that the poor are doubly disadvantaged, both by their own poverty and by the effects of a neighborhood context in which many of their neighbors are also poor (Wilson 1987, 1996). A particular concern in the U.S. is with the effect of concentrated poverty on children’s and adolescents’ outcomes, particularly those like education and fertility that will impact their own socioeconomic status in adulthood. Given that the children of poor families are disproportionately exposed to neighborhood poverty and that neighborhood context during childhood contributes to individual poverty in adulthood, economic segregation and the resulting concentrated poverty are important drivers of stratification processes. In the U.S. case this segregation is as much race-based as it is economic: concentrated poverty is largely the burden of blacks and Hispanics, and as such neighborhood effects are also important for understanding racial inequalities.²

² The role of race and ethnicity in the U.S. literature on neighborhood poverty and neighborhood effects is largely limited to the role of racial segregation in the creation and maintenance of geographically concentrated poverty. Racial segregation and housing discrimination coupled with high rates of poverty among minorities, particularly blacks and Hispanics, leads to concentrated poverty among minorities that is far more common than among whites (Wilson 1987, Massey and Denton 1993, Jargowsky 1997). However, the processes and disadvantages resulting from concentrated poverty are often assumed to be universalistic. In other words, racial or ethnic group-specific cultural beliefs, customs, norms or practices are not seen as playing a central role in neighborhood effects, even though members of specific groups tended to be concentrated with others of the same race or ethnicity in poor neighborhoods. This might be contrasted with some European approaches that focus on specific immigrant groups in high poverty neighborhoods and the role of group specific cultural traits, particularly as those cultures interact with poverty concentration (e.g. LaGrange 2010).

Due to the challenges of confounding by family background and individual characteristics, the vast majority of research on neighborhood effects in the U.S. has focused on documenting the existence and relative magnitude of such effects. As we move beyond questions of selection bias, however, scholars have begun to examine the processes or mechanisms by which neighborhood effects come about and for whom they are most significant. This is not to say that prior neighborhood effects literature was not theoretically motivated, but that the empirical focus has been on *whether* there are neighborhood effects rather than on exploring *how* neighborhood effects come about and operate. Multiple theories of neighborhood effects in the U.S. have been proposed, including but not limited to social isolation, social (dis)organization, environmental hazards, violence, institutional resources, and – the focus of this article – neighborhood culture. Each theory proposes one or more mechanisms through which neighborhood disadvantage is linked to individual outcomes.

These theories are not mutually exclusive; they are complementary rather than competing. Mechanisms drawn from different theories may explain different outcomes equally well, the same outcome may be brought about by different mechanisms for different individuals, and life-course processes, resource distributions, and social networks may affect the interpretation or applicability of any of these mechanisms.³ A complete account of neighborhood effects mechanisms likely includes causal processes identified by multiple theories acting in concert.

Of these mechanisms, neighborhood culture is amongst the most widely discussed but least developed, theoretically or empirically. The purpose of this paper is to review the literature

³ One simple definition of a mechanism is “the cogs and wheels of the causal process through which the outcome to be explained was brought about” (Hedstrom and Ylikoski 2010: 50)

on cultural mechanisms in neighborhood effects research in the U.S.⁴ It has three goals. The first goal is to describe and critique two central theories of cultural mechanisms in U.S. neighborhood effects research. The second goal is to explore additional cultural mechanisms that might be fruitfully pursued in empirical research on neighborhoods and culture. We divide this discussion into two parts, one on previously-established, seemingly non-cultural neighborhood effects processes that might be thought of as cultural, and another part on the use of concepts from the sociology of culture that have been hitherto ignored in the neighborhood effects field. Our third goal is to discuss the conceptual and methodological challenges facing research on culture in neighborhood effects. Throughout this paper we attempt to highlight the most fruitful points of overlap between the sociology of culture and the study of neighborhood effects, to point out unresolved tensions, and to develop an agenda for overcoming these challenges.

1. Cultural Mechanisms in the Neighborhood Effects Literature

What do we mean by *cultural mechanisms* in neighborhood effects? We mean a set of processes that are the product of neighborhood poverty (or some other form of neighborhood disadvantage, such as high rates of unemployment or non-marital childbearing) and in turn affect individual outcomes of neighborhood residents.⁵ A cultural mechanism explains how the composition of the neighborhood (who lives there, particularly their structural positions in the hierarchies of the wider society) affects the cultural context of the neighborhood (the cultural

⁴ We are not the first to do so; see Sampson and Bean (2006) for a related review.

⁵ This definition is intentionally limited in that it focuses on processes linked to neighborhood disadvantage rather than all cultural aspects of neighborhoods. In explaining how neighborhood disadvantage can affect individual outcomes we are attempting to highlight the direct paths through which culture may operate. This should not be read, however, as a rejection of alternate conceptualizations of culture, a claim about the relationship between culture and structure, or an argument that poverty/disadvantage is the sole “source” of culture in a neighborhood. We are keenly aware of Sewell’s claim that structures are multiple, schemas transposable, and resource accumulation unpredictable (Sewell Jr. 1992), but are attempting to offer a simplified reading of “cultural mechanisms” here in the hope of stimulating consideration of such factors in future research. We return to this point, and alternate conceptualization of culture’s import to neighborhoods, in section 3.1.

milieu experienced by residents) as well as how that cultural context affects individuals. Thus we think of neighborhood effects mechanisms as composed of two components: (1) the processes by which neighborhood poverty or other forms of disadvantage create a particular neighborhood cultural milieu (what neighborhood effects researchers call more generally the “emergent” properties of neighborhoods, see Sampson 2012), and (2) how different types of cultural milieu have consequences for individual behavior, decision-making, and outcomes. The latter question, how cultural context shapes individual behavior, has been a particular interest in cultural sociology and is where concepts from that field may be most productively incorporated into the neighborhood effects literature. Because the term culture has many different meanings and encompasses many different concepts (Jepperson and Swidler 1994), a particular problem in the literature on neighborhoods and culture has been lack of specificity in the concepts that underlie the proposed mechanisms. As we will see below, different conceptualizations of culture can lead to very different mechanisms.

1.1. The Field as it now Stands

The dominant conceptualization of the cultural context of poor neighborhoods in the neighborhood effects literature is what we term the “deviant subculture” theory. The dominance and ubiquity of this theory has meant that its core ideas and assumptions are rarely stated explicitly, resulting in considerable variation across researchers in its presentation and application. Our description of this perspective is therefore gleaned from various sources.

The deviant subculture theory (hereafter, “subculture” theory) holds that individuals in poor neighborhoods engage in behaviors that are (at least on average) different than those of residents of more advantaged neighborhoods because they are embedded in and responsive to a

different culture, one that values such behaviors or the outcomes to which they lead. Instead of valuing marriage, the urban poor value early parenthood. Instead of valuing work and self-sufficiency, the urban poor value leisure. Instead of valuing investment in education, the urban poor value short-term hustling or crime that allows them to “get by” day-to-day. Young people who grow up in poor neighborhoods are socialized into this culture through interactions with neighbors and peers. Social isolation from mainstream individuals and institutions, driven by racial and economic segregation in neighborhoods and schools, precludes other sources of socialization. Perhaps the strongest statement of this perspective is provided by Massey and Denton in their 1993 book, *American Apartheid*:

“As intense racial isolation and acutely concentrated poverty have continued, ghetto values, attitudes, and ideals have become progressively less connected to those prevailing elsewhere in the United States. More and more, the culture of the ghetto has become an entity unto itself, remote from the rest of American society and its institutions, and drifting ever further afield.” (172).

This quote includes three core elements of the subculture perspective. The first is the importance of concentrated poverty and racial segregation in generating social isolation. The second is the role of social isolation in generating a separate, distinct culture (“the culture of the ghetto,” “remote” and “drifting ever further afield”). The third is what such a culture consists of, “values, attitudes, and ideals,” that is, the ends toward which one should strive.

The ideas underlying the subculture perspective can be traced back to the fount of Parsonian functionalism. Parsons understood culture – an individual trait developed through socialization, singular and unwavering – as providing the values toward which human action is directed (Parsons 1951). Likewise, we see in subculture theory a claim that the cultural milieu of

the disadvantaged provides the ends toward which they act. An earlier generation of scholars, Oscar Lewis and Daniel Patrick Moynihan perhaps best known, brought this view of culture to the study of poverty as well. The strong negative public and intellectual reaction to Lewis's "culture of poverty" thesis (1966, 1968) and the Moynihan report (1965) tamped down the study of culture and poverty for several decades (see Wilson 1987). Since the 1980s, largely via subcultures, culture has reemerged as a legitimate topic in the field. This work maintains the motivational understanding of culture while emphasizing its adaptive nature: the subculture of disadvantaged areas responds to structural factors (joblessness, isolation, discrimination, etc.), but is not permanent; a change in structure is presumed to alter culture. The reemergence of culture in the field has political as well as theoretical ramifications. Work in the subculture vein, as Skrentny astutely notes, "takes cultural explanations back from the Right, and then banishes them from policy discussions because culture is epiphenomenal" (2008:63).

One example of this approach to subcultures comes from Anderson's ethnographic study of inner-city Philadelphia (Anderson 1990, 1999), where he describes romantic and sexual relationships among young people as the "baby game." Anderson argues that male adolescent peer groups, without avenues such as occupational prestige or wealth for demonstrating success, value sexual conquest of multiple women and high fertility as proof of manhood and signals of masculinity. At the same time, they also see long-term relationships as traps by girls or women out to take advantage of a man's limited material resources. As a result, young males seek to "play" their female counterparts, promising long-term relationships in exchange for sex, then moving on to another partner. Young women, with few prospects for conventional means of success or status, see early motherhood as a route to adult status and seek to ensnare the most

desirable men with sex. As the process plays out, the result is high rates of early childbearing and single motherhood in poor inner-city communities.

Perhaps the most well-known and well-researched version of the subculture theory is the “oppositional culture” explanation of schooling outcomes among poor blacks. On the basis of an ethnographic study of an inner-city high school and the surrounding community, Fordam and Ogbu (1986) argue that, in response to limited educational and labor market opportunities, poor inner-city black youth see school effort as “acting white.” Since only whites will benefit from schooling effort, blacks who engage in effort at school are thought to view themselves as better than their black peers. As a result, they are ostracized, and resistance to schooling becomes normative in the adolescent culture. Subsequent research has found no evidence of greater sanctioning of school effort among African-American youth (Cook and Ludwig 1998, Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey 1998, Harris 2006), and Carter (2005) has argued that young people’s conceptions of “acting white” have more to do with music and fashion tastes than with schooling effort.

Similar subcultural explanations, in which residents of poor neighborhoods develop cultural values that are different from the mainstream and thereby lead individuals to engage in different behaviors, appear in neighborhood effects studies from multiple fields. Some criminologists argue that high rates of violence in disadvantaged neighborhoods are the product of a “street culture” that valorizes honor through violence and public domination of others. Absent access to other forms of prestige or social status, respect goes to the toughest (for a review, see Kubrin and Weitzer 2003. See also Stewart and Simons 2010 and Berg et al 2012). In the immigration literature, segmented assimilation theory (Portes and Zhou 1993) holds that some second generation immigrants assimilate into the values and norms of inner-city black

culture rather than mainstream culture because of their skin color, neighborhood location, and perceived lack of opportunities for upward economic mobility. This “downward assimilation” leads to negative outcomes.

While U.S. poverty and neighborhood effects researchers have been focused on subcultural theories, researchers in fields such as urban studies, race and ethnicity, education, stratification, and the sociology of culture, have developed alternative ways of thinking about culture. These approaches – lumped under the rubric of the “cultural turn” – part ways with the conception of culture as providing the ends to which action is directed, and instead consider the various ways in which cultural resources, tools, and models enable and constrain the behavior of actors who have access to them. Topics of study include but are not limited to frames (Goffman 1986); schemas (Sewell Jr. 1992); styles, skills, and habits (Swidler 1986); habitus (Bourdieu 1984); semiotic codes (Alexander and Smith 1993); and narratives (Somers 1994).

The cultural turn was, at least in part, motivated by empirical work on the values, attitudes, and ideals of the poor, and continues to find applications in that field.⁶ Studies of education, fertility, and work in poor communities have documented strong adherence to conventional values such as the importance of education, marriage, parenthood, and work. Qualitative research has provided evidence of a high degree of cultural conflict in poor communities (Hannerz 1969, Anderson 1999);⁷ argued that local cultures are derived from mainstream culture but reinterpreted to fit local needs and in response to blocked opportunities,

⁶ Debate over the degree to which the poor share the values and aspirations of the middle-class was one of two central examples in Swidler’s seminal “Culture in Action” (1986). Swidler uses evidence from Liebow, Hannerz, and Valentine to argue that the values and aspirations of the poor are indeed similar to those of the middle class, but that cultural differences made enactment of these aspirations much less likely. In addition, Hannerz’s *Soulside* informs Swidler’s thinking on cultural repertoires.

⁷ Anderson’s position on the debate between subculture and cultural heterogeneity is difficult to discern. On the one hand, his notion that poor urban neighborhoods contain both “street” and “decent” cultural codes is a core motivating idea for the cultural heterogeneity perspective. On the other hand, his explanations of behavior and decision-making in poor urban neighborhoods tends to fall back on the deviant subculture logic, as discussed above.

rather than a rejection of mainstream culture due to lack of opportunity (Liebow 1967, Duneier 1992, Anderson 1978, Rodman 1963); and shown that local values are consistent with mainstream values (Edin and Kefalas 2005, Newman 1999).

The basic conceptual problem with subcultural explanations of neighborhood effects is that it is hard to see how a subculture can dictate individual behavior when the empirical evidence suggests lack of uniformity in cultural models present in the neighborhood. The cultural turn perspective relies instead on a different underlying conceptualization of what culture is and how it influences individual behavior. The subculture concept assumes that culture is coherent and cohesive and explains behavior as conformity to subcultural values. Variation in behavior must therefore result from embeddedness in a different subculture with different values. In contrast, modern sociology of culture is based on a cognitive view in which culture is fragmented and composed of, “disparate bits of information and... schematic structures that organize that information” (DiMaggio1997:263). A key concept is the cultural repertoire or toolkit (Hannerz 1969, Tilly 1978, Swidler 1986): the set of cultural resources that an individual has available for deployment. An individual always has multiple cultural resources in his or her repertoire, and they need not fit neatly together. Indeed, they may be divergent or conflicting.

Based on such an understanding of culture, Harding has put forth an alternative to the subculture perspective that conceives of disadvantaged neighborhoods as culturally heterogeneous rather than simply distinct from middle- or working-class communities (Harding 2007, 2010, 2011). Harding defines cultural heterogeneity as “a wide array of competing and conflicting cultural models” (2007:341). In other words, rather than being dominated by a unified subculture with non-mainstream values, the cultural heterogeneity theory describes poor neighborhoods as containing a mix of competing and conflicting cultural elements, some of

which are oppositional or “ghetto-specific” (Wilson 1987) and reflect responses to blocked opportunities, but most of which are conventional.⁸ The cultural heterogeneity perspective holds that poor neighborhoods are culturally heterogeneous, and that this meso-level heterogeneity causes young people growing up in such neighborhoods to develop a far more heterogeneous repertoire than their counterparts in more advantaged neighborhoods.

The cultural heterogeneity perspective revives two insights that were once core ideas of sociological research on urban poverty. The first comes from Shaw and McKay (1969), who argued that socially disorganized slum neighborhoods present youth with “systems of competing and conflicting moral values,” both conventional and unconventional. Shaw and McKay used this insight to explain higher rates of delinquency in immigrant receiving neighborhoods during the early 20th century, arguing that this heterogeneity of moral values leads to the weakening of social norms and breakdown of informal social control (see below on the role of culture in social organization theory). The second comes from Hannerz (1969), who was the first scholar of whom we are aware to use the concept of repertoire in an analysis of culture among the urban poor. Hannerz argued that each individual has a repertoire of various cultural “items” – beliefs, norms, values, meanings, and modes of action – that is a mixture of both mainstream and “ghetto-specific” cultural elements, with ghetto-specific cultural elements being adaptations and reactions to poverty and social exclusion. The culture of the local community can either add to or substitute for various elements in one’s repertoire.

⁸ Wilson’s conceptualization of the cultural context of poor urban neighborhoods seems to have evolved over time. While *The Truly Disadvantaged* discusses the importance of social isolation in creating a “ghetto-specific” culture, *When Work Disappears* uses the term “ghetto-related” and emphasizes that many residents of poor urban neighborhoods subscribe to mainstream values, even if such values are difficult or impossible to live up to. His discussion of culture on pages 66-72 in *WWD* is similar to the cultural heterogeneity perspective discussed here. Wilson’s latest book, *More Than Just Race* (2009) continues along the same lines, specifically and emphatically rejecting subcultural explanations of behavior in poor urban communities.

How does cultural heterogeneity help us to explain the effect of neighborhoods on an individual's outcomes? Assuming that an individual's repertoire is the product of the various cultural resources that he or she comes into contact with regularly, an individual residing in a culturally heterogeneous neighborhood will have a more diverse repertoire of cultural resources available. Especially for young people, a diverse repertoire can make envisioning and implementing effective strategies of action more challenging. Adolescents in more culturally heterogeneous neighborhoods are less likely to realize or act in accordance with the pregnancy frames, relationship scripts, educational goals, and frames about violence that they articulate (Harding 2007, 2011, Berg et al. 2013, Berg et al. 2012).

Based on a qualitative study of adolescent boys in three neighborhoods in Boston, Harding (2010) identifies three processes through which neighborhood cultural heterogeneity translates into negative schooling outcomes and early fatherhood. "Model shifting" occurs when alternative cultural models are available to replace those in use when challenges or setbacks occur, leading to lack of consistency in action or effort. "Dilution" occurs when information about how to enact particular cultural models is diluted by the volume and diversity of such cultural models. In a culturally heterogeneous neighborhood, dilution may mean there are fewer opportunities to develop the skills, habits, and interactional styles that allow young people to successfully navigate and secure resources from complex institutions such as the labor market or post-secondary education. "Simultaneity" occurs when individuals try to deploy multiple cultural models at the same time and those models are incompatible with one another, leading to flawed strategies of action. Other types of processes, yet to be identified and described, may operate as well.

Individuals do not simply pick selectively from the available cultural resources; they also look to their environment for sanction of and support in their application. This is one place in which the role of structural positions or material circumstances enters cultural heterogeneity theory. Cultural models that have social support in the local environment are more likely to enter one's repertoire and to be deployed from it, but the social support need not be universal and can be evidenced by either the words or the actions of others. Moreover, structurally influenced social identities may play an important role in the interpretation, salience, and deployment of particular cultural models from the repertoire. Some cultural models may "resonate" (Schudson 1989) more with one's prior experiences, which will be in part determined by structural positions or material circumstances. Those with greater resonance are more likely to be deployed. In contrast subculture theory views culture as a direct response to opportunities (structural positions) or material circumstances.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Table 1 summarizes key differences between the subculture theory and the cultural heterogeneity theory. While much of this has been discussed above, we want to highlight two additional points. First, cultural heterogeneity theory acknowledges that cultural resources come from multiple sources, such as local contexts (family, school, church) and larger social institutions such as the media, politics, or religion. As a result, social networks and culture are only loosely coupled, as individuals draw on multiple sources in developing their repertoires. In contrast, the subculture theory assumes that a subculture is, in addition to being a set of cultural resources, a bounded group or network of individuals; social networks and culture are tightly

coupled. Second, given its emphasis on selection of cultural models for deployment from the repertoire, the cultural heterogeneity theory assumes a high level of individual agency, while the subculture theory, with its emphasis on cultural conformity, assumes a lower level of agency. The concept of repertoire assumes that individuals selectively filter cultural resources they encounter in their environment, although in a way that is attentive to which ideas are dominant in the local context or in the wider society.

1.2. Critiques of the Current Field

The literature on cultural mechanisms in neighborhood effects summarized in Table 1 is at a crucial stage, with two very different perspectives on the cultural context of poor neighborhoods and the processes through which this context affects individuals. In the remainder of this section we discuss three critiques that have been made of these perspectives, with the goal of motivating our discussion of alternative conceptualizations and a new research agenda in the subsequent two sections of the paper.

A first critique, levied generally against the post-cultural turn field, cautions against abandoning the notion that culture may influence the ends toward which individuals strive. The critique, as we understand it, can be made in two ways. First, there is a philosophical argument, rooted in American pragmatism, which questions the very distinction between means and ends. This perspective suggests that a given cultural resource – a frame, a script, a strategy of action – may have multiple instances, and that singling it out as solely a means of or constraint on action (rather than also recognizing the ways in which it can serve as an end), is to overlook the plurality of meanings it may have.⁹ Second, there is a logical argument that one need not assume cultural coherence in order to use concepts such as norms, values, ideals, or attitudes. The

⁹ See the discussion of imagined futures in section 2.2 for a specific example of this argument.

question of what culture consists of – and whether ends are important – must be analytically separate from whether it is coherent or heterogeneous. In other words, the critique described above of the subculture perspective need not be taken as a general critique of the applicability of cultural concepts related to values, ideals, ends, or “motivations” as Vaisey (2009, 2010) calls them collectively.

A second critique questions whether the current conceptualization of cultural heterogeneity sufficiently theorizes the role of dominant vs. non-mainstream cultural models. For example, Harding (2010) analyzes heterogeneity in career scripts, but focuses on a set of scripts – such as vocational training, GED followed by community college, work in the low-wage labor market – that, while not necessarily salient in a middle class community, would not be viewed as deviant in the wider society. This leaves largely unexamined the role of alternative “deviant career” scripts, particularly drug selling or other criminal activity. More generally, how do the evaluative hierarchies of the wider society influence the availability and deployment of cultural models in poor neighborhoods? What role do local and non-local norms play in the composition of individuals’ repertoires in poor neighborhoods and the decision to act according to a particular cultural model from the repertoire? The role of neighborhood context relative to the wider society deserves further consideration and elaboration if we are to understand the role of neighborhood context in repertoire construction and how strategies of action are developed from repertoires.¹⁰

A third critique questions whether either the subculture or cultural heterogeneity perspective presents an adequate model of what “culture” is. This critique requires elaboration of what elements constitute culture, at what levels of analysis they are to be found, and how these

¹⁰ This reflects a larger weakness in the repertoires literature, which has not sufficiently theorized the composition of repertoires or deployment of elements from the repertoire in action or behavior (see Lamont 1992; Lamont and Thévenot 2000).

elements are related to one another and to a range of structural factors. Twenty years ago, Jepperson and Swidler (1994) described the difficulty of this problem in cultural sociology, and the questions that they faced remain, by and large, unresolved. Suffice it to say that culture can be and regularly is theorized as existing and acting at the level of individuals – frames, scripts, and other “cultural models” (Holland and Quinn 1987)¹¹; styles, skills, and habits; identities; etc. – as well as the community (especially in the form of norms and institutions). It is important to note that the heterogeneity theorized by Harding is heterogeneity *within* a given element – heterogeneity of frames about sex or scripts for education – and not *across* elements. The connections between and within these levels, however, have bearing on his model and remain under-theorized. How are cultural resources “inside” the individual related to one another and to community norms? How do they get “inside” and how do we account for differential internalization?

These questions have direct bearing on the subculture and cultural heterogeneity theories. The deviant subculture perspective is most closely aligned with conceptions of culture based on values, ideals, and attitudes, while cultural heterogeneity has primarily relied on frames, scripts, and cultural models. A richer elaboration of the latter should account for what heterogeneity means when applied to other concepts. Given Harding’s argument that heterogeneity at the community level leads to more heterogeneous repertoires among members of the community, we need a deeper theory of both normative heterogeneity (a concept that seems at first glance paradoxical) and the transmission of cultural resources. In addition, the structure and consequences of cultural heterogeneity may vary depending on the cultural resource considered. For example, cultural resources like styles, skills, and habits can be thought of as more

¹¹ Holland and Quinn (1987) define cultural models as, “presupposed, taken-for-granted models of the world that are widely shared (although not necessarily to the exclusion of other, alternative models) by the members of a society and that play an enormous role in their understanding of that world and their behavior in it” (p. 4).

internalized and less conscious than cognitive concepts like frames, scripts, beliefs or narratives. Is it possible to internalize competing or conflicting styles or habits? Can the habitus be heterogeneous? More generally, can these other cultural concepts be used to describe differences in cultural context between poor and more advantaged neighborhoods and to explain differences in behavior or outcomes across neighborhoods?

2. Possible Alternative Conceptualizations of Neighborhood Cultural Mechanisms

The above critiques suggest that alternative conceptualizations of neighborhood cultural mechanisms are possible and necessary. In this section we consider additional possible linkages between the neighborhood effects and cultural sociology literatures. In reviewing these literatures, we have come to see linkages – some implicit, some potential – between the two fields. We believe that there are well-established neighborhood effects theories that are nominally unrelated to neighborhood culture yet contain elements of cultural explanation or could be strengthened by explicitly considering cultural concepts. Likewise, there are concepts central to the sociology of culture that could fruitfully be brought to bear in explaining neighborhood effects. We aim to highlight several of these possibilities in this section.

2.1. Finding Culture in Neighborhood Effects Theories

In this sub-section we attempt to emphasize the cultural aspects of extant neighborhood effects theories and mechanisms. These are not typically thought of in the language of cultural sociology, but we believe that linking the two may prove beneficial to both fields.

Our first example comes from the social organization field of the neighborhood effects literature. Instead of focusing on the cultural context of poor neighborhoods, this longstanding

approach focuses on the social organization of poor neighborhoods, or the extent to which residents are socially connected to one another in such a way that they can act collectively to regulate activities in the neighborhood via informal social control. Although this literature originally focused on crime and delinquency (e.g. Shaw 1929, Shaw and McKay 1969, Kornhauser 1978), it has also been extended to the control of adolescent behavior in other domains such as education and fertility (e.g. Coleman 1988, Browning et al. 2004, 2005).

There is a strong cultural element to social organization theory, in that a neighborhood's capacity for social control may be determined as much by residents' subjective beliefs about, scripts toward, and frames of their neighbors as by the social network ties linking neighborhood residents together. Berg et al (2012), for instance, find that adolescents in neighborhoods with greater heterogeneity in frames about violence are more likely to engage in violence. Moreover, shared beliefs are central to the idea of collective efficacy, defined as "social cohesion among neighbors combined with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good" (Sampson, Raudenush, and Earls 1997). Collective efficacy represents the most important recent theoretical advance in our understanding of social organization. Although not typically discussed in cultural terms, the theory suggests that residents' subjective beliefs about how their neighbors will react to crime, delinquency, or disorder are important determinants of whether they are able to work together to limit their neighborhood's exposure to such problems.

Small (2004) makes the link between neighborhood culture and neighborhood social organization explicit through his concept of "neighborhood frames." A neighborhood frame is a lens through which an individual understands the key features of his or her neighborhood. Small analyzes the neighborhood frames of the residents of Villa Victoria, a Puerto Rican public housing project in Boston. He shows that young people who view the neighborhood as the

product of a collective struggle to create and defend from gentrification a Puerto Rican enclave participate in activities that enhance the neighborhood's social organization, while those whose neighborhood frame sees the neighborhood as "just another housing project" do not participate in such activities. Those young people who view the neighborhood through the lens of its history and collective struggle do so because that history has been passed down to them through social interactions with older neighbors.

Collective efficacy and neighborhood framing suggest that neighborhood effects processes normally associated with social organization theory can incorporate an understanding of the role of cultural processes. In fact, cultural processes may be key mechanisms by which neighborhood disadvantage is translated into social organization or lack thereof.

As a second example we consider the case of legal cynicism, which Sampson and Bartusch define as, "cynicism about the legitimacy of laws and the ability of police to do their job in an effective and nondiscriminatory manner" (1998: 784). These authors find that neighborhood disadvantage is an independent predictor of legal cynicism among African-Americans. Kirk and Papachristos (2011) view legal cynicism as a cultural frame and find that legal cynicism explains high homicide rates in some Chicago neighborhoods during the 1990s. In a related vein, Harding (2010) argues that a frame of "institutional distrust" that emerges from young men's neighborhood-based interactions with the police is often translated to other social institutions and their agents, such as schools and teachers, affecting how young men from poor violent neighborhoods approach interactions and relationships with authority figures.

Here we see that violence and other forms of public social disorder may breed cynicism and distrust toward a range of institutions. In our first example we stressed the ways in which available frames, scripts, or beliefs might affect the possibilities for social organization and

collective efficacy. This example illustrates how the lack of organization and efficacy can, in turn, lend social support to non-mainstream frames and scripts. While collective efficacy and neighborhood frames concern residents' (culturally-shaped) beliefs regarding their own neighborhoods, culturally significant interpretations of external institutions may likewise be a product of neighborhood context.

A third site for the potential application of cultural elements to the study of neighborhood effects comes from the urban studies literature on neighborhood change, (re)development, and gentrification. There has been limited direct contact between this field and sociologists studying either neighborhood effects or culture, but it seems worthwhile to put them in discussion. This work seeks to understand the social forces that lead to change or stasis in the economic and demographic character of neighborhoods as well as the consequences of such changes for residents (e.g. Zukin 1987, Mele 1996, Boyd 2000, Lloyd 2002). In this literature, culture is often conceptualized as consumption, particularly of the arts but also of food, clothing, or recreational spaces. The key cultural concept is amenities, and neighborhoods are differentiated from one another by the sets of amenities that fall within their borders or are nearby. Changes in a neighborhood's amenities may spur or may follow from changes in demographics or the socioeconomic positions of its residents, and certain neighborhoods become known for the cultural amenities that they offer. Silver, Clark, and Yanez (2010) formalize the concept of the "scene" to allow for systematic measurement of clusters of amenities in spatial locations. A scene is cluster of urban amenities, and Silver et al (2010:2295) argue that scenes "structure shared cultural consumption" and that scenes enable people to actualize cultural "values and meanings."

One might think of scenes as place-based instantiations of the concept of urban subcultures developed by Fischer (1975, 1995). Fischer defines a subculture as “a large set of people who share a defining trait, associate with one another, are members of institutions associated with their defining trait, adhere to a distinct set of values, share a set of cultural tools (Swidler 1986), and take part in a common way of life” (1995: 544). Although Fischer developed his subcultural theory of urbanism to explain the “unconventionality” of urban life and did not explicitly consider neighborhood-specific subculture, the theory carries potentially important ideas for a middle ground between deviant subculture and cultural heterogeneity. Like the deviant subculture perspective described above, it links subculture to networks of association and interaction and emphasizes values as a key aspect of culture, yet like the cultural heterogeneity perspective, it also conceptualizes culture as a shared repertoire and emphasizes the role of interaction and cultural diffusion across subcultures. Other key ideas from urban subculture theory are the role of institutions in structuring and maintaining subcultural differentiation, variation in the intensity of subcultural interaction, and the distinction between central and peripheral cultural elements.

Thus far, scenes have largely been used to understand neighborhood change. In order for scenes or other forms of urban subculture to inform cultural mechanisms of neighborhood effects, we must develop a fuller understanding of how a neighborhood’s scenes affect individual residents. What types of scenes are most common in and around disadvantaged neighborhoods? What types of scenes do residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods participate in outside their own neighborhoods? Do scenes favored by the upper classes provide nearby residents with opportunities to acquire cultural capital? Do scenes provide sources of identity or neighborhood narratives? For example, Wherry (2011) shows how a neighborhood’s branding as a cultural

center can reinforce ethnic identities and provide a context for practices and performances associated with those identities. Do scenes provide employment opportunities or consumption opportunities for local residents, or are their amenities mostly produced for and by outsiders? What types of scenes increase or reduce social cohesion and collective efficacy? Does a diversity of scenes generate or contribute to cultural heterogeneity?

Finally, the importance of institutions in the neighborhood effects literature provides another opportunity to more carefully consider the role of cultural mechanisms. Institutions are understood in the sociology of culture as, minimally, repositories of well-established, taken-for-granted meanings, symbols, and rules.¹² They permit and constrain certain courses of action, and may vary in their availability to or interpretation by certain actors. They can also vary along several axes, both from abstract to concrete and from wide-reaching to particular. On the more immaterial side, we take things like marriage and Christmas as institutions (both have broad reach). In more concrete terms, the U.S. penal system as a whole is an institution (broad, expansive), and so is Riker's Island prison (small, particular).

The neighborhood effects literature has primarily used the concept of institutions in the small and particular sense, viewing them as organizations that create, aggregate, and distribute material, social, and (to some extent) cultural resources. Wilson (1987) argued that the exodus of middle-class blacks from inner-city ghetto neighborhoods in the post-Civil Rights era weakened the institutions of those neighborhoods, leading to what he termed "de-institutionalized ghettos" (see also Wacquant [2008] on the "hyperghetto" and de-institutionalization of marginalized neighborhoods more generally). Although the contours of the institutional landscape in poor urban neighborhoods remains an open empirical question (Small 2006, 2009; Small and

¹² For a more comprehensive statement of the significance of institutions in the sociology of culture, see Swidler (2001).

McDermott 2006; Small and Stark 2005, Sánchez-Jankowski 2008), it is clear that institutions play important roles in the life of neighborhoods. For example, Small, Jacobs, and Massengill (2008) argue that local institutions foster and maintain neighborhood network ties by linking otherwise disconnected people together.

Sánchez-Jankowski's *Cracks in the Pavement* (2008) provides an example of how institutions can be pertinent to the study of neighborhood effects. Based on a decade-long longitudinal ethnographic study of five poor neighborhoods, the author develops a model of the interplay between neighborhood institutions and neighborhood culture. He demonstrates how commonly-overlooked institutions – housing projects, grocery stores, barber shops and hair salons, gangs, and local high schools – integrate the “value orientations” of the community, establish hierarchies, elaborate and maintain social order, and facilitate day-to-day survival under conditions of material scarcity.¹³ For Sánchez-Jankowski, a neighborhood's institutions – understood here in a very concrete, particular sense – are closely linked to its cultural environment. Local institutions are products of neighborhood culture and critical to the production of social organization and structure that sustains and preserves the neighborhood culture.¹⁴ A key implication of such an analysis is that the cultural context of poor neighborhoods and its impact on individual behavior cannot be understood without attention to the local institutions that reflect and sustain that cultural context.

¹³ It is worth noting that Sánchez-Jankowski draws a clear distinction between establishments and institutions. The former may become the latter under certain circumstances, but it is not a given. In other words, not every hair salon or grocery store is an institution. Other common establishments or organizations (churches, day-care centers, jails, etc.) could be considered in this light.

¹⁴ Readers may also wish to consider Sánchez-Jankowski's (2008) analysis of the “subculture of scarcity” in poor neighborhoods, which is a product of material deprivation and facilitates day-to-day survival in poor communities. He proposes that the subculture of scarcity consists of two “value orientations,” the maximization of security and the maximization of excitement. Because it is based on values but also draws from Swidler's work on cultural toolkits, it has the potential to bridge the divide between the “culture as ends” and “culture as means” strands of cultural theory.

2.2. *Finding Neighborhood Effects applications in the Sociology of Culture*

In this sub-section we briefly offer some suggestions on how ideas from the sociology of culture could be fruitfully applied to neighborhood effects. This discussion is not meant to be comprehensive, but rather to highlight a few prominent concepts that have heretofore garnered little use in the neighborhood effects field.¹⁵

Cultural capital is a concept frequently invoked in the study of inequality and poverty but which has not been used extensively to understand neighborhood effects. Lamont and Lareau define cultural capital as, “Institutionalized, i.e. widely shared, high status cultural signals” (1988: 56).¹⁶ There is a large cultural capital literature stemming from Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and Bourdieu (1984) that examines the way that tastes or styles, often unconsciously performed, are acquired in childhood based on family class background and access to upper-class institutions (particularly schools). These tastes and styles play an important role in stratification processes through their role in signaling class membership. For example, Lareau (2003) shows how middle class parents, through practices she describes as “concerted cultivation,” teach their children cultural skills and styles that are favored by educational and labor market institutions.

¹⁵ There are a number of other ideas from the sociology of culture that seem to hold great promise for the study of neighborhood effects. We urge researchers to consider as well, in particular, applications of group style (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003) and semiotic context (Tavory and Swidler 2009) to the study of neighborhoods. The former could be applied to neighborhood- or sub-neighborhood-level patterns of interaction, looking at how different group styles are made available, taken on, and modified, as well as how they in turn limit or enable certain types of collective social action. The latter, it seems, might plausibly be used in analysis of the various codes and scripts in play in a neighborhood, ideally to show how the availability or unavailability of certain codes makes action more or less likely. A range of topics seems feasible, but direct application of Tavory and Swidler’s case (condom use) may be one of the more interesting.

¹⁶ The term cultural capital is also sometimes used to refer more simply to knowledge or information acquired through social experience, though conceptually we should probably think of knowledge as distinct from cultural capital. Such “institutional knowledge” may be important for navigating middle class institutions such as higher education and may also be influenced by neighborhood-based social interactions or networks. Lizardo and Skiles (2008: 488) emphasize another distinction, that between cultural capital and cultural resources: “Cultural capital should be kept distinct from other forms of cultural competence, which DiMaggio (1991) refers to as ‘cultural resources’. While cultural capital is ‘institutionalized as legitimate and valuable at the societal level’ (Mohr and DiMaggio 1995, 168), cultural resources have more localized effects and are not subject to authoritative and ritualized forms of valuation by dominant institutions.”

What can cultural capital allow us to understand about the operation of neighborhood effects? Carter (2005) argues that cultural capital can be relative to the cultural environment, which suggests one possibility. She develops the concept of “non-dominant cultural capital:” musical tastes, clothing styles, and speech patterns that signal “cultural authenticity” in poor minority communities. Non-dominant cultural capital signals group membership among peers and is necessary for inclusion, identity, and social support in poor urban communities. Adolescents who do not exhibit facility with these cultural signals are portrayed as “acting white.” Here we see cultural mechanisms serving to define boundaries and establish hierarchies, limiting what can and cannot occur in a social space. Given the links drawn above between social organization and culture, we think that cultural capital (and boundary-work more generally) might be a useful addition for thinking about how social order is constructed, maintained, and challenged in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

The question remains open whether neighborhood context influences cultural capital above and beyond the influence of the family and school. Can a neighborhood with considerable class diversity instill in a young person from a lower- or working-class family the styles and habits that are expected in middle- or upper-class settings and institutions? One might expect that “code switching,” or the ability to switch between interactional and language styles depending on the social context, might play an important role in poor black youth’s mobility prospects. What sorts of interactions or social networks are necessary for a young person from a poor background to acquire such cultural capital? And how do they avoid the potential pitfalls – including but not limited to the dilution or simultaneity effects discussed with reference to cultural heterogeneity – that accompany such an acquisition?

A second idea drawn from the sociology of culture comes from a macro-level perspective and considers the position of poor or otherwise disadvantaged neighborhoods in the evaluative structures of the larger society (Lamont, Beljean, and Clair 2014). Poor neighborhoods are often stigmatized, especially when they are populated by disfavored minority groups, such as blacks in the U.S. For example, Kirschenman and Neckerman (1991) show that black residents of inner-city Chicago neighborhoods are held in low regard by employers based on unfavorable stereotypes about criminality, work ethic, and competing family obligations. Sampson and Raudenbush (2004) find that perceptions of neighborhood disorder are informed by the racial and class composition of neighborhoods even after accounting for objective measures of disorder. Given that residents of such neighborhoods perceive the stigma attached to their neighborhoods (Harding 2010, Small 2004), we might ask whether or how that stigma is internalized or resisted (Link and Phelan 2001, Lamont and Mizrachi 2012), and the consequences of such reactions for the internal cultural milieu of the neighborhood or the opportunity structure facing neighborhood residents.

A third area from within the purview of the sociology of culture that could be particularly useful in the study of neighborhood effects is the intersection of narrative, identity, and imagined futures. Narratives are stories, unfolding over time as a series of key events or scenes, which individuals use to make sense of the past, present, and future and the links between them. An important implication is that a narrative serves as a sort of cognitive filter in that it highlights some events, scenes, or “themes” as particularly salient or relevant, what previous scholars have termed “selective appropriation” (Ewick and Silbey 2003, Somers 1994). Yet a narrative not only describes the sequence of events that occur but also provides an explanation of the causal links in the story.

Individuals do not develop narratives in isolation, but rather they construct narratives from culturally available “public narratives” (Somers 1994) and interactively in conversation with others (Ewick and Silbey 2003). Narratives provide individuals with a framework in which to make sense of or construct their identities and social positions. Moreover the types of narratives to which individuals have access and in which they understand themselves to be operating, as well as the sort of people they believe themselves to be, may affect their actions and the future-oriented projects on which they embark (Emirbayer and Mische 1998; Mische 2009; Small, Harding, and Lamont 2010; Somers 1994).

This field has been pushed forward in recent years on several fronts. Vaisey’s proposal of a “dual-process model” of culture’s influence on action, for one, has strong implications for the role of identity, and culture more generally, in motivating action (Vaisey 2008, 2009, 2010). Drawing on research in cognitive science that shows that individuals alternate between “slow” (deliberate, thoughtful) and “fast” (automatic, semi-unconscious) responses to stimuli – and mostly employ the latter – Vaisey argues that culture can be understood as motivational insofar as it shapes “fast” responses. He has offered evidence that the value orientations (interpretable as identities) of young people can be predictive of their behavior, even at some remove from initial measurement (see also the discussion of value orientations in Sánchez-Jankowski 2008). Espousing a pragmatist alternative to the means-ends debate in the sociology of culture, Frye’s (2012) work on imagined futures has demonstrated how cultural models can inform identity, provide narratives, and shape courses of action, even in the face of readily-apparent structural barriers to achievement. She documents how in Malawi, through concerted governmental and NGO campaigns, a cultural model of “Bright Futures” has taken root, influencing how young

women think of themselves, plan for the future, and evaluate their behavior and the behavior of others.

This work has clear applications to neighborhood effects. If neighborhoods constrain the identities/narratives/imagined futures available to those who are raised within them, and these in turn play some role in enabling and constraining certain courses of action, then we again see a strong link between neighborhood, culture, and outcome. Vaisey's (2010) work on the returns to educational expectations and aspirations of impoverished youth is a first step in this direction. He shows that adolescents' educational ideals do vary by poverty status, and that educational ideals are predictive of continuation in school for poor youth. Although the analysis does not directly address the role of neighborhood context, it suggests that educational ideals are likely to vary by neighborhood poverty and to matter for educational outcomes. We would be eager to see research that documents and investigates the significance of local variations in available narratives, identities, and imagined futures and the implications of those variations for the socioeconomic outcomes typically of interest in the neighborhood effects literature. Further conceptual development and application along these lines has the potential to resolve existing tensions in the culture literature between "culture as ends" and "culture as means," which are also reflected in the neighborhood effects literature.

The concept of settled and unsettled times offers a fourth potential contribution to the study of neighborhood effects. Simply put, culture sometimes "does" more. The best-known formulation of this idea is offered by Swidler as a distinction between, "culture's role in sustaining existing strategies of action and its role in constructing new ones" (1986:278). In settled times culture serves more as a background, taken-for-granted resource to be called on selectively: individuals have a limited toolkit of cultural resources available which can constrain

their actions but is insufficient to explain why they follow one available strategy of action over another. In unsettled times, by contrast, culture can be manifested as a very clearly expressed strategy of action in a delimited sphere of life (an ideology, in Swidler's terms). Culture can have more direct effects in revolutionary moments (Sewell Jr. 1996), for instance, than in the prosaic interactions of everyday life.

We suggest that this settled-unsettled distinction may be significant in considering the "when" of neighborhood effects. The empirical questions – determining if a time is settled or unsettled, and for whom – may be difficult to resolve, but the conceptual distinction should serve as a reminder that culture's effects need not be understood as uniform. Neighborhoods can go through settled and unsettled periods, and the role of cultural mechanisms is not uniform across time. For example, the U.S. mortgage crisis and recession of the last six years, which has had a disproportionate impact on blacks and Latinos, may lead to unsettled times. A period of higher-than-normal unemployment and residential turnover may have pronounced effects on the well being of institutions, the futures perceived of and planned for by adolescents, and the frames available in a hard-hit neighborhood. Awareness of context and the potential for ideological ferment should inform our thinking on the applicability of neighborhood effects mechanisms regardless of theoretical commitment. The operation of collective efficacy and the significance of neighborhood institutions, for instance, may be quite different in settled or unsettled times.

3. Conceptual and Methodological Challenges

It should be clear by now that our understanding of the cultural processes through which disadvantaged neighborhoods affect individuals is limited. The dominant model of such processes (deviant subculture) has come under attack, and the alternative account (cultural

heterogeneity) has thus far experienced only limited testing and certainly requires further conceptual and empirical development. Other possible accounts can be gleaned from related literatures, but their roles in neighborhood effects have not been clearly elaborated, let alone rigorously tested. More generally, how cultural mechanisms relate to other neighborhood effects theories has received little attention. Much remains to be done.

3.1. Conceptual Challenges

A first set of conceptual challenges revolves around questions of interrelationships within the cultural domain. We need more integrated theoretical models that draw together and map the relationships between the various cultural resources at play and processes that stem from neighborhood disadvantage. For example, what types of cultural models are and are not more heterogeneous in disadvantaged neighborhoods? We might expect norms of public interaction to be fairly homogenous in more violent neighborhoods where the stakes are high, and we might expect disadvantaged neighborhoods to be no more heterogeneous than others with regard to musical tastes, religious beliefs, or fashion choices. Can cultural heterogeneity lead to the accumulation of cultural capital and, if so, under what circumstances? At what rates of exchange and with what associated risks is non-dominant cultural capital convertible into other forms of capital (à la Bourdieu 1986)? How are frames about external institutions, such as legal cynicism, related to frames about neighborhood institutions, such as Small's neighborhood frames?

A related challenge is to distinguish the cultural concepts outlined here from similar concepts in other disciplines. For instance, a social psychologist may see strong parallels between some of the concepts here and the concept of attitudes. What distinguishes them? Part of the answer is that culture has a shared or collective aspect to it; something is not "cultural"

unless it is shared, whereas attitudes are held by individuals. However, many cultural concepts are also measured primarily at the individual level and then, at least in current practice, aggregated to some group level such as the neighborhood.¹⁷

Another conceptual challenge is specifying how cultural transmission occurs in neighborhoods. What are the “cultural conduits” through which cultural ideas flow within neighborhoods? What types of social networks, organizations, or institutions typically transmit cultural ideas, and to whom? What types of people have more or less power to sustain framings, enforce boundaries, and offer support for scripts? What are the conditions under which individuals are receptive to neighborhood-based cultural messages? For example, Harding (2009) finds that older teens and young men who gain status through their ability to protect younger boys from neighborhood violence acquire considerable cultural power in the eyes of those younger boys, becoming sources of adolescent socialization beyond the family. This suggests that certain sources of socialization are more authoritative than others. Yet at the same time, the older teens and young men who are most involved in crime and violence serve as “negative role models” whose strong public presence in poor neighborhoods serves as a point of comparison and leads to “leveling of expectations,” defining what “success” means for both parents and children (Harding 2010). But this is far from a complete story of cultural transmission and reception in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

A fourth set of conceptual challenges revolves around the relationships between cultural mechanisms and other neighborhood effects processes. One core issue is determining how the

¹⁷ Note that this type of aggregation can be deeply problematic. For example, most (or even the vast majority) of people in a given community may espouse the same framing about parenting. But that does not mean that this is automatically a collective trait. Jepperson and Swidler draw from Durkheim to make the point that, “while some feature (e.g., a sentiment, an opinion) may be shared across subunits, the sharing does not make the feature a collective one. The corollary then applies as well” (1994:365). Aggregation comes up repeatedly in section 3.2, and we caution the reader to keep this problem in mind. The development of direct measures of collective culture amenable to quantitative analysis is particularly of interest.

former contributes to the latter; the discussion above highlights this challenge. A second issue is empirically distinguishing cultural from non-cultural processes. For example, the institutional resources of different neighborhoods have long been of interest to neighborhood effects scholars (e.g. Wilson 1987, Small and McDermott 2006). Empirical work measures institutional resources by the number and type of businesses and organizations in a neighborhood. This is also how scenes are measured, making it challenging (though not impossible) to distinguish an institutional resource-related process from a scene-related process.

Finally, we would like to offer one slightly broader, more theoretical suggestion for linking neighborhood effects and culture. One of the recurring criticisms of empirical neighborhood effects research is in the simple specification of what constitutes a neighborhood. A zip code, census tract, or block group is not a *de facto* social unit, yet they are often treated as such out of necessity for analytic purposes. This is, of course, not always the case, and there are studies that have offered convincing methodologies for drawing socially or ecologically meaningful neighborhoods for analysis (see especially Sampson 2012).

Much of what neighborhoods are thought to do – functions like the previously discussed social organization and informal social control – is quintessentially social and bears little trace of starkly material factors. Our conception of neighborhood, as Hipp, Faris, and Boessen point out, “often carries with it both a sense of place as well as a community – perhaps partly imagined – of intertwined relationships” (2012:129). That community of relationships is what drives most sociological and criminological explanations of neighborhood effects. In our cultural theories it is not material factors related to physical place (such as geography or pollution) that explains neighborhood effects, but rather the network of relationships. John Hipp and colleagues, as well as some other scholars, have begun to carve out a research agenda that pushes neighborhood

effects in the direction of network analysis. This work allows us to observe the structure of relationships both within and between neighborhoods, and thus reconceptualize how we define the very unit of analysis (Hipp and Boessen 2013; Hipp, Faris, and Boessen 2012; Hipp and Perrin 2006; Sampson 2012). If what we have thought of as one neighborhood in fact contains multiple distinct networks, do we still see it as a single unit? And how separate are two or more neighborhoods that are tightly linked by a single network? This work may prove invaluable in explaining how frames, scripts, and narratives diffuse across the urban landscape as well as how boundaries are drawn around and between neighborhoods.

As we take this step, it behooves us to revisit Emirbayer and Goodwin's (1994) call for the critical evaluation of network analysis. Specifically, we hold to their claim that, "culture and social relations empirically interpenetrate with and mutually condition one another so thoroughly that it is well-nigh impossible to conceive of one without the other" (1438). The social structures that are described through network analysis are the complement of cultural structures – whether these are relatively coherent semiotic codes or loosely logical repertoires (Kaufman 2004) – and the former cannot be conceived of as logically prior to the latter. Culture can be enormously significant in establishing the linkages between ideas, people, and action, thus establishing the boundaries both of thinkable behavior and of group memberships (Abbott 2001; Mohr and Duquenne 1997; Padgett and Ansell 1993). Culture can be constitutive, not just reactive. It can shape the ways in which networks are developed (Vaisey and Lizardo 2010) as well as how groups and institutions are conceived of, appraised, and thus acted toward (Small 2004). The very cultural mechanisms that we are looking to uncover might well, therefore, be thought of as the element that makes the concept of "neighborhood" sociologically meaningful in the first place. We initially defined a cultural mechanism as a product of neighborhood disadvantage

leading to individual outcomes. Here we want to muddy the waters: the neighborhood itself could also be conceived of as a process of culture in action.

3.2. Methodological Challenges

Above and beyond these conceptual hurdles, there is a range of methodological challenges in studying neighborhood effects cultural mechanisms. Some of these are shared by all studies of mechanisms, such as identifying the role of one mechanism relative to others (see Harding et al. 2011 for a discussion of this and other methodological issues). Others are shared by all studies of neighborhood effects, but may be particularly important for cultural mechanisms, such as defining neighborhoods.

As discussed above, cultural resources can be conceived of as running along a continuum from micro (individual-level/internal) to meso (community-level) to macro (society-wide). Quantitative and qualitative methodologies may be appropriate to resources at any point along this continuum, but some may be better-suited than others and the specific tools used may vary. For instance, survey questions asked about community norms would be different, in form as well as content, from those measuring particular individual framings. We urge researchers venturing into these waters to be as clear as possible about the level of analysis and the types of cultural resources to which their hypotheses apply. This is especially important when it comes to models of cultural diffusion; too often culture is referred to as “shared” without an explanation of how or amongst whom.

Qualitative research, with its focus on process and on subjects’ interpretations and understandings, is well-suited to investigating certain types of cultural resources and processes. Community-level cultural processes may be much more amenable to ethnographic study than to

survey research, for instance. Qualitative researchers need to enter the field with existing concepts in mind and an eye for new cultural processes. Cultural differences within and between neighborhoods are important subjects of inquiry, as are neighborhood boundaries, networks, and interactional patterns.

Several aspects of this area of research make qualitative research particularly challenging. One is that understanding neighborhood effects mechanisms may require explicit comparisons across neighborhoods, necessitating multi-site fieldwork. A second is that understanding the processes by which cultural context impacts individuals is best accomplished by longitudinal fieldwork that follows individuals and their neighborhoods over time. Third, and more theoretically, several authors have called into question the efficacy of qualitative research – most especially in-depth interviewing – in seeking to explain how individuals actually use culture. They argue that culture's role is largely sub-conscious, and, as such, interviewing will shed little light on its workings (Martin 2010; Vaisey 2009). This position reflects claims about both the motivational efficacy of culture and the use of interview data, neither of which is a settled topic (see also Pugh 2013, Vaisey In Press). The aspiring fieldworker should be well aware of and prepared to respond to the methodological challenges their work may face.

The path to quantitative analysis of cultural mechanisms in neighborhood effects is somewhat clearer, even if the proper means are not yet fully available. Such work would focus on three types of analyses. One set of analyses would examine the associations between measures of neighborhood disadvantage and neighborhood culture. That is – at the level of the milieu rather than the individual – what individual-level cultural resources are in circulation, what norms are enforced, and what institutions are in place? Because the recent literature in cultural sociology focuses on the relationship between cultural context (milieu) and individual

behavior and action, our review and discussion has emphasized this aspect of neighborhood effects mechanisms, yet questions about the emergent cultural context of poor neighborhoods are equally important. For example, what types of scenes or narratives are more or less common in disadvantaged neighborhoods? More generally, how are changes in neighborhood poverty related to changes in neighborhood cultural context? This question is central to Wilson's arguments about the concentration of poverty and its consequences that motivate much of the neighborhood effects literature but it has received little empirical attention. A second set of analyses would examine the association between neighborhood disadvantage and cultural processes that could be measured at the individual level. For example, are there differences between young people growing up in different neighborhoods on conventional measures of cultural capital? A third set of analyses would examine the role of existing cultural measures, both neighborhood- and individual-level, in mediating neighborhood effects. For example, to what degree can the scenes present in a neighborhood explain the relationship between neighborhood disadvantage and educational attainment? To what degree does cultural capital mediate the relationship between neighborhood disadvantage and college completion?

All three analyses require measures of neighborhood cultural context. In the short term, there is much that can be done with the data at hand (individual and neighborhood measures from existing surveys and administrative data). Existing survey measures can stand in for cultural concepts and can – in some situations and with an awareness of the connotations – be aggregated to measure cultural context. Administrative data can provide measures of neighborhood organizations, institutions, amenities, and scenes. Such measures of cultural context can be linked to census data to examine the cultural context of disadvantaged

neighborhoods.¹⁸ They can also be attached to existing longitudinal datasets to examine associations between cultural context and individual cultural understandings or between cultural context and individual outcomes.

However, quantitative researchers also face their own set of obstacles; chief among them is the challenge of measuring culture. In the long-term, quantitative researchers need new survey data with better measures of culture. Existing survey-based measures were designed to measure other concepts and were not necessarily intended to be aggregated to the neighborhood level to measure neighborhood cultural context. Administrative data can tell us what is in or near a neighborhood or what people do, but culture is also about subjective experiences and perceptions. New data need to have four properties: they need to measure cultural processes at the (1) neighborhood and (2) individual level, and do so (3) over time (longitudinally) for both, while also (4) measuring other neighborhood effects mechanisms that are competing explanations or are factors with which cultural processes interact. Although they are resource intensive, we know well how to conduct longitudinal surveys that track individual outcomes, and we know how to link these individuals to their geographic neighborhoods of residence and their demographic, economic, and (to some degree) institutional and organizational characteristics. We have less understanding of how to measure culture at either the neighborhood or individual level in surveys, although we have some potential models. One is the “ecometrics” framework (Raudenbush and Sampson 1999) used to study collective efficacy by aggregating individual survey responses to the neighborhood level to construct neighborhood level measures of shared, subjective phenomena. Nevertheless, it is unclear whether simply aggregating individual survey responses provides an adequate measure of neighborhood cultural context. Some individuals may

¹⁸ While keeping in mind the point made by Valentine (1968) that data of this sort – administrative and especially demographic – are not easily interpreted and can conceal quite wide cultural differences.

be more influential than others, some ideas may become dominant in public life even if they are not dominant in individual surveys, and other factors such as identities, experiences, and time spent in the neighborhood may affect the salience of different cultural ideas for neighborhood residents. Investments in pilot studies of cultural measurement would seem a wise first step in this direction.

* * *

We suggested above that understanding cultural mechanisms of neighborhood effects involves understanding both (a) the processes by which neighborhood disadvantage generates a cultural context that is different from that in more advantaged neighborhoods and (b) the processes by which such cultural differences influence individual behaviors, decision-making, and outcomes. In other words, we need to understand how to characterize the cultural context of disadvantaged neighborhoods and how being embedded in such contexts affects individuals. The above discussion has, at least implicitly, attempted to develop various ways of thinking about these two types of processes. This is far from a comprehensive discussion of the applications of cultural concepts to the study of neighborhood effects, but we expect that the topics we have chosen to highlight may prove especially significant both in terms of empirical findings and spurring further research.

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Table 1: Comparison of Subculture and Cultural Heterogeneity Theories of Neighborhood Culture and Neighborhood Effects

	Subculture	Cultural Heterogeneity
<i>Cultural Concepts</i>	Values (Ends)	Frames, Scripts, Narratives (Means)
<i>Cultural Coherence</i>	High	Low
<i>Basis for Explanations of Behavior</i>	Conformity to subculture	Availability and Deployment of Cultural Models (repertoire)
<i>Social Networks and Culture</i>	Tightly coupled (subculture as reference group)	Loosely coupled (multiple sources of cultural models)
<i>Accounting for Variation</i>	Different subcultures	Different Repertoires and Different Deployment
<i>Role of Structural Positions & Material Circumstances</i>	Subculture as response to blocked opportunities	Resonance, Social Support, Identities (Influencing availability, salience, and deployment of cultural models)
<i>Individual Agency</i>	Lower	Higher