The South Bronx: Exploring the Critical Role of Neighborhood Attachment in Education, Financial Security, and Aspirations

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Bard

The South Bronx: Exploring the Critical Role of Neighborhood Attachment

In Education, Financial Security, and Aspirations

Senior Project Submitted to

The Division of Social Studies

of Bard College

by

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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2017

This is for my kids in the ghetto
who feel like they don't belong
in a world that's far too shallow,
content on annihilating us all.

The kids who hide their books from bullies
cause they know far better than we
that books serve no purpose
when we're begging on our knees
for the lives we've yet to live and
accomplishments we've yet to achieve.

This is for my kids in the ghetto
who know these blocks like the backs of their hands
these cement lego pieces others claim to be
no man's land but,
it's our home
an undercover war zone
we're fighting for this land,
the only land
we can call our own.

When the only home you've ever known
are projects where the population is overgrown
and you never know
who's a friend
or a foe
and you gotta hang your head low
when walking through Livingston
or Cedar Grove
or else you'll be turned into a
charity case,
or
sprayed with mace by some chick
who doesn't feel safe
cause you aren't in her idea of
what is your place.

And this is for my kids in the ghetto
who are merely equated to the state
of their neighborhoods
who are somehow no good,
low down,
dirty dogs
but,
the only barking I hear is from the mouths of those
who think they're sly
looking at us out the corner of their eyes
and grinning really wide
as they brag about how great it is to live
on the other side of reality,
They only equate us to struggle

segregating us like wizards to muggles
but we don't all live under the stairs.

This is for my kids in the ghetto
who succeed
despite where they grew up
heads held high while
wearing those dirty ass chucks
or clean new jays
their minds are dead set on the come up
embracing lives lived in
so many different ways.

Who is society to say
that some little black lives are worth more than others
to save?
Pretending that little black girls in weaves haven't been
crucified for days,
or the ladies with multi-colored braids
aren't made into jokes
but when Becky does like we do
it's always
"YAAAASSS HUNTY SLAY!"

This is nothing but a
representation of my mind
spent so many years building this ladder
so now it's time to climb
we're on our way to the top,
there's no stopping us now,
little kids from the ghetto,
don't let society steal your crowns.

As one little ghetto kid
to all of the others,
the flames of your passions
can never be smothered.
Our stories are dynamic
we're not all the same
our ghettos may be called
by many different names,
but our one commonality is
we're all just seeking change.

For The Kids
By Aaliyah Barnes
Oblivion Magazine

Acknowledgments

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I owe a debt of gratitude to my love, Wasif, for inspiring me to write this thesis. Thank you for challenging me every day.

During the process of writing this thesis, I was fortunate enough to have friends who offered their time to edit my work. I am eternally appreciative for their kindness. Thank you to Bianka Bell, Pamela Munoz, Ria Das, Leslie Perez, Asad Hashmi, and Leah Bracey.

I am also grateful to the following professors, who provided insightful comments: Peter Klein, Allison McKim, and Laura Ford.

I would like to give a very special thanks to my advisor, Yuval Elmelech. Your constructive feedback, advice, and wit were always something to look forward to every week.

Furthermore, I would like to thank Mr. Herbert Gans for inviting me to his home to share my research. Thank you for taking the time to provide thoughtful and useful suggestions.

And lastly – I didn't think it was possible to call my hood *home* before meeting my participants. Thank you for allowing me to hear your empowering stories and reminding me to never forget where I come from.

ABSTRACT

Based on qualitative interviews in the South Bronx, a residentially segregated area in New York City notorious for its historically concentrated poverty and physical urban decay, this study explores lived experiences that reveal the impacts of living in an urban poor neighborhood on quality of life. Neighborhood attachment is one lens to evaluate residents' subjective perceptions of quality of life in relation to objective qualities of neighborhoods. Contrary to previous research linking strong neighborhood attachment to wealthier residential environments, a majority of South Bronx residents who participated in this study share a fairly strong sense of neighborhood attachment. This study particularly focuses on the extent to which neighborhood attachment affects residents' educational attainment and financial security. Findings of this study suggest the prevalence of social and economic inequalities that limit mobility regardless of how attached residents are to their respective neighborhood. Furthermore, an investigation of residents' future aspirations and expectations confirms findings of neighborhood inequalities rooted in residential segregation, in which their opportunities are constrained by structural barriers to educational attainment and financial security.

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INTRODUCTION:

The South Bronx

When I go downtown, I see the differences. There's cleanliness and better stores. We're here because we can afford it, not 'cause we want to be here… I feel like that's just how it works around here (Sebastian)

Significance of Study

Sebastian is a 20-year-old young man who works as an Uber bike messenger in Manhattan, New York. When coming home from work, Sebastian notices how different his neighborhood is in contrast to other areas of the city. And not in a good way. During our conversation, Sebastian expressed how living in the South Bronx was a reminder of his class status more than anything else. To understand why this is for many low-income inhabitants of urban areas, a large body of literature has been dedicated to understanding widening disparities in socioeconomic status in metropolitan areas and American cities (Wilson 1987; Morris 1989; Sampson 2008). Rising socio-economic inequalities have been associated with shifting access to opportunities and labor market dynamics among the urban poor. These inequalities have been characterized by income in a way that suggest a minimal ability to sustain a healthy and comfortable life style; poor employment, quality of education, and public services (McDonald & McMillen 2011) are few of the many crucial factors that affect urban poor experiences.

However, there is a finite amount of research on how neighborhood social capital assist in alleviating poverty and structural inequalities within residentially disadvantaged areas. Social capital has been commonly referred to the value of social ties and support, which provides a

sense of trust, collective efficacy, and social cohesion in communities. In the rare times this is addressed, literature puts an emphasis on the substantial divides between the wealthy and poor by encasing higher income residents in a geographically concentrated privileged environment that connects them with better education, economic opportunities, social relationships, and more. For example, *Place Matters* by Peter Dreier et al. (2001) discussed how urban poor neighborhoods tend to lack social networks and access to employment opportunities. Though the research and analysis of urban poor neighborhoods is valuable, the findings of this book focus more on quantitative analysis that overcompensates for residents' perceptions of their quality of lives. I assert that a sole focus consisting of quantitative analysis fails to account for the actual circumstances that shape the experiences of those who reside in residential segregated areas. An insight into the demographic, social, and structural contexts of urban poor neighborhoods can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impacts of residential segregation in quality of life for low-income individuals.

On a theoretical level, discourse on quality of life and social capital contextualizes residential segregation on a neighborhood level. Previous studies on quality of life in relation to neighborhoods suggest that there are indicators of residential environments that connect to outcomes such as education, health, crime, and employment (Wilson 1987). These outcomes have been characterized by low workforce participation rates, lack of funding for school, low levels of useful social capital, and poor physical environment. Though cities in Europe and Canada have high overall levels of poverty, their neighborhoods are not as isolated and deprived as those in urban cities in the U.S. In fact, their lower income residential areas are vibrant and integrated into mainstream society without having extraordinary negative effects on mobility

(Dreier et al. 2001). On the other hand, the disproportionate allocation of resources and class divides in the United States greatly affect social and economic mobility for many people today.

My study aims to strengthen conceptions of quality of life, social capital, and structural inequalities. Incorporating assessments of residents' perceptions of their neighborhood and their sense of community could reveal social capital levels and evaluate social and economic isolation in an urban poor setting. Furthermore, to fully consider the circumstances that shape the experiences of the urban poor today, I used a qualitative approach to examine two things: (1) neighborhood attachment and its implications for quality of life and mobility and (2) the extent to which neighborhood attachment functions as a valuable indicator of social capital. Through the lens of neighborhood attachment, I evaluate residential satisfaction and sentiments regarding living in an urban poor neighborhood. In understanding the association between neighborhood attachment and quality of life, I incorporate objective neighborhood characteristics that explore:

a) educational and financial experiences as two important aspects of quality of life

b) future aspirations and expectations.

This study revolves around urban poor experiences in the South Bronx as a residentially segregated area in New York City. When I first gathered research for this study, I wanted to show how the neighborhood one lives in affects residents' quality of life, and thus impacts their future aspirations. Inspired by the works of William J. Wilson, I found the context of residential segregation crucial to understanding experiences in navigating ways to mobilize within an urban poor neighborhood. It was not until I finished speaking with South Bronx residents in this study that I realized the complexity of their experiences, as they reflect on politics, social institutions, and economics.

To comprehend the significance and impacts of living in an urban poor neighborhood on its residents' quality of life, there needs to be a historical and evolutionary understanding of the South Bronx. The next section is dedicated to describing a historical timeline of the South Bronx to understand its contemporary social and economic environment.

The South Bronx

Although the South Bronx is closer in proximity to Manhattan than the other boroughs, the area is residentially segregated. Contrary to wealthier neighborhood counterparts, the South Bronx unfortunately isolates poor and working class families from beneficial social networks and opportunities to mobilize financially. Residential segregation, however, does not exempt South Bronx residents from the notorious cost of living in New York City. With increasing food, housing, and other living expenses, the cost of living in New York City is 68.8% higher than that of the national average (Wallace 2015). As one of the five poorest congressional districts in the United States, with almost 30% of the Bronx's 1.4 million residents living at or below the poverty line (Jackson & Goldman 2015), it is no surprise that Bronx residents find more difficulty subsisting within an expensive city. More importantly, those who reside in South Bronx urban poor neighborhoods bear serious consequences in direct relation to poverty that include limitations on crucial access to social capital. Circumstances surrounding why some neighborhoods are more susceptible to class inequalities than others can be traced back to historical upheavals caused by white flight, redlining, migration, and more.

In the early 20th century, the South Bronx was known as the perfect home that fits the "suburban ideal" during the 1940s; many New Yorkers dreamed of a bigger home, friendly neighbors, and privacy especially from work and city noise (Gonzalez 2006). Thus, the

landscape design of South Bronx neighborhoods incorporated abundant housing, gardens, Art Deco pre-war buildings, and historic row houses. An influx of immigrant populations, during those years, also migrated into the South Bronx for its attractive housing and living conditions compared to the crowded tenements they left in Lower East Side of Manhattan. Many of these immigrants were of Italian, Irish, and Jewish descent. They were attracted to not only the residential aspect of the South Bronx, but also the great number of manufacturing jobs and professional services. South Bronx neighborhoods overall sported an undeniable aura of luxury and pride for residents.

But the picture-perfect South Bronx neighborhood did not last very long. In the 1960s, the South Bronx suffered the brunt of white flight, landlord abandonment, and redlining. Over crowdedness, due to the migration of predominantly poor African Americans and Latinos, pushed many white Jews to search for new communities to join that would symbolize the suburban ideal outside of the South Bronx. Additionally, urban renewal projects such as the Robert Moses' Cross-Bronx Expressway – a large highway that literally cut through 113 streets, avenues, and boulevards of the residential areas of the South Bronx – destroyed existing neighborhoods and displaced over 5,000 people and small businesses (Gratz 1994). Because of this, slum-like conditions such as substandard tenements and physical urban decay impacted the lives of many low-income families who resided near the highway's construction area.

Despite apparent deteriorating conditions, the city failed to make residents' quality of living a priority. This neglect was apparent when an extraordinary portion of public funds was allocated to building the Yankee Stadium instead of being used to rebuild the city's poorest neighborhoods. Initially, the city originally designated $2 million to improving slum-like

neighborhoods after the construction of the Cross-Bronx Expressway, but not one penny of that amount was given. At the same time, the stadium project was awarded $120 million (Gratz 1994).

Another consequence of the Cross-Bronx Expressway was the lowering of property values in the South Bronx. Not only were residential neighborhoods unattractive, but banks and corporations actively discouraged investment in the area. The Federal Housing Administration (FHA) relied on maps to distinguish "risk" from "in demand" neighborhoods. As a result, South Bronx landowners were considered ineligible for mortgage since their neighborhoods were marked as risk areas. Buildings were valued at such a dismal amount that at some point, landowners set their buildings on fire to obtain insurance money. Soon after this, residential areas appeared abandoned as many tenants, comprising of people of color, were displaced. Between 1970 and 1980, the Bronx lost more than 97% of their buildings to fire and abandonment (Flood 2010). This time period was encapsulated into one catchphrase: "The Bronx is burning". Coupled with burning of buildings, unemployment, displacement, and an increase in criminal activity, the South Bronx was no longer the ideal suburban home, but instead, became a site for urban decay and destruction.

Neighborhood revitalization in the South Bronx started to slowly progress in the early 1980s with government efforts to build better quality housing units. Since 1986, 19,000 apartments were renovated and abandoned buildings were redesigned to welcome new families (Purdy 1994). Various employment opportunities serving a multitude of entrepreneurial skills attracted a new influx of immigrants of mostly working class Puerto Ricans. "Barrios" or ethnic neighborhoods became infused with Puerto Rican culture and social networks, helping new

Puerto Rican immigrants transition into the workforce easily. Bodegas (small grocery stores) and Piragueros (Puerto Rican shaved ice venders) were two common components of barrios in the South Bronx.

Despite improvements to neighborhood conditions and employment opportunities, the South Bronx continues to be characterized by poverty and violence. Poor funding and isolation from crucial resources that assist with education and employment prevents most of its residents from gaining economic and social capital. With high rates of crime and poverty, many South Bronx residents withdrew from participating in their area. Through the late 1990s until now, the South Bronx has never been a place for its residents to mobilize. In his book *Metropolis: Center and Symbol of Our Times* (1995), Sociologist Philip Kasinitz discusses how leaving the Bronx was a symbol of economic security and success.

> The mentality of neighborhood types who, quickly as possible, got the hell out of their neighborhoods… the frenzied economic and psychic pressure to move up and out, was breaking down hundreds of neighborhoods like the Bronx… You want to know the morality of the Bronx? 'Get out, schmuck, get out!' (156).

Kasinitz attributes the feeling of being 'stuck' to the lack of mobility in an urban poor neighborhood. His mentioning of the Cross-Bronx Expressway criticizes the role urban "renewal" projects play in improving living conditions for residents. Residents carry the burden of historical and institutional failures, which destabilizes quality of living in South Bronx neighborhoods.

In mass media, focus on the South Bronx overall reflect a depressing portrayal of its social environment that includes violence and crime. Very few media outlets and literary works reveal actual circumstances to living in the area, such as *The Rat That Got Away: A Bronx*

Memoir (2009) by Allen Jones and most recently, the Netflix television series *The Get Down* (2016). These works emphasize on the history of the South Bronx and how it was embedded in the lives of young residents of the neighborhood who believed that success and achievement can only be obtained if they moved to a different neighborhood outside of the Bronx. However, these are only a few examples that give justice and accuracy to the circumstances residents undergo.

Exploring those circumstances represents only a portion of the underheard narrative of low-income individuals placed in residentially segregated areas in the United States. These narratives are obscured and not given enough attention, due to heavy usage of stereotypes and delegitimization of marginalized communities. As a result, people affected by this are deemed as undeserving by media, when – in truth – structural inequalities in an urban poor neighborhood can be studied without undermining the South Bronx as a perceivably ravaged place to live in.

Non-profit organizations such as BronxWorks and South Bronx Unite have worked to address socio-economic and environmental inequalities in the neighborhood by bringing awareness to employment opportunities and community resources. Though organizational efforts have helped unite residents to challenge injustices in their neighborhoods, there has not been sufficient research on the effectiveness of community mobilization in neighborhood revitalization. Government investment in housing units, transportation improvements, shopping strips, and employment opportunities (Block 2008), and respectively quality of life, has slowly improved, but not enough to show significant developments in alleviating the impacts of residential segregation in South Bronx neighborhoods and their residents' access to better educational and economic resources.

The truth of the matter is that residential segregation vastly contradicts the popular American belief that "If you work hard than you can do anything you want." This notion – although unintentional in its actual manifestation – confirms the culture of poverty theory, coined by Oscar Lewis (1959), which posits that conditions of poverty ultimately leads to a formation of a culture or subculture that is characterized by the assumption that predicaments are self-created. Essentially, Lewis' work conflates urban poor neighborhoods with dependency and criminality. The problem with this assertion is that Lewis and other similar scholars delegitimize the circumstances of low-income individuals and focuses on common behaviors and attitudes that are, to this day, highly stigmatized and perceived as 'fixed' cultural aspects of their lives. Lewis' work also does not incorporate proposals of alleviating conditions of poverty or place enough importance on structural and institutional influences of poor residents' hardships.

Now, with the rise of gentrification, the framing of urban poor neighborhoods in the South Bronx has shifted to portray a false perception of revitalization, when white middle and upper class youth move into "the next hot spot" (Kaysen 2015). But this larger picture ignores the displacement of longtime residents. My study develops upon the slow gentrification process as an additional context to neighborhood effects on one's quality of life. Gentrification reproduces class divides and does very little to help – if not harm – long-time residents' mobility.

<div align="center">**Chapter Overview**</div>

My study is organized into four chapters. Following the first chapter that provides extensive context to the study of urban poor neighborhoods and quality of life, I move on to three empirical chapters that analyzes in-depth interviews and delves deeper into neighborhood attachment, educational attainment and financial security, and future aspirations and expectations

respectively. Lastly, my conclusion summarizes findings and briefly discusses how they can be used for further studies that may help with policy recommendation.

In Chapter 1, I present the literature review and methodology. In my literature review, I first examine conceptions of neighborhood effects. I then review literature on neighborhood attachment and its role as an indicator of social capital. I connect literature on social-interactional and institutional mechanisms behind neighborhood effects and their impacts on education and employment. I move on to discussing literature on future aspirations in the context of neighborhood effects. In my theoretical framework, I discuss how Wilson's work on neighborhood effects and social capital is incorporated in the broader theoretical concept of quality of life impacted by the structure of the neighborhood. I conclude my first chapter by describing my methodology.

In Chapter 2, I focus on neighborhood attachment and identify different measures of attachment. I explore different measures of attachment to the neighborhood that demonstrate residents' connectedness and community participation. I show how neighborhood effects, as a social phenomenon, affects attachment and shape their access to social and community support. This chapter provides context to understanding quality of life and the interactions between residents and neighborhood entities such as services.

In Chapter 3, I focus on the impacts of neighborhood effects in an urban poor setting on educational attainment and financial mobility. I explore demographic, institutional, and social factors that influence quality of life for lower income residents. I use my findings from qualitative interviews to highlight the social and economic isolation residents face that ultimately limit them from opportunities that are more accessible outside of a poor neighborhood.

In Chapter 4, I assess perceptions of mobility and how residents' aspirations and expectations reflect on those perceptions. Here, I show how living in an urban poor neighborhood constrains ability to pursue educational and career dreams. My findings illustrate the complex reality low-income individuals have to confront to achieve their future desires; I draw back to structural barriers to education and financial mobility mentioned in Chapter 3 and how they shape future aspirations and expectations.

In my conclusion, I summarize findings and analyses presented in every chapter. I discuss how my case study on the South Bronx examines the extent to which neighborhood attachment matters in alleviating the impacts of neighborhood effects. In the context of educational attainment and financial mobility, I reiterate the various ways the structure of an urban poor neighborhood shapes and constrains the lives of South Bronx residents. I demonstrate that attachment is not an effective indicator of social capital levels when structural inequalities regulate urban poor neighborhoods. I conclude with discussing how this study may contribute to future research and development of plausible policies that would benefit urban poor neighborhoods.

CHAPTER 1:

Context on Urban Poor Neighborhoods

I hate that people have to live in the South Bronx because they have to survive, not because they ***want*** *to live there. And that sucks because people shouldn't be alive just to survive. People should be alive to live. They work too hard here… if they had more choices and better resources they wouldn't have picked to live these lives because these aren't fun lives to live (Cameron).*

Synopsis

The objective of this chapter is to provide a thorough review of social aspects of neighborhood effects on quality of life. This chapter begins with a literature review on social processes that leads to the phenomena of neighborhood effects. From there, I look at conceptualizations of neighborhood attachment and how they have been previously used to study indicators of quality of life. I assert that attachment in the context of social relationships and neighborhood experiences can be valuable as a lens to better understand neighborhood effects. My following section delves into extensive literature on the impacts of neighborhood effects on two specific indicators of quality of life: educational attainment and employment. Next, I explore literature on aspirations in the context of poverty to provide a better sense of how social and structural aspects of neighborhood effects influence perceptions of future achievement, expectations, and well-being. I go on to present my theoretical framework, where I demonstrate the relevance of Sociologist William J. Wilson's work on neighborhood effects and social capital in my study. Lastly, I discuss my methodology, which describes the qualitative approach used for this study on neighborhood effects in an urban poor neighborhood.

Literature Review

Social Context to Neighborhood Effects

The social phenomenon behind neighborhood effects has been deemed essential to understanding how people interact with one another, develop trust, and build a community. This provides depth to the study of neighborhoods in the social sciences. There have been many debates over what defines the word 'neighborhood'. Generally, close physical proximity to one's residential environment has been a common definition. Studies on neighborhoods have also frequently relied on "geographic boundaries defined by the Census Bureau or other administrative agencies (e.g. school districts and police districts)" (Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley 2002). The problem in this, though, is that these 'geographic boundaries' provides an incomplete definition of neighborhoods as it leaves out structural patterns and social networks among residents that speak beyond socioeconomic status and wealth of certain areas compared to others. To fully consider the circumstances that shape the experiences and perceptions of residents in an urban poor neighborhood, it is essential to recognize characteristics that reveal social interactions and participation in the neighborhood.

Various scholars have expanded on the definition of neighborhoods to include social processes that reveal how residents connect to other neighbors and utilize their surrounding resources for their own well-being (McKenzie 1921; Keller 1968; Chaskin 1997). For instance, measurements of trust between neighbors and other residential members can help determine the strength of a community. Literatures on deconstructing the meaning of a neighborhood community have focused on the presence of social support and social cohesion. In urban poor neighborhoods, scholars have questioned the presence of an effective neighborhood community in urban poor areas, where structural inequalities tend to intervene in developing effective social

support. Previous studies have also acknowledged that the combination of neighborhood resources and social relationships make the place you live in a very important indicator of residents' outcomes (Jacobs 1961; Sampson 2012; McKnight 2013;).

Other literature looked at social interactions in the neighborhood; these interactions influence residents' perceptions of their neighborhoods and general well-being. Additionally, Chaskin (1997) found that residents' demographic information and socioeconomic status are two of the many factors that influence their perceptions of their environment and can provide an additional measurement of neighborhood quality. Neighborhood perceptions can also provide an understanding of "neighborhood effects", which provides context to quality of life.

A great bulk of literature on understanding neighborhood effects have defined the term as social and environmental influences that affect outcomes for groups of individuals. William Julius Wilson (1987) was best known for contributing early studies on neighborhood effects to understand why inner city poverty persisted among African Americans. He argued that previous work on neighborhoods left out the role of social interactions in understanding "why poverty traps might [still] exist" (Durlauf 2003). 'Poverty trap' is a phenomenon that describes a spiraling mechanism that makes it hard for people to escape poverty due to the absence of economic and social capital.

Similar to Wilson, Sampson, Morenoff & Gannon-Rowley (2002) studied neighborhood effects that focus on social-interactional mechanisms that provide depth to evaluating traditional characteristics of neighborhood poverty. Social-interactional mechanisms include measurements of social ties, neighborhood activities, and social organization. There are very few studies that focus on understanding neighborhood effects from the lens of social processes. To address this,

my study attempts to fill in that gap in literature by delving into social dynamics in an urban poor setting through qualitative methodology.

Jencks & Mayer (1990) attempted to understand social processes behind neighborhood effects specifically in an urban poor setting. They determined that collective socialization, peer-group influence, and institutional influences would be negatively impacted by growing up in a residentially segregated neighborhood. In socio-ecological literature focused on neighborhood effects, scholars have tried to link Jencks & Mayer's findings to the lack of positive social capital. Alejandro Portes (1998) defines positive social capital as "the ability to secure benefits" based on "membership in social networks or other social structures." He also differentiates positive social capital from *negative* social capital which refers to the costs of being part of a social network that can hurt individual life outcomes. To expand on that, Douglas S. Massey (2008) looked at the allocation of negative social capital by exploring the association of neighborhood composition with economic outcomes such as earnings and employment. Residents who were in 'advantaged' neighborhoods had more beneficial social networks and a stronger integrated community – regardless of racial and ethnic differences – and were able to navigate employment opportunities better.

The emphasis on social interactions in literature on neighborhood effects can also be found in sociological and psychological studies. Durlauf (2003) discussed about role model effects, which explains how individual behavior is influenced by shared traits of a group within the neighborhood. The assumption in the role model effect rests in the belief that social interactions shape one's choices. Though Wilson (1987) agreed that interactions among one another can develop a mindset that is similar to one's peers in the neighborhood, he warns about

the consequence of this belief. Attributing one's own outcomes to a collective group's behaviors can mislead research into supporting Oscar Lewis' culture of poverty theory.

To avoid this misconception, Scholar George Galster (2010) identified environmental, geographical, and institutional mechanisms for neighborhood effects. Environmental mechanisms include physical surroundings such as urban decay and deteriorating public infrastructure that affect residents' well-being. Geographical mechanisms include spatial mismatch which describes how certain neighborhoods have less or more accessibility to opportunities than other neighborhoods based on location. Lastly, institutional mechanism includes organizational support that takes interest in how some neighborhoods have access to resources based on funding. These mechanisms largely describe how social structures shape social processes in residentially segregated neighborhoods.

Collectively, these studies overall contribute to research on how social-interactional processes generally impact the well-being of lower income residents raised in an urban poor neighborhood.

Neighborhood Attachment

Previous literature that have attempted to measure attachment to the neighborhood to discuss neighborhood satisfaction and quality of life in a residentially segregated area. Phrases such as 'sense of belonging' and 'place-based attachment' have been used interchangeably to convey a presence of social capital as well as a sense of community. For the purposes of this study, I group the two phrases as *neighborhood attachment*.

Some researchers have explored social-interactional processes in neighborhoods through the lens of residents' "sense of place" (Hay 1998). Parallels between residential segregation and

attachment were drawn to observe how residents describe their environments (Hay 1998; Corcoran 2002; Woldoff 2002; Blokland 2003; Guest et al. 2006). The significance of sense of attachment in understanding neighborhoods was elaborated by Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996). They noted how bonds with certain places and people can influence one's sense of self-efficacy, which pertains to one's perception of personal success and overcoming life situations in order to pursue their goals. Studies on self-efficacy assume that an individual's sense of control over their own decisions is influenced by one's residential environment. Hay (1986) posited that a qualitative study on neighborhood bonds can provide a good understanding of subjective assessments of self-efficacy.

This kind of subjective assessment of neighborhood attachment have shown to reveal residents' sense of security, trust, and longing. These attributes have been valuable in research that previously focused on linking sense of attachment to social characteristics of neighborhood effects and community. Blokland (2003) pointed out how relationships in urban poor neighborhoods can reveal the social context of a geographical region, as well as the presence and strength of a community. He explains in his book, *Urban Bonds*, social embeddedness through neighbor relationships, community activities, and friendships contribute to residents'sese of neighborhood attachment and can help assess self-efficacy in a structurally limited environment.

Contrary to literature that demonstrated a negative association between neighborhood attachment and quality of life (Young, Russell, and Powers 2004; Stewart et al. 2009), Blokland's research revealed that sense of attachment was present despite the lack of diverse networks and social integration into the neighborhood. This called for researchers to incorporate other dimensions of neighborhood to understand this phenomenon. The concept of neighborhood

attachment was then examined under the context of community resources and services that influence quality of life and thus how residents mobilize within these conditions. Sun (2005) and El Din (2012) incorporated neighborhood quality of life into their studies to understand shared perceptions of their environment. These studies incorporated Myers' work (1987) on neighborhood effects to describe "shared characteristics residents experience in place" (108). These 'shared characteristics' refer to social institutions that affect residents' experiences with safety and flexibility in their lives. Studies on these characteristics reveal that, though similar experiences contribute to their sense of attachment, their general satisfaction with their neighborhoods reflect more on their tendency to maintain closeness to their environment for their self-efficacy. Few researchers also explored how neighborhood attachment can be indicative of how social capital resources facilitate civic activities and collective efficacy to maintain an environment most suitable for residents (Hay 1998; Woldoff 2002; Sampson 2009). They asserted that institutional capacity to improve access to social capital can greatly affect residential outcomes. Supporting this, Bursik and Grasmick (1993) highlighted the importance of institutional resources such as police protection, community services, and schools that impact individual well-being within the community.

That being said, previous studies indicate that attachment to a residential environment can measure better quality of the environment, strong social relationships, and a desire to be involved in the community. This has been shown among those who live in wealthier neighborhoods (Young, Russell, and Powers 2004 & Stewart et al. 2009). Sense of attachment in these neighborhoods have shown to develop better social support, networks, and opportunities that accommodate their life style. In understanding what makes urban poor neighborhoods

different, my following section focuses on relevant literature on neighborhood effects that centers on social-interactional, structural, and institutional resources that hinder residents' ability to mobilize. This literature review gives a glimpse to two specific aspects of quality of life: education and employment.

Neighborhood Effects and Education

This study delves into the impact of neighborhood effects on education for urban poor residents. Existing literature shows a general consensus that overall low levels of student achievement can be attributed to living in a neighborhood of high concentrated poverty. Student achievement have been traditionally measured by test scores and level of education (Halpern-Felsher 1997; Jargowsky & Komi 2011). Some researchers argue that studies on adolescent development in an urban poor neighborhood is essential to understand certain factors that are tied to lower student achievement. Jargowsky and Komi (2011) pointed out the importance of positive peer influences, adult role models, neighborhood events and activities, and community building resources that are needed for healthy adolescent development. Not having healthy role models can isolate children from being socialized into mainstream values regarding education and career (Wilson 1997; Galster 2010; Kuang 2014). Incorporating research on the presence and effectiveness of role models as well as institutional resources in an urban poor neighborhood can demonstrate the impacts of residential segregation that can be detrimental to life opportunities and social standing.

Wilson (1987) expanded the study on the impacts of social isolation on educational status; he argued that lack of interactions with employed individuals greatly impacts youth to question the value of education. Wilson claims that 'healthy' role models are those who are of

higher social standing and occupation characterized by reputation and income. Exposure to these types of role models, according to him, would enable more motivation and clarity in educational aspirations. He attributed this finding to what he calls the "concentration effects", which refers to the concentration of economically disadvantaged people in a geographic region that share a reality very different than those outside of the region.

Role models of higher social standing and income have been associated with educational attainment in several studies besides Wilson's work. Jencks and Mayer (1990) discuss how wealthy neighbors have been found to be better role models for poor people; they share findings based on high-SES (socioeconomic status) schools and describe how social support and resources in wealthier schools influenced motivation for lower income students to take education seriously.

> High-SES schools developed a school wide culture that defined college attendance as both inevitable and desirable… schools with a working class majority developed a school wide culture that defined college attendance as impractical and perhaps even undesirable. In such schools, even middle-class students might not attend college (Jencks and Mayer 1990).

Other literature following this study discuss reasons why youth in poor neighborhoods tend to suffer more serious consequences such as poor attendance and lack of motivation. Some research indicates that, though education is generally valued in urban poor neighborhoods, youth do not have the extra push needed by surrounding influences to realize their aspirations (Wodtke; Harding and Elwert 2011). This brings to attention on the lack of institutional resources that would otherwise provide positive social capital such as better role models and social support.

Funding in neighborhood educational services limits students from getting the best access to better education (Wilson 1987). In fact, schools and libraries require more tax money

from residents in their neighborhoods since they are locally financed. This is simply not present in poor neighborhoods. Residents are not able to have better facilities due to low funded institutions in their neighborhoods. Low funding has been associated with lower quality education for children because there are insufficient educational resources for low-income children. The lack of funding for extracurricular activities, books, and other educational resources have shown to demonstrate that educational outcomes are beyond social networks; allocation of essential educational resources greatly differ based on the wealth of a neighborhood. Without the proper institutional resources for educational achievement, student peers in poorly funded schools and people in the neighborhood can influence motivation and test grades. For instance, those who are surrounded by people who have dropped out of school or is engaged in delinquent behavior are more likely to value education less and thus perform lower than other students (Anderson 1999). This is an example of what Portes (1990) calls negative social capital.

Economist Linda Datcher (1982) illustrated how funding has a big role in not only dividing wealthy neighborhoods from poor ones but also increasing inequalities in allocation of educational resources for lower income youth. She used the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) to show how there is a $1,000 increase in the mean income based on zip codes for increased years of schooling by about one tenth of a year. This indicates that educational opportunities are essentially dictated by the wealth of residents in the school's neighborhood, which puts many students in urban poor neighborhoods at a great disadvantage.

Moreover, the social disorganization perspective argues that social immobility, lack of trust, and collective efficacy leads to deviant behavior and crime (Bursik and Grasmick 1993).

Research on the social disorganization perspective in regards to educational attainment argues that low student achievement is a product of poor neighborhood structure that does not maintain 'value systems', or placing importance on certain things such as graduation, needed for youth to stay out of trouble and prioritize school attendance and success. Evidence for association with exposure to crime – in a socially disorganized community – and educational attainment has been found in studies that discuss how experience of risk and victimization may cause stress and poor concentration in school (Martinez and Richters 1993). Further research has also connected neighborhood homicides with low rates of high school graduation (Hardin 2009). These findings indicate that growing up in a neighborhood with concentrated poverty with high crime rates can affect the effectiveness of institutional resources and social interactions.

Neighborhood Effects and Employment

A secured and well-paid job has been shown to be indicative of a better quality of life; those with a higher income and job access more opportunities for their families as well and stress less about living costs. Residential segregation, however, makes it difficult for low-income residents to achieve a secured and well-paid job. Several studies suggest that there are disproportionate rates of employment opportunities within urban poor neighborhoods compared to upper class areas (Wilson 1996; Turney, Clampet-Lundquist, Edin and Kling 2006; Glasmeier and Farrigan 2007; Massey 2008; Ioannides and Topa 2009; Bauer 2011).

Wilson (1996), in his book *When Work Disappears*, discusses how low skilled African Americans end up at the end of the 'employment line' because they live in areas with little access to jobs and growth (29). He further explains this by discussing the composition of the neighborhood and how it impacts economic opportunities. Stores, banks, and businesses are

typically displaced or pushed out of the neighborhood when there is industrial restructuring; competition of newer businesses and land makes it difficult for local ones to maintain their work (Wilson 1996). This is still relevant today as gentrification introduces new investment in businesses, in which long time owners of local neighborhood services and shops have more difficulty keeping up with increasing property tax rates and risk being bought out by new industrial projects.

In addition to the displacement of local jobs and businesses, demands in the labor market shift towards employing higher educated workers which leads to an unfortunate increase in joblessness among those who do not have high levels of education. As mentioned in the previous section, the lack of funding and quality of schools in urban poor neighborhoods furthers inequalities in employment opportunities because residents who do not finish high school or college generally have lower chances of getting a well-paid job.

Supporting this, Bauer (2011) asserts that living in a higher socio-economic status (HES) neighborhood and attending a school with higher income students is linked to better quality of work outcomes. In fact, Bauer's findings reveal that employment probability is negatively affected by neighborhood unemployment rate such that an increase in local unemployment rate by 1% increases the likelihood of individual unemployment by about 1.6%. Studies that focused on access to job opportunities established the relevance of the spatial mismatch theory to suggest that a deprived urban poor neighborhood reduces employment opportunities because there are more job opportunities in the suburbs (Kain 1968; Wilson 1987; Ihlanfeldt 1994). In 1976, the Gautreux Experiment was developed to place more than 4,000 residents from public housing in urban poor neighborhoods to subsidized housing in suburban neighborhoods in Chicago (Wilson

1996). The results show that, though many of the participants in this study had significant barriers such as lack of adequate education and work experience, the study supported the spatial mismatch theory. Those who moved to the suburbs were able to get a job easier than those placed in the city. The respondents who moved to the suburbs mentioned the high availability and access to jobs there compared to the city (Wilson 1996). This has been attributed to a stronger labor market in areas with less barriers to accessing resources to jobs.

The difficulties of obtaining a job and maintaining it can be traced back to the social isolation theory. The social isolation of those living in an urban poor neighborhood has been found to contribute to how residents interact with one another. Sampson and Graif (2009) discussed how usage of personal networks and referrals is significant in employment opportunities. Literature links social interactions or networks with neighborhood effects and gathered research that suggest the importance of understanding social ties among neighbors and friends in an urban poor neighborhood.

One study focused on residents from Toronto revealed that 42% of yearly contacts in individual networks were neighbors who lived less than one mile away. A similar study that focused on residents from Seattle revealed that 35% of respondents had a majority of non-kin social contacts who lived in the same local community (Ioannides and Topa 2009). It is important to consider that these studies reflect the overall population rather than urban poor neighborhoods. Regardless, these results are essential to measure how social ties are formed and maintained in the context of employment opportunities in urban poor neighborhoods.

The struggle in the labor market for lower income residents is generally worse when there's a lack of strong social relationships in neighborhoods. Studies have found that

neighborhoods with high employment have more resources that promote work, job information and referrals, and availability of jobs (Turney et al. 2006). Similar to Wilson (1996), scholars studying neighborhood effects have pointed out how individuals tend to network with those who are employed to seek job openings and further contacts. This is difficult to obtain in a neighborhood where unemployment is disproportionately higher than others.

Residents of urban poor neighborhoods are less likely to have access to the social ties needed for a job that meets their needs because they are surrounded by other people who also may not have "contact or of sustained interactions with individuals and institutions that represent mainstream society" (Wilson 1987). Though literature has continuously brought up evidence of the disadvantages of living among people who are also deprived of employment resources, researchers have not delved into how people compensate for the lack of social networks and opportunities in their urban poor environments.

This seeks for a more qualitative approach to measuring social ties and isolation in the context of employment opportunities. Wilson (1996) analyzed how residents reacted to the dynamics of class tensions when interacting with people in an urban poor neighborhood. The following excerpt is from an interview in Chicago's West Side:

> Well, basically, I feel that if you are raised in a neighborhood and all you see is negative things, then you are going to be negative because you don't see anything positive… Guys… see drug dealers on the corner and they see fancy cars and flashy money and they figure: 'Hey, if I get into drugs I can be like him' (55).

Clearly, peer interactions with those who may be involved with informal jobs such as drug dealing can influence goals and perceptions of mobility. My study explores the significance of

social interactions and isolation from mainstream values and opportunities on the economic well-being of South Bronx residents.

Aspirations and Expectations

Literature in social sciences have drawn parallels between quality of life and aspirations as well as expectations to measure present situations and predict future well-being (Campbell 1981; Andrews and Robinson 1991; MacLeod 2009). Studies on this examined people's perceptions of achievement, views on self-efficacy, and how their social class is reflected in their attitudes about the future. To understand this, Campbell (1981) stated that it's important to differentiate aspirations from expectations. While aspirations tend to be long-term and deals with what one *wants to have*, expectations tend to be based on present circumstances that shape their quality of life. Unlike aspirations, expectations tend to be lower when people experience a lower standard of living.

The aspiration-expectation gap is based on the idea that one's desires are hindered by expectations due to perceived constraints to success. Jay MacLeod's research (2009) examined the aspiration-expectation gap in his in-depth interviews with low-income men in an urban poor neighborhood. His research revealed the effects of their current economic situations on their aspirations and expectations. MacLeod demonstrated that respondents' expectations for their employment were influenced by their perceptions of success in relation to their present circumstances. One group of men specifically faced difficulties not only in the labor market, but also in finding social networks. These barriers to employment opportunities made members of that group feel more pessimistic about their social mobility. MacLeod's research acknowledged

that aspirations expressed hope and preferences for people's futures while expectations were reflective of constraints.

Previous research specifically on educational aspirations have found studying educational settings in poor neighborhoods valuable; achievement was mostly hindered by social and structural factors such as peer support and funding funding (Sewell, Archibald, and Portes 1969; Wei-Cheng and Bikos 2000). Despite having aspirations in achieving a higher educational level, low-income families are faced with conflicts in school, family, and neighborhood's lack of resources that inevitably influence their expectations. MacLeod suggests that status attainment – in the context of income – conflicts with educational aspirations. Thus, people's perceptions of success greatly differ based on the wealth of their neighborhoods.

In many ways, studying aspirations can reveal the impacts of neighborhood effects on quality of life. My study attempts to explore how residents perceive their aspirations in contrast to their expectations based on their experiences living in an urban poor neighborhood.

Theoretical Framework

William Julius Wilson is one of the widely known scholars who contributed work to studies on the link between neighborhood characteristics to individual outcomes in the context of class. His book (1987), *The Truly Disadvantaged*, addresses the impacts of what he coins as "concentration effects" in an inner city in relation to aspirations and opportunities. As previously mentioned, Wilson's concentration effects demonstrate the relevance of residential segregation in quality of life. This ultimately perpetuates the socio-economic deprivation among lower income racially marginalized communities. Wilson also suggests that the concentration effects theory is connected to what he calls the "social isolation" theory. The notion that urban poor

neighborhoods are socially isolated stems from the fact that people are excluded from essential networking opportunities and role models due to structural barriers.

These theories have served as a critique to scholars who ignore the structural makeup of a poor neighborhood and instead blame poor people for the impoverishment of the area. Wilson points out how this belief is problematic as it places the burden on the poor for the deterioration of the neighborhood. Using the concentration effects theory and social isolation theory, Wilson elaborates on how the environment is structurally deprived of essential resources such as jobs and access to effective institutional resources. It is due to these factors that access to positive social capital is very limited for low-income residents in the neighborhood.

Moreover, in Wilson's *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (1996), he identifies the impact of work opportunities at a neighborhood level. He notes the consequences of high neighborhood joblessness as a product of low levels of social organization. He discusses about the declining involvement in the formal labor market, ultimately isolating people from understanding how to attain a job. That being said, residents in an urban poor neighborhood find difficulty overcoming social isolation that prevent them from mobilizing economically and socially.

To conclude, Wilson's writing on neighborhood effects and mobility in the context of social capital functions to deconstruct aspects of low-income neighborhoods that contribute to the understanding of social capital resources such as social relationships. Thus, I incorporate Wilson's work on neighborhood effects into my study on the South Bronx, as these aspects addresses how indicators of quality of life are influenced by the neighborhood setting.

Research Method

To better understand residents' quality of life and their experiences living in an urban poor neighborhood, I used a qualitative approach that centered on in-depth interviews. Throughout the course of two months in late 2016, I conducted 13 one-on-one and in-person interviews with residents who have been living in the South Bronx for eight or more years at the time of the interview. In fact, 10 residents have been living in their neighborhood since birth. Three residents have lived in the South Bronx for 8 to 15 years. The sample is not representative of the entire South Bronx population due to its size. However, residents reflect on experiences and observations that are very relevant to the purposes of this research and may contribute to future studies expanding on this study's findings.

Residents who participated in this study were between the ages of 19 and 37. This study focuses on a specific group of residents who are in the process of navigating ways to financially mobilize to establish a secure job and career. Thus, my sample compromises of predominantly young residents who have not fully settled. That being said, the two older residents in this study (ages 36 and 37) were found to be crucial to my study as they gave valuable insight to their continuous struggles and efforts to mobilize in an urban poor neighborhood.

Among the 13 residents, there were nine males and four females. Making up the majority, nine residents (six males and three females) in this study identified as Hispanic. Two residents (two males) identified as both Black and Hispanic while one male resident identified as strictly Black. Only one female resident identified as South Asian. Every resident reported coming from an immigrant family, with the exception of one.

Though all 13 residents completed high school, they reported varied time spent in college. Four participants obtained a high school diploma and are currently working. Only two

residents have obtained a Bachelor's degree and are currently working while seven residents have completed some college at the time of the interview. Within this group of those who completed some college, two out of the seven residents discontinued their education for the time being to work but they plan on obtaining a Bachelor's degree in the future.

Reported household income varied among all 13 residents depending on several factors such as household size and parents' incomes. On the higher end of the income distribution, two residents self-reported their estimated household income to be more than $70,000. Out of the two residents, one resident disclosed to me that their reported incomes were based on both parents' incomes and their own income. The second resident is the only married individual who reported the combination of him and his wife's incomes together. Only one resident reported an estimated household income between $50,000 to $59,999 based off his parents' incomes as well as his own contributions. Two residents reported to make between the ranges of $30,000 to $39,999. The remaining eight residents reported a household income that is less than $30,000, with four of them making less than $20,000.

After receiving IRB approval in November of 2016, I reached out to residents through personal connections, social media, and I snowballed the rest of the sample. I briefly informed them about my research and asked them if they would be interested in being interviewed in person. I met with residents at a location at their convenience, mostly at a local cafe. All residents showed a general interest in having a conversation about their experiences in the South Bronx and agreed to be part of the study. After scheduling a time and place for the interview, I gave them the consent form at the location. Given that the interview has two stages: survey (5 mins) and in-depth interview (55 minutes), I tried to make the interview convenient for them to

answer openly. I first asked residents survey questions containing demographic information, and I filled the form out myself while they answered out loud to me. In this way, they did not feel tired for the in-depth interview. Each interview was approximately an hour in length.

The second stage of the interview contained semi-structured and open-ended in depth questions. The flexible structure of the questions allowed residents to answer fully with more details that reveal their attitudes, observations, and understanding of the issues and topics presented to them. This method helped residents feel more comfortable having a conversation rather than answering to rigid and structured questions with options to choose from.

However, there is one disadvantage to this method which was making sure to stay on time. Since residents were able to express how they felt more with the open-ended questions, it can sometimes be time consuming. In order to resolve this problem, I made sure to keep them on task with answering the questions. When responses started to drift towards discussing about another matter that was irrelevant to my study, I shifted the conversation in a respectful manner to connect it back to the interview questions. This not only saves time but kept both me and the resident focused on the questions at hand.

It is important to note that residents' attitudes expressed in this study are only reflective of the time of the interview. Residents in this study represent various neighborhoods in the South Bronx that share common patterns. Nevertheless, the reader should be aware that findings in this study do not necessarily indicate neighborhood homogeneity. As we see in the next chapters, neighborhood experiences differ greatly among all 13 residents based on perceptions, socio-economic dynamics, and more.

Pseudonym Chart

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Residency in the South Bronx (years)	Employment Status	Education	Estimate Household Income*
JACOB	Male	22	Black	22	Employed	Some college	More than $70,000
ADRIAN	Male	19	Hispanic	19	Student	Some college	$20,000 - $29,999
DAMIEN	Male	22	Black and Hispanic	22	Employed	Bachelor's Degree	$50,000 - $59,999
CAMERON	Female	21	Hispanic	21	Student	Some college	$10,000 - $19,999
REMY	Male	21	Hispanic	11	Student	Some college	$25,000
HECTOR	Male	22	Hispanic	22	Employed	High School Diploma	$20,000 - $29,999
LUIS	Male	36	Hispanic	8	Employed	High School Diploma	More than $70,000
GENESIS	Female	21	Hispanic	21	Employed	Some college	$35,000
JULIET	Female	20	Hispanic	20	Student	Some college	$16,000
SEBASTIAN	Male	20	Hispanic	20	Employed	High School Diploma	Less than $10,000
RICKY	Male	37	Hispanic	37	Self-employed and Student	High School Diploma	Less than $10,000
NADIA	Female	21	South Asian	21	Employed and Student	Some college	$20,000 - $29,999
MARTIN	Male	25	Black and Hispanic	15	Employed	Bachelor's degree	$30,000 - $39,999

*Residents in this research study reported the income(s) that was most relevant to meeting their basic necessities (e.g. rent, bills, and food). Some residents continue to live with their families for financial support. Jacob, Adrien, Damien, Cameron, Remy, Genesis, Juliet, and Nadia continue to rely on their family's financial support. Hector, Luis, Sebastian, Ricky, and Martin rely mostly on their own income to support their costs.

CHAPTER 2:

Neighborhood Attachment

I've seen better and I've seen worse but it's home, you know? (Jacob)

Outline

This chapter explores neighborhood attachment to consider how residents' experiences of living in an urban poor space affects interactions and attitudes towards their respective South Bronx neighborhoods. What do residents' sense of attachment tell us about their perceptions of their neighborhoods and how they respond to various social, institutional, and systemic factors in their lives? In the first part of this chapter, I describe the physical and social layouts of the South Bronx to study the extent to which they facilitate interpersonal relationships, participation in activities, and responses to difficult situations that ultimately impact quality of life. Residents share their experiences with shopping at local corner stores, the changing space as a result of gentrification, and neighborhood services and amenities. These components are commonly expressed in residents' responses when they elaborate on their neighborhood attachment.

I also illustrate how South Bronx residents define their neighborhood attachment with respect to finding a sense of community. Here, I draw attention to two main indicators of community, which are social cohesion and trust. While this chapter acknowledges structural constraints and how they impact social capital resources, I emphasize the bonds (or lack thereof) that residents make with other residents. My findings suggest the presence of sense of attachment to the neighborhood, which largely developed from shared experiences of social and economic hardships. Additionally, the neighborhood culture also contributed to residents' sense of

attachment as they reflected on how authentic the South Bronx was compared to other neighborhoods. I distinguish unique cultural repertoires that were considered significant for residents' identities as South Bronx natives.

Sense of Attachment in South Bronx Neighborhoods

Neighborhood attachment has been commonly studied to understand the correlation between place-based belonging and individual well-being. Previous scholars have associated a stronger sense of neighborhood attachment with better health, social support, and social mobility (Hay 1998; Blokland 2003). Neighborhood attachment, however, has been found to be weaker in poor residentially segregated areas (Young, Russell, and Powers 2004; Stewart et al. 2009). Factors such as violence and lack of access to resources can affect how low-income residents respond to certain neighborhood situations. This may influence neighborhood perceptions and their ability to develop useful social capital. Without strong and efficient community resources, residents in urban poor neighborhoods are more likely to report lower neighborhood attachment.

However, as I explore residents' attitudes towards their neighborhoods, I present findings that contradict previous literature that explained low sense of attachment in urban poor neighborhoods. Although residents were generally dissatisfied with their neighborhoods, they felt very connected to their identity as South Bronx natives. In fact, ten out of thirteen residents in this study had a fairly strong neighborhood attachment. Considering previous studies that measured sense of attachment (Hay 1998; Stewart et al. 2009; Bennett 2013), I focus on how South Bronx residents describe their neighborhood, level of satisfaction with services and amenities within a community, and social interactions.

Describing the Neighborhood

A comprehensive understanding of certain aspects of the neighborhood setting is crucial to analyze residents' sense of attachment. Most residents in the study identified the "blocks" they grew up on in the South Bronx when asked to describe their neighborhood. To give context, the standard length of a NYC city block is approximately 264 feet (Tauranac 2008). Residents described many of their interactions and experiences within the vicinity of their home. This revealed the depth of their social isolation from differently characterized activities on other blocks. Based on our conversations, residents perceived blocks as venues for local stores, activities, and daily interactions with neighbors. For some, it was clear that their block(s) served a function of developing a sense of community. This section provides a social layout of the South Bronx neighborhoods to provide context to neighborhood relationships and how they contribute to residents' sense of community within the small vicinity they resonate with the most.

Neighborhood Services and Amenities

In multiple studies, researchers have found that neighborhood facilities or services can promote close, informal social ties that can help fight social alienation driven by poverty (Jacobs 1961; Keller 1968; Stewart et al. 2009). On the contrary, opponents suggest that it would be very difficult to build strong social ties through neighborhood services when urban poor environments are intertwined with economic disadvantages (Hawthorne 2006). These disadvantages are hard to ignore when understanding how South Bronx residents grasp their sense of community.

This section explores the critical role of South Bronx's services and amenities in residents' attachment to their respective neighborhoods. Residents in the study were isolated from community institutions that would otherwise provide significant social capital that

encourage positive social and economic behaviors. In reaction to the question "do you know of

any services or facilities in your neighborhood", some residents were surprised, if not

bewildered, to realize how little they knew.

> I know very few. There's uhhh… there used to be… oh shit… I guess group homes before but now I don't know any… I don't know any besides churches (Jacob).

> Daycare… I never heard – (stops) – I mean there's a high school? I don't see any community centers… Not like close no (Adrian).

> Now that I think of it… I don't know any of the stuff… I see government buildings like for food stamps. I don't see stuff for domestic violence or substance abuse. Or at least they're not being advertised or promoted enough (Juliet).

Only one South Bronx resident was able to mention more than two services in their

neighborhoods (e.g. parks, recreational centers, shopping centers, and career services). This

gives a glimpse of the very few services that are available to South Bronx residents. But, it is

important to consider that many residents who struggle with poverty are immigrants who may

have language barriers. Residents are therefore limited to the social interactions and services they

are able to make. They may have difficulty conducting research of their options when they are

either working stressful low paid jobs or are unable to understand how to navigate resources on

their own.

Cameron (21) lived in her neighborhood since birth. She described her neighborhood to

have a predominately Hispanic and West African population; most of her neighbors were either

immigrants or come from an immigrant family. Cameron mentioned how she was one of the few

people in her neighborhood who was ever enrolled in college. As the only resident in my study

who was able to mention more than two services in her neighborhood, Cameron recalled being

able to educate herself on these resources while she was attending college.

She named a few neighborhood services, including organizations such as BronxWorks, which is dedicated to providing services and assistance for residents in the Bronx regarding workforce development, youth programs, immigration services, and more. Despite living in the South Bronx for her entire life, Cameron emphasized that she was only aware of these nearby resources once she was in college.

> Now, I know of services in the area like BronxWorks because I researched them. That's the sad thing – in order to find these things, you need to have access to the internet and learn how to conduct research online. I didn't know that BronxWorks is influential in the community because I never heard of it… I had to research to find organizations. There's actually a lot of activists in the South Bronx that people do not know of. But I didn't know about this until last year in college. People here know enough English to survive, but many people would probably have a hard time navigating their way to search things online on their own. Also, with the hours they work, how could they? It's about surviving so it's hard to find time to care about these things (Cameron).

Residents' work schedules can limit their time to understand how to access neighborhood services. This is an example of how the combination of poverty, low educational attainment, and language barriers shape how residents make use of their neighborhoods. Until residents are able to overcome structural barriers to education and employment, it will be difficult for residents to identify neighborhood services that would be helpful for them.

It is also important to consider that more awareness and active participation from organizations and community centers in the neighborhood could help strengthen access to services and inclusivity for residents. All thirteen residents shared that they wish there were more organizational support in the community to help them build useful social networks for future economic opportunities. Due to the economic and social forces that constrain access to social capital through neighborhood services, South Bronx residents expressed how unlikely they were to actively seek for resources without organizational and state help.

Wilson's social isolation theory suggests that residents in an urban poor setting have limited contacts with certain people, groups, and institutions which may be helpful for improving quality of life in urban poor neighborhoods (Wilson 1987). In an environment where poverty is already hard to overcome, limited community engagement can affect their ability to access essential social capital resources for mobility. Strategies to improve access to neighborhood services can help establish them as effective community institutions in the South Bronx. Consequences of lacking neighborhood services were reflected in multiple conversations with residents. Damien mentioned that the absence of neighborhood services in his neighborhood promoted the belief that South Bronx residents were on their own to resolve situations that come with poverty and social isolation. He discussed about his disappointment with community initiatives for youth.

> We don't have any services. And they're like 'why don't these kids find a better option?' There's nothing out here. You can't expect a kid who has mad shit going back home to find better options when there's nothing out here for better opportunities (Damien).

Without the ability to interact and participate in supportive programs, South Bronx residents have more difficulty mobilizing both socially and economically. Establishing initiatives to support residents with lower educational attainment and low paid jobs could, otherwise, help their present circumstances. Hawthorne (2006) explained how neighborhoods with effective organizational support and services can demonstrate higher social cohesion and have a better sense of community.

However, social cohesion appeared to be difficult to build in South Bronx neighborhoods even when there were neighborhood services and amenities. Martin described a playground in his neighborhood that was not fixed for many years.

> I remember times when people would just stand outside and play music. People were more prone to being outside in general. Today, I don't see that anymore. People don't play music outside. It's really quiet. There's a playground and they haven't fixed that since I was in sixth grade. Kids in the area can't really go out to play. It doesn't feel like a safe area. The playground could've been a place for parents to come out, but they're obviously not gonna come out if it's not safe (Martin).

The physical neglect in the neighborhood's playground was indicative of the changing social atmosphere of Martin's neighborhood. Neighbors rarely spent time outside to interact with one another and there was also a sense of distrust that came from a lack of social interactions. The social dynamics of Martin's neighborhood speaks to the importance of physical community institutions as they play a central role in social cohesion.

Urban planning policies that were initially proposed to revitalize neighborhoods can be driven by political and economic factors; these factors generate significant problems for residents to gain social capital resources and enjoy living in their neighborhoods. Researchers have recognized that these are structural and institutional problems that low-income residents could not solve on their own (Dreier et al. 2001). Anthropologist Erika Larkins (2015) studied favelas (slums) in Brazil and her research demonstrated how residents of favelas internalized poverty and violence due to the lack of implementation of physical community institutions in neighborhood spaces. Similarly, the South Bronx has historically been and continues to be in a state of abandonment, which contributes to residents' feelings of social isolation and powerlessness to change their circumstances.

> We didn't have a community center before. It recently opened in the past few years… it's kind of a place where people come together but not really. It's not really promoted. I've not gone there at all. No invites, no nothing. I went there once and I've been living there since 2002 and it was just for a tenants' association meeting (Martin).

Without active participation of community leaders, South Bronx residents are unable to take more control of their present circumstances as well as form useful relationships with other residential members.

They are limited to neighborhood amenities that are questionably healthy for their well-being. In fact, most residents in this study shared their disappointment in regards to the strong presence of fast food restaurants and liquor stores. When residents described the physical layout of their neighborhoods, it was striking to find the neglect in establishing community services such as parks and recreational centers. Ricky discussed about his disapproval of the amount of pharmacies lined up on every block of his neighborhood. At first, I was confused with Ricky's frustration about pharmacies, considering how convenient their location was for residents who may be sick. When I asked Ricky to elaborate on his disapproval, he explained how there were no other healthy options to serve residents besides pharmacies that distribute medication. Ricky shared stories of young neighbors misusing prescription drugs because of their addictions.

> There are 11 pharmacies back to back around here. There's not enough grocery shops and after school programs. There's nothing but pharmacies here" (Ricky).

The presence of more positive services can assist in alleviating neighborhood conditions that are associated with addiction, poverty, and crime. Jargowsky and Komi (2011) pointed out essential community building resources such as healthy neighborhood stores and programs can be very beneficial for adolescent development. These neighborhood services and amenities can encourage positive interactions and social cohesion.

Along with that, Sebastian described the effects of not having a permanent space for residents to connect with each other. Sebastian expressed how he tried to make use of his

residential block to create social activities for neighbors to come together. This is a form of "tactic" that scholar Michel de Certeau (1984) discussed in his book, *The Practice of Everyday Life.* He differentiated the two terms: strategy and tactic. Strategy is composed of ways that powerful institutions try to regulate space as well as social interactions. As a residential space, South Bronx blocks are designated by urban planners as an area for homes. De Certeau posited that tactics oppose strategy because they are modes of practice that manipulate, divert, and appropriate regulated spaces. People use tactics that do not meet the strategy or goals of the institution. Those subjected to structural inequalities have been found to utilize tactics to be opportunistic, playful or creative. In Sebastian's case, a tactic felt necessary to appropriate residential blocks as a space to build a sense of community.

> I've been trying to close the block down to have a block party but it was wayyy more fun when I was younger. There were block parties and basketball games outside. Little things like that would get people outside. I don't see that anymore. When it used to rain, I wouldn't need to tell nobody. Everybody would already come out and get wet in the rain. You know? Everybody gets all down. But then – as I grew older – everyone wanted to stay in because it's hard to keep the streets clean (Sebastian).

Without a courtyard or spaces for the neighborhood community to participate in social activities, residents like Sebastian carry an extra burden of ensuring that their blocks are welcoming and clean. It is apparent that these sorts of tactics unfortunately do not last long. However, it should be noted that residents' desires to build a sense of community – through their own creation of neighborhood activities – demonstrate their sense of neighborhood attachment.

In an environment with lacking neighborhood amenities and infrastructure, local corner stores become one of the main contributing social institutions to the neighborhood layout. The next section delves into the importance of local corner stores in neighborhood interactions.

Local Corner Stores

The corner store is a vital indicator of the social and economic make-up of South Bronx communities. For many, the local corner store provides a unique shopping experience that allows residents to purchase a large variety of foods, groceries, and other goods specific to the surrounding community. Studies have previously studied local corner stores such as bodegas to understand their role in neighborhood communities. In the South Bronx, most food stores are actually bodegas and they are a common place for residents to shop at (Lyons 2010). Bodegas act as a gathering space for South Bronx residents to build a relationship with each other as well as the store owners. Sebastian (20) was born and raised in his neighborhood. As Sebastian described his neighborhood, he shared his appreciation for long-time stores building a sense of community. Having grown up on the same block throughout his life, Sebastian valued the relationships he developed in his local bodega.

> If I was to talk to the store owner and let's say I'm a dollar short… since he knows me he'd be like 'bring it to me tomorrow' (Sebastian).

Being able to build a relationship with the store owner fosters a sense of trust and safety. Store owners serve an invaluable service by allowing residents like Sebastian to buy goods on credit. Unlike many giant chain stores, South Bronx bodegas serve a small multicultural community, in which residents can interact with one another, gossip, share advice, and build a strong connection with store owners. These intimate relationships, as a result, contribute to store loyalty and kindness. In a study by Kaufman and Hernandez (2001), Latino residents patronized bodegas to show support by buying products despite them being relatively more expensive than local supermarkets.

As neighborhood institutions known for their strong presence of family owned local businesses, mom and pop corner stores cater to cultural needs of the neighborhood. From ethnic food, clothing, and other services, mom and pop shops stock up products that connect residents to their cultural heritage and thus establish a loyal customer base (Sanchez-Jankowski 2008). Ricky (37) was one of the two oldest residents in this study, who has lived in his neighborhood since birth. He described his experiences in a local mom and pops store that was, unfortunately, later displaced. Ricky reflected on memories in the store and explained how staff members including the restaurant owner, Ali, were very welcoming to South Bronx residents.

> When you had no money, you can go to Ali who makes the pizza… he even knew everyone's orders. On Thanksgiving, he used to buy turkeys and just give it to everybody (Ricky).

The act of remembering order preferences not only reflected customer loyalty, but also how valuable customer relationships were formed in local mom and pops stores. Ali's food service also extended to the community as he distributed turkeys to South Bronx residents. It is also evident that residents developed strong relationships with small businesses by providing customer loyalty. This sense of commitment was clear when residents continuously returned back to the stores to buy food and other products.

The small and intimate environment of a mom and pops store can make residents comfortable enough to reveal details about their lives with each other as well as workers. Being able to share personal stories shows that these spaces establish bonding experiences. Ricky described how Ali's store was a unique space for neighborhood friendships to develop.

> [My friend] would come in and, once he did, that's how I knew I had to get up from that chair so he can come through and sit with us. He always ordered a sunny side up egg, a toast, and one sausage. I knew to get up from that chair to let him in at exactly 10:30 am.

He's well known out here. He was filthy rich, but he'd still want to sit and eat food with us and kick knowledge. Such a good dude. He never left the hood until he died (Ricky).

Ricky's relationship with Ali's store was reflective of his social interactions with other neighbors who became friends. His ability to memorize his friend's regular breakfast order demonstrates the amount of time Ricky and his friend spent in the restaurant. The store created a liaison between residents in the community through the act of ordering food. Sociologist Sanchez-Jankowski (2008) compared local food to "internal organs, feet, heads, and tails" to explain how food is a central role in bonding residential members of urban poor neighborhoods. In other words, shopping experiences in local food shops can cultivate meaningful friendships that Sanchez-Jankowski call "social cliques". These cliques are distinguished as groups that residents like Ricky tend to spend more time with, exchange ideas, and participate in activities together.

However, South Bronx local corner stores are increasingly being displaced by mainstream chain stores. As we see in the next section, displacement has detrimental effects on social bonds between residents as well as store workers. This inevitably contributed to a shift in the social atmosphere of South Bronx neighborhoods, in which residents found a greater difficulty connecting with others. Residents expressed a sense of longing and loss when they experienced physical changes in their neighborhood, including the replacement of local corner stores.

Displacement

As gentrification begins to replace low-income residents and local businesses in the South Bronx (Teicher 2016), residents experience a sense of displacement in their neighborhoods. Residents in this study show general concern about neighborhood changes and

what they imply about their well-being. For many, displacement of local businesses and residents triggered an adjustment period in which the dynamics of residents' social interactions changed. This section explores experiences with displacement to understand residents' attachment to their neighborhood as they express longing and loss in our conversations. In a way, negative attitudes and concerns about displacement are indicative of neighborhood attachment.

Luis (36), who was one of the two older residents in this study, lived in his South Bronx neighborhood for eight years. He initially refused to meet me at a recently opened Starbucks café and instead proposed to meet at a local mom and pops café. When I asked Luis about his thoughts on the introduction of Starbucks in the South Bronx, he shared his disappointment with the lack of recognition for already existing mom and pops stores that were always part of the South Bronx community. Luis talked about the effects of shifting customer support from local shops to mainstream and expensive ones. Not only do local businesses risk losing more customers with the establishment of new ones, they also risk being displaced because their foods become unprofitable.

As discussed in the previous section on local corner stores, mom and pops stores add character to South Bronx neighborhoods. These stores typically sell goods and services that resonate with residents in the surrounding area. Increasing apartment rent and introduction of new and expensive businesses affects the ability for smaller businesses to make profit *and* serve as a community space. Residents in this study expressed distrust towards new businesses because of their lack of intimate and friendly spaces that were commonly present in local stores. Ricky shared similar sentiments as Luis and expressed his frustration with gentrification effects on local businesses as well as the social atmosphere of the South Bronx.

> These big corporate people don't give a fuck about us. They don't. I rather come and support [this coffee shop] than Starbucks. They don't even come to the neighborhood and see how the hood is but they wanna make money out of us (Ricky).

The small and intimate design of local mom and pop stores allowed residents and store workers to develop meaningful relationships. When these stores were later displaced, residents experienced a hostile and detached relationship with their environment. New businesses were commonly described as "intruders" since they were not venues for meaningful social interactions and products that were specific to cultural heritages in the South Bronx.

Martin (25) described the shifting dynamics in social relationships at local corner stores. As a South Bronx resident for 15 years, Martin was very familiar with his community. He mentioned how being able to familiarize himself with his local bodega owner added value to his shopping experience. It wasn't until Martin started to experience the slow displacement of local corner stores that he began to feel sad about not recognizing a familiar face while shopping.

> There used to be Latinos there, but now it's a Yemini owner who I don't know. So… you know… it's different… it hasn't changed in prices or stuff like that. But it's sad that a family I knew to an extent is not there anymore… they were displaced. I had a stronger relationship with the bodega owners when I was [younger] (Martin).

It is clear that displacement of local stores influences interactional experiences and attachment to the neighborhood. Martin's experiences with the family who used to run the bodega reveals the impacts of trust and familiarity on belonging to the neighborhood. The relationships between residents and store owners thus provides a sense of community identity. Sociologist Melinda Milligan (2003) examined the impacts of displacement on what she described as "spatial continuity". Being able to build a relationship with employees in smaller stores provided a sense of belonging and value to residents' shopping experiences. She asserted that there is a disruption

in the spatial continuity when displacement occurs. Jarred by the physical changes of their environment, residents developed a sense of nostalgia based on past experiences with building community relationships.

Feelings of loss and nostalgia can be found in multiple responses among residents who experienced displacement of not only local stores but neighbors as well. Jacob (22) was born and raised in his neighborhood. He opened up about his childhood memories and disclosed that the last time he felt a strong sense of community was when he was a child. Jacob described the tight knit community that he experienced prior to witnessing displacement of neighbors, who moved out due to increasing rent.

> People would do a cook out, invite others, and say 'I'm making some food. Come through.' People would talk to each other. My mom would have conversations in the bodega despite being of different races and have conversations in the laundromat. I remember, at that time, my mom said hello to seven different people in the bodega and we couldn't leave because she was so busy talking to people. But then – people started moving in and out 'cause rent was going up (Jacob).

The face-to-face interactions Jacob's mom encountered in the past, which were unique to certain kinds of settings, contributed to his sense of neighborhood attachment. In this case, smaller neighborhood spaces such as bodegas and laundromats were venues for residents to connect with each other and share experiences that lessen the effects of social isolation through poverty in an urban poor neighborhood.

When I asked Jacob to identify a place he felt most connected to, he quickly responded saying "the movie theater" which he explained was later displaced. He reminisced over the movie theater as it held many memories for him. For Jacob, the neighborhood movie theater was depicted as a significant role in his attachment to the neighborhood.

> I used to love the movie theater that was here. My dad and I would go there all the time, but then they closed down and got bought out by Marshalls. That was two years ago. Another movie theater closed down and turned into a strip mall (Jacob).

Jacob described a lack of attachment or what he calls a "stranger feeling" to his neighborhood, once he experienced the displacement of the movie theater. This fostered a sentiment of loss and unfamiliarity with his neighborhood. Besides his desires to relive memories in the movie theater, Jacob suffered from financial costs following the displacement. Jacob recalled difficulties of being able to easily go out and watch a movie with his friends at a low cost.

> If you know where I live… it's not convenient for me to go there at all. I would have to take multiple buses or a cab to get there. That means I would have to go to a theater in Manhattan which would be a minimum of $15 a ticket for a two-hour experience (Jacob).

The additional travel and movie costs add to the burden of not being able to spend time with others or participate in activities that were once enjoyable. Many of the residents I interviewed described feelings of unfamiliarity, sadness, and even lack of safety as they witnessed changes in belonging with their neighborhood. Juliet (20) was born and raised in the same neighborhood in the South Bronx. She described the negative impacts the changing space has had on how she perceived her neighborhood.

> I feel less safe now in the environment. Small businesses and bodegas are closing down. It's abandoned out here. A lot of people moved out. Strangers I don't really know… (Juliet).

The experience of witnessing displacement in the neighborhood produced feelings of distrust and lack of safety. Being able to recognize local stores and people was a sign of security and comfort. With the added stress of poverty, displacement created instability in daily neighborhood interactions and activities. Scholars such as Dreier et al. (2001) related this instability to how residents' social ties are further weakened within the neighborhood. The South Bronx felt more

of a socially isolated neighborhood for Juliet as she felt unsafe to associate with "strangers" outside of her apartment building.

Furthermore, residents expressed disapproval and resentment when commercial development and urban renewal took place as white middle and upper class individuals moved into South Bronx neighborhoods. Initially, it was intriguing to find that residents in this study developed negative attitudes to urban developments in their neighborhoods considering the historical neglect in prioritizing residents' well-being. In my conversation with Damien (22), who was raised throughout his life on the same block in the South Bronx, he expressed an alienating feeling as he realized that neighborhood renovations were very sudden and became more apparent when he a new class of people began to move into his block.

> I dislike how the neighborhood is changing. They're fixing the neighborhood because white people are moving in… 'oh because these yuppies[1] wanna move into the neighborhood let's fix it up for them.' They really want to fix this place up because, for some reason, this is the 'spot'. It's close enough to the city, but it's not *in* the city. But it's in the hood so it's cheap for them (Damien).

Damien felt uncomfortable seeing people from affluent backgrounds move into his neighborhood as this migration could potentially drive up apartment rent prices and attract more youth, who may be able to pay more than long time residents in the South Bronx. Even as the South Bronx expanded to include more urban renewal projects, Damien's negative attitudes to the changing space stemmed from the fact that gentrification attracted a certain demographic population; that was essentially a driving motivation for repairs and beautification projects in long time residential communities.

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[1] The slang term "yuppie" is derived from "Yup", which is an acronym for Young Urban Professional. Both derogatory terms refer to a young individual who is from an affluent background and currently holds a high-paying job.

Rising gentrification disrupts social inclusion and excludes longtime residents from feeling as if they have a part in community engagement and renovation. Victor Rios (2011) emphasizes how urban poor individuals are always subjected to social control agents that implicitly enforce the belief that they are not worthy of neighborhood revitalization, safety, and respect. In this case, gentrification can be perceived as a social control strategy that regulates the social environment. In many cases, residents like Damien – although not overtly – resist gentrification as it impedes their ability to act on their neighborhood attachment and therefore build meaningful interactions in the community.

Overall, attitudes concerning the lack of efficient community institutions and shifting social and physical changes in the neighborhood draw attention to residents' concerns and sense of attachment. In my next section, I analyze the critical role of neighborhood attachment in overcoming barriers of social integration that South Bronx residents experienced as a result of exclusionary behaviors enacted by social institutions and other agencies.

Measurements of Neighborhood Attachment

Contrary to studies that have drawn a positive association between level of satisfaction with the quality of the neighborhood and neighborhood attachment, the majority of South Bronx residents in this study were very attached to the neighborhood despite their unpleasant experiences, as described in the previous section.

Very few studies have looked at trying to understand this phenomenon, where there is a relatively strong sense of neighborhood attachment in an area where level of satisfaction with the environment is very low. Stewart et al. (2009) pursued research on differences in neighborhood attachment between lower income and higher income residents; the study revealed that lower

income residents felt more comfortable to affiliate themselves with neighbors in a similar socio-economic situation. They generally perceived a better sense of neighborhood attachment with people in a "marginalized situation". This is despite the fact that emotional, social, and economic support were found to be lacking in urban poor neighborhoods.

Generally, I found three different categories of neighborhood attachment in my study:

A) Low sense of neighborhood attachment

B) Fairly strong sense of neighborhood attachment based on shared experiences with being in a marginalized situation

C) Fairly strong sense of neighborhood attachment based on shared experiences with using a cultural repertoire unique to the South Bronx.

Categories of Neighborhood Attachment[2]

A	*B*	*C*
Genesis	Ricky	Luis
Hector	Yael	Sebastian
Juliet	Cameron	Remy
	Damien	Nadia
	Jacob	
	Adrian	

Figure 1. Primary categories contributing to neighborhood attachment.

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[2] The reader should note that there is variation in each category. Some residents may be in both categories under "Shared Experiences". That being said, residents' responses reflected more on the categories they were placed in. These categories are purely analytical to layout important differences for the purposes of this study.

Diagram for Low Sense of Neighborhood Attachment

**Low Sense of
Neighborhood Attachment**

I don't feel connected, but I sort of do... But I would not stay here... I don't feel like I fit in. I feel out of place... I can't engage with the people here... For now, it's just a cheap place to live (Juliet).

I didn't choose to live here. At some point, I realized that I'm not from here (Hector).

Rent is the only thing stopping [my family]. I do not want to stay here in the future. Absolutely not. Like do I plan on raising kids here? No (Genesis).
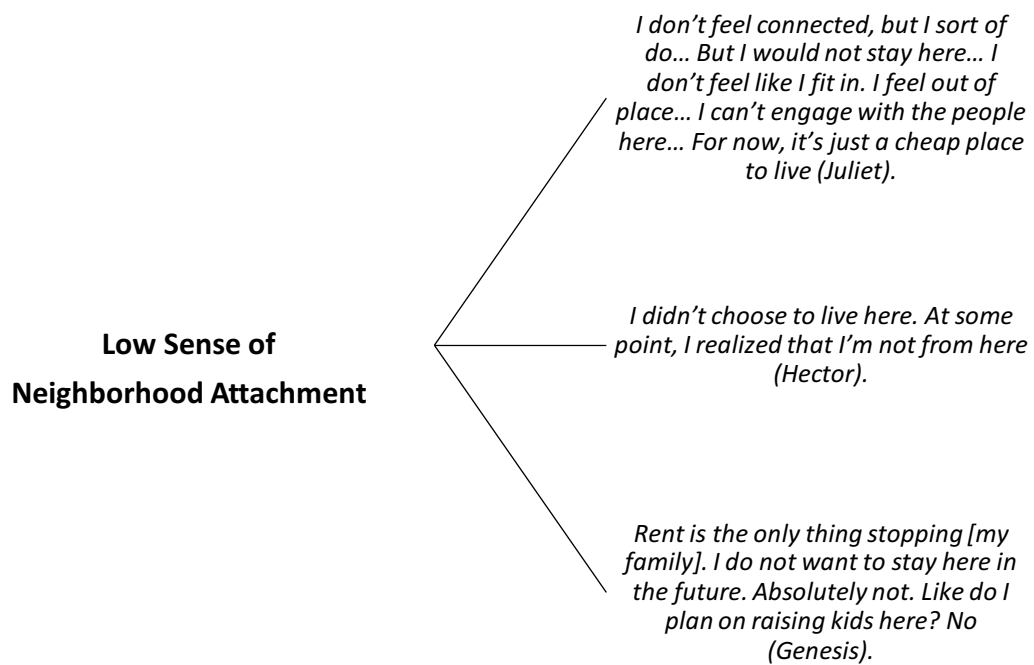
Figure 2. Diagram for low sense of neighborhood attachment with three examples of responses from residents.

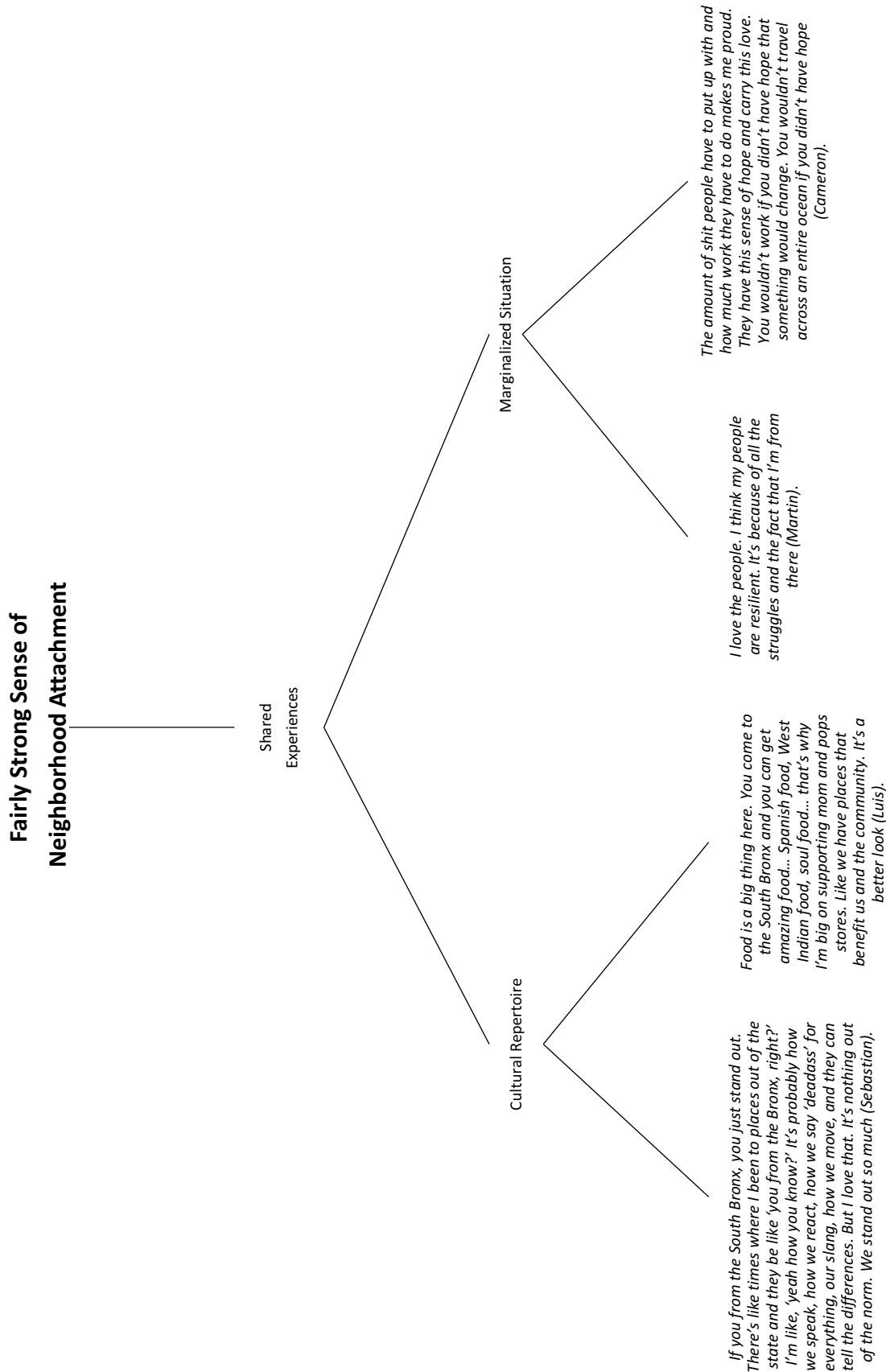*Diagram for Fairly Strong Sense of Neighborhood Attachment*

Fairly Strong Sense of

Neighborhood Attachment

Shared
Experiences

Cultural Repertoire

Marginalized Situation

If you from the South Bronx, you just stand out. There's like times where I been to places out of the state and they be like 'you from the Bronx, right?' I'm like, 'yeah how you know?' It's probably how we speak, how we react, how we say 'deadass' for everything, our slang, how we move, and they can tell the differences. But I love that. It's nothing out of the norm. We stand out so much (Sebastian).

Food is a big thing here. You come to the South Bronx and you can get amazing food... Spanish food, West Indian food, soul food... that's why I'm big on supporting mom and pops stores. Like we have places that benefit us and the community. It's a better look (Luis).

I love the people. I think my people are resilient. It's because of all the struggles and the fact that I'm from there (Martin).

The amount of shit people have to put up with and how much work they have to do makes me proud. They have this sense of hope and carry this love. You wouldn't work if you didn't have hope that something would change. You wouldn't travel across an entire ocean if you didn't have hope (Cameron).

Figure 3. Diagram for fairly strong sense of neighborhood attachment based on "shared experiences" in South Bronx neighborhoods. Two types of shared experiences are distinguished: using a cultural repertoire and being in a marginalized situation. Two examples of responses from residents are provided for both types of shared experiences.

Low Sense of Neighborhood Attachment

Only three residents expressed a very low sense of neighborhood attachment. They shared how their neighborhood environment limited their ability to not only interact with others, but also to maintain social and economic stability. David Varady's (1986) work on neighborhoods revealed that, if we measure neighborhood conditions, we can see how they strongly affect residents' self-efficacy within the neighborhood. Varady established the neighborhood confidence theory, which suggested that lack of confidence in one's neighborhood to help individual mobility can affect residents' willingness to interact with other residential members and be more involved in the neighborhood community.

Moreover, Sampson (2012) drew parallels between neighborhood effects and lack of collective efficacy to understand the lack of neighborhood confidence among residents in an urban poor setting. A community with shared expectations and strong social relationships demonstrated higher trust and civic engagement in the neighborhood. Linking both Varady's neighborhood confidence theory and Sampson's collective efficacy theory, it can be said that some South Bronx residents struggled feeling attached to their neighborhoods because they that experienced a lack of social organization and meaningful interactions.

All three residents, Genesis, Hector, and Juliet told me that they would leave the South Bronx if they were financially capable to. My conversations with them revealed a struggle to identify ways to find a sense of community in a socially constrained neighborhood.

> Rent is the only thing stopping [my family]. I do not want to stay here in the future. Absolutely not. Like do I plan on raising kids here? No (Genesis).

I don't feel connected, but I sort of do… But I would not stay here… I don't feel like I fit in. I feel out of place… I can't engage with the people here… For now, it's just a cheap place to live (Juliet).

I didn't choose to live here. At some point, I realized that I'm not from here (Hector).

As we see in the next section, residents' social isolation and experiences with violence affect their perceptions of their neighborhoods. Feelings of fear and anxiety over their safety are contributing factors to their desires to leave the South Bronx.

Violence and Self-Isolation

Genesis (21) spent her entire life living on the same block in her neighborhood in the South Bronx. Growing up, Genesis rarely went outside to hang out since she didn't have many friends on her block. But, she remembered how "the boys on [her] block" would always hang out on the corner. She smiled as she described how neighbors would put out beach chairs in front of apartment buildings and open the fire hydrant. Everyone would get wet and enjoy the summer weather. Those times, however, remained as memories for Genesis.

It was until a few years ago when a young boy was shot in front of Genesis' apartment building and this event drastically changed her perspective of her neighborhood. Soon after the event, Genesis began associating the news to her neighborhood, claiming it one of the most dangerous areas in New York City. She started to feel more unsafe recognizing that violence was becoming more apparent on her block.

> I did find out recently that our neighborhood is really dangerous 'cause of gangs or something like that. But he was like only 12 years old. I left that day and it was eight in the morning. He got shot at 8:15 am. That was a huge wake up call. I was like, 'ok I don't feel safe here.' Like 'oh my god I need to move.' I knew his family. They've been living here for as long as I have. He was like the one who helped me get into the building 'cause I had a big luggage. Like what the hell happened? (Genesis).

Her feelings of unsafety do not end there. When Genesis realized that the supervisor for her

apartment building did not regularly check security cameras, she felt more suspicious and afraid

of her neighborhood. Genesis mentioned that having a front door man who can check people

who come in and out of the building would have made her felt less unsafe. Ironically, front door

men of residential buildings and privacy were motivation factors for migrating into the South

Bronx during the early 1920s[3]. Furthermore, not being able to recognize or communicate with

the landlord contributed to a greater sense of distrust for Genesis, especially when crime has

increased in the past few years. According to the New York Police Department (NYPD),

robberies, homicide, felony assaults, and other crimes went up by 24.3% between 2014 to 2015

in the South Bronx (Small 2016). The lack of effective security measures is an example of

institutional neglect in providing South Bronx residents a better sense of protection. This, in turn,

impacted how residents like Genesis interacted with others in their neighborhoods.

Juliet described how neighborhood violence discouraged her from participating in her

neighborhood. She expressed her distrust in neighbors and other residential members.

> I don't really hang out in the neighborhood. I just walk my dog. The parks are too
> dangerous. There's not much to do and it's too dangerous for me to be out at a certain
> time. When I'm in the South Bronx, I get catcalled more. I'm forced to be in my own
> world because I'm skeptical of people outside of my building (Juliet).

Juliet's response illustrates how South Bronx residents – especially women of color – have to

constantly be aware of their surroundings, which can create an anxious relationship with their

neighborhoods. This relates to Rios' research (2011) on how low-income individuals

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[3] Refer to "The South Bronx" in Introduction.

concentrated in urban poor neighborhoods are subjected to violence and, therefore, internalize the fear of being a victim of a crime.

When I asked Juliet to identify a place she felt most connected to, she mentioned her apartment building. The tight knit community grounded on celebrating Latino heritages in her building allowed her to feel more comfortable and safe. However, the drawbacks to this were more apparent when Juliet came to terms with how self-isolated she was from neighborhood activities. She recalled times when she would experience feelings of fear and threats to her personal security once she stepped out of her apartment building. Consequently, Juliet felt compelled to come home by 5 PM without feeling her safety being jeopardized.

For Hector (22), living in the South Bronx felt too great of a risk to consider staying there in the future. Hector explained how he moved a few times within the South Bronx due to safety issues and, because of that, he was only able to describe how his neighborhoods as places he learned to *survive* in.

> It's quiet, but you can say sneaky at the same time. You can never like keep your eyes closed in the Bronx. People always doing bad things… they don't know how to control their liquor, and when you don't know how to control that, stuff goes down. You know, violence and stuff like that. I used to hear a lot of shootings down a few blocks and see people get stabbed at four in the morning. It made me feel unsafe because I saw people I know that I hang out with get beat up (Hector).

Living in a violent area in the South Bronx pushed Hector farther away from settling there in the future. Though the rent was affordable for him, Hector was not able to find a sense of security in his neighborhood.

> I know I'm safe on my block, but I'm not gonna go to another block 'cause of things that go down there. I stay on my own (Hector).

Recognizing other residential members on his block, as well as friends, provided a sense of protection for Hector. This perceived form of security, however, was only limited to his residential block. Hector conveyed to me that there was a risk in interacting with individuals beyond his block because he was unaware of harmful threats that may come with those interactions. He discussed how there was a "different story" on each block that everyone had to be aware of in order to measure the possibility of being a victim of violence.

> I know for sure nothing's going to happen to me on my block 'cause everyone knows me. I feel safe. I met my friends there; we used to play basketball together and go to the same park (Hector).

Mark Granovetter's (1983) "The Strength of Weak Ties" demonstrated that low-income individuals relied more on strong ties as they were more connected to the shared experiences of social pressures in their neighborhoods. This connects to how residents' social interactions are greatly limited to selected blocks in the South Bronx based on how safe they are perceived to be. Granovetter posited that strong ties that develop in this small vicinity could create a socially disorganized community, where collective efficacy is very low. In other words, disconnected subgroups provide little to no benefits in integrating residents into the wider neighborhood community. Disconnected subgroups also weaken access to social resources such as job referrals.

Although having friendships on Hector's block provided a sense of assurance that he would personally not be a victim of violence, it was clear that he did not want to to spend time in his neighborhood as he grew older. When I asked Hector why he did not want to stay in the South Bronx in the future, he said, "I don't associate myself with violence. These people keep going with the system." Hector elaborated on the 'system', discussing how living in the South Bronx was a reminder of his social isolation from the rest of society.

> The system is doing the same things your family has always done and staying in the neighborhood for the rest of your life. If you know it's bad for you why stay there, you know? I know some neighbors there and they're *still* there 'cause they keep going with the system. Some of them are still in gangs 'cause they just wanna follow what they see… you see a lot when you're outside. If you see these things all the time, you're gonna wanna do it. You see money, drugs, and you're gonna want to deal with money and drugs (Hector).

The 'system' that Hector discussed above shaped his perceptions of his neighborhood in relation to his mobility. After witnessing acts of violence, crime, and lack of financial mobility in his neighborhood, Hector's feared that he would be unable to navigate ways to pursue his future goals if he continued to be in an environment with very few people who have socially and financially mobilized.

As a result, Hector spent more time outside of the Bronx to participate in activities. With limited opportunities to mobilize and participate in healthy community events, Hector continued to remain to himself in his neighborhood.

> I didn't [hang out] for sure…'Cause I knew this shit takes you to jail or death… If there was a career center or better parks, I don't think people would be stuck in the system… When I was growing up, I only saw C towns, grocery shops, and a 99 cents store. There's nothing to look around here. Nothing exciting and nothing to find. We grew up seeing drugs, guns, and fast money so they think that's the only way to make it, you know?... I feel constrained here 'cause I *know* the system for us [Hispanic] and black people… so not a lot wanna change it… I just know there are better places and a better life (Hector).

It appeared that not only did Hector fear getting into any neighborhood trouble by interacting with residential members of his neighborhood, he was also disappointed with the overwhelming lack of services, community centers, or proper supervision. This essentially creates a divide between residents and their social capital needs and reinforces a socially disorganized community. The structurally limited space isolates South Bronx residents, especially those who resort to crime and violence, from escaping the 'system'. As we see in the next chapter, Hector

was able to understand this once he went to a unique charter high school that promoted a healthier social and academic environment.

Overall, Genesis, Juliet, and Hector's lack of neighborhood attachment speaks to the stress and anxiety they experienced while living in a socially isolated neighborhood. They generally found their neighborhoods to be threatening for their safety, which contributed to their desires to leave the South Bronx in the future. However, majority of residents in this study experienced similar situations that surprisingly drew them closer to appreciating their neighborhoods more. The next section explores how South Bronx residents developed a fairly strong neighborhood attachment based on shared experiences in their neighborhoods.

Sense of Neighborhood Attachment Through "Shared Experiences"

Residents who expressed a fairly strong sense of neighborhood attachment shared certain characteristics of their neighborhoods that stood out to them. At first, it was intriguing that most residents who were very attached to their neighborhood surprisingly had minimal social ties and were not very invested in their communities. There are two factors that affect neighborhood attachment: being in a marginalized situation and using a cultural repertoire unique to the South Bronx. Residents felt more connected to their neighborhood based on shared experiences living in an urban poor neighborhood despite perceiving their social environment as unsafe and isolating. The following section first focuses on the first factor – being in a marginalized situation – and describes how social and economic hardships shaped residents' experiences of isolation and anxiety to understand their neighborhood attachment.

Describing Social and Economic Hardships

Contemporary neighborhood attachment studies have highlighted neighborhood conditions and experiences to understand how people develop a sense of attachment. To understand that, the consequences of growing up in an urban poor neighborhood must be addressed first. In conversations with the six South Bronx residents who felt connected to their neighborhoods based on shared social and economic hardships, I quickly understood – *the South Bronx requires a lot of surviving*. They explained how situations related to poverty and violence were very tough to experience on their own.

Poor socioeconomic conditions can dampen families' abilities to find a well-paid job and navigate resources to build their social networks. Ricky recalled times when his family experienced overwhelming stress when he was younger; he mentioned how his parents "grew up on the streets". When I asked what growing up on the streets meant to him, Ricky told me that it was symbolic of the struggles his family had to undergo to make ends meet financially and maintain their safety in a violent neighborhood. Growing up on the streets was also indicative of an unstable household and using informal methods of making income. Ricky talked about his parents' experiences with maintaining a roof over their heads and how they used alternative routes of making an income. Considering the lack of job opportunities and social networks in low-income neighborhoods, Ricky's father became part of a street gang in the South Bronx while his mom was involved with selling drugs to other residential members of the community.

Ricky also discussed his feelings of danger in the neighborhood despite living there since he was born. Anxiety surrounding violence was common to all residents in the study and contributed to difficulties in socializing. Ricky disclosed to me that the respect he received from

other neighbors for being a long-time resident was not always enough. This is an example of the

lack of collective efficacy in urban poor neighborhoods; long-time neighboring relationships

may not strongly affect the deterrence of crime and threats. Feelings of unsafety creates an

otherwise hostile environment where neighbors feel most secure when they are not around

others. Ricky described the social atmosphere in his neighborhood that made him feel very

skeptical of other long-time residents:

> There's no morals out here… You gotta at least be like, 'oh hold on I know him… I
> know what he's about. I know his family'. But there's no trust out here… I see all that on
> the streets… They're like 'yo we out here, smoking, with our pants down low… yeah we
> out here.' They think it's poppin', but it's not poppin' (Ricky).

Witnessing residential members in the community resort to the consumption of drugs can

contribute to an unhealthy perception of the neighborhood and intensify feelings of unsafety.

Anderson (1999) explained how both drug users and nonusers are in environments that

perpetuate a "mental coercion bordering on strong-arming". In other words, being aware of

people close by who are involved in illegal drug use or sale can influence individual behaviors

and general perceptions of safety and violence. Anderson discussed how certain corners and

spaces would be marked off as "selling areas" for dealers and users. For that reason, Ricky

became very protective of his son and felt much safer to stay inside their home. The lack of

permanent infrastructure and healthy social institutions creates anxiety for residents to associate

with their neighborhood peers.

Cameron alluded to a similar feeling of fear and anxiety in her neighborhood when she

shared her experiences with harassment in her neighborhood.

> As a woman of color, I feel endangered… I feel so unsafe as a woman. I just want to be
> able to take a walk out here. Just a walk without people catcalling me… I close myself. I

try not to walk alone. I walk on the main road, where it's unsafe, instead of the block for pedestrians at night because I'm too scared of something bad happening to me. I put my headphones on, keep my head down, and make sure no one is behind me. I keep looking back. I make sure my headphones are slightly off my ears so I can still hear what's going on around me. I can still listen to everything around me. This has caused a great amount of anxiety for me… I felt like I needed to get out of the Bronx (Cameron).

The anxiety that Cameron described above highlights how internalized violence in the neighborhood is reflective of how stressful not being able to trust other residential members in the same community can be. Being a woman of color in her neighborhood subjects Cameron to uncomfortable and anxious situations, where the chances of other people mobilizing to protect each other are very low. Feelings of intense danger led Cameron to socially isolate herself from others on her blocks by walking on the main road.

Martin experienced similar feelings of distrust in his neighborhood due to fears of violence. He described how neighbors would limit their social interactions to making small talk.

Neighbors sometimes talk to each other but not really… there is this culture around fending for yourself… being isolated and individualized. You know a part of me attributes that to the way policing is done in my neighborhood… a lot of distrust by law enforcement, from people in the community, among each other… people don't want any trouble. There's this assumption that people have to stick to themselves (Martin).

Loosened interpersonal connections and deterioration of neighborhood conditions due to violence can contribute to the social isolation of residents. Hence, residents in Martin's neighborhood found it necessary to resort to a 'fending for yourself' attitude to remove themselves from the environment. Additionally, policies targeted to regulate urban poor spaces greatly affects the collective identity of neighborhoods and social interactions. Martin pointed out how policies implemented under former mayor Michael Bloomberg constructed a more militarized and tense social environment in the South Bronx.

Mayor Bloomberg received major backlash for his policies regarding improving crime rates. One of them included the "crime-fighting tactic" known as stop-and-frisk. Under Mayor Bloomberg, police encounters jumped from 160,851 in 2003 to 685,724 in 2011; only 1.8% of police searches among racially marginalized groups resulted in weapons seizures (Honan 2013). The heavy policing and racial profiling stirred great uncertainty and fear for many residents.

> I saw in front of my eyes how things changed for the worse. People thought it was unsafe like, 'I don't want to stay out here because they might give me a ticket' or like 'I don't want to talk to you because I don't want them thinking that I know you'... there's a lot of distrust and a lot of people… they just wanna stay very minimalist. They're like, 'I just wanna live my life. I just wanna provide for my family.' They don't want to rub any feathers (Martin).

Personally, Martin became more connected to his racial identity, as well as other residents, in a negative sense because they felt their race was targeted by the police. Residents like Martin described their encounters with police in the neighborhood as common experiences in their neighborhoods. Neighbors and friends would share their personal instances with police violence and how walking in their neighborhoods can be an anxious experience. Martin and Damien expressed how their interactions with the police created a sense of intrusion in their community's lives.

> I get questioned and stopped and frisked for no apparent reason… it happens often… I can't say it happens frequently, but I've been stopped throughout my life more than 13 times. They found nothing… just going to the bodega on my bike… just because of my race… something about me seems suspicious to them. I highly doubt they'd stop a white person. And there's a lot of white people that walk around the South Bronx now that I never see get stopped (Martin).

Policing became so normalized in Martin's neighborhood until it was hard to detach it from their experiences living in the South Bronx. As a result, Martin and other residents were not able to comfortably walk around their neighborhood without feeling targeted by police.

Though residents' experiences with poverty, violence, and social isolation reflected on how living in their neighborhoods provided a very low sense of security, they shared how they valued the strength in their community of being in similar marginalized situations.

Pride in Coping

Once residents recognized other residential members in their neighborhood who were also in a similar social and economic position, their struggles felt less isolating. Six out of the ten residents, who reported a fairly strong sense of neighborhood attachment, expressed their solidarity for other residents who have also shared feelings of danger, difficulties with paying for bills, and other experiences of marginalization.

> I love my neighborhood. I love it. I'm very proud to be from here 'cause this is the hood. This is what made me. My mother could hit the lotto and *still* live here… This place teaches me to do better. Sometimes I'm overwhelmed 'cause of this place but you know... that's life (Ricky).

> I love the people. I think my people are resilient. It's because of all the struggles and the fact that I'm from there (Martin).

> The amount of shit people have to put up with and how much work they have to do makes me proud. They have this sense of hope and carry this love. You wouldn't work if you didn't have hope that something would change. You wouldn't travel across an entire ocean if you didn't have hope (Cameron).

> I love my people. I love everybody who's from this hood. We all here have been from a situation… if you're from the South Bronx, I already have a connection with you. I don't even know everyone from this neighborhood, but I'm still gonna show love… because it's like we all grew up here and we all came from the same place. You can't tell me something that I'll be surprised about (Damien).

Given that residents were generally dissatisfied with their neighborhoods, residing in a space where other members of the community were also struggling to cope with neighborhood

situations made them feel more empathetic of others. Their neighborhoods were a reminder of the challenges people had to undergo to survive as low-income individuals.

While Ricky, Martin, Damien, and Cameron described their neighborhoods to be an unstable and unhealthy environment in the previous section, they insisted that the hardships they faced and witnessed were what ironically connected them. Being able to make friendships in their neighborhoods was a very important component to appreciating and trusting them for support, considering the amount of alienation and violence that residents have witnessed throughout their lives.

> There's no trust out here, but I got a handful of people I can put my life on. And these dudes right here guarantee will not tell… they won't set you up… If it's time to rumble, we'll be rumbling… these dudes I put my life on… when we all go out and we got $20 we gonna buy a bottle together… they did so much for the neighborhood… their backs were against the wall… they did time and was convicted for their crimes. They never hurt nobody…. if people needed money, they were looking out. 'If you need a pair of sneakers, I got a pair in my closet. Go in there and help yourself. Take two of them. Yo here's some money for you' (Ricky).

In an environment where Ricky described as unsafe, trusting others who went through similar hardships with poverty and violence gave him a sense of comfort. He mentioned how a few of his friends made sure to provide the social support they needed to get through difficult times in the neighborhood. The lack of economic resources in South Bronx neighborhoods fostered the value of sharing, especially when other people were struggling to make ends meet.

> I'm the type of person where if I got a dollar, I'm gonna share that dollar and we gonna eat. If it's bread and butter and I got a dollar, we gonna share it. You're gonna cut a butter in half and we all gonna share that. When you got nothin' you don't take nothin'. What matters is that we ate out here so we good (Ricky).

Ricky's friendship with people who are also struggling financially reveals how connecting with others based on similar life styles and struggles augments neighborhood attachment. These

meaningful relationships can promote collective efficacy on smaller blocks and provide a sense

of security. Sampson (2006) discussed the relevance of social relationships in collective efficacy.

He explained how developing strong relationships with other residents can increase informal

social control behaviors that regulate disorder and promote security.

Similarly, Damien's family suffered from financial hardships that allowed him to feel

empathetic with other residents in the neighborhood and develop a sense of community.

> There's a woman out here selling pastelitos for a living and that dude selling mix tapes with his big ass speakers out here bumping music. You have people playing dominos… You got people out here who sell fresh vegetables and fruits at such a discounted price outside... There's a homeless man and he can watch your apartment and you know nothing was stolen. He helps with groceries. He come around and he's like 'hey can I get a dollar' and, because we know him for so many years, we give him food. It's crazy. I love that because I can't find that anywhere else (Damien).

Damien's neighborhood attachment can be traced to how his built environment was reflective of

other residential members who were also struggling to make a steady income. Being able to

recognize familiar faces who work outside such as street vendors contributes to residents' sense

of community. Sociologist Sudhir Venkatesh (2006) explained how people who do not have a

steady place of work may conduct their own independent business by selling clothes, home

cooked food, and music on the streets. Underground entrepreneurs also include the homeless,

according to Venkatesh. Since there is less usable physical property to conduct independent

businesses in urban poor neighborhoods like in the South Bronx, the strong presence of

underground entrepreneurs can add character to the community as their continuous neighborhood

involvement facilitates social relations with the wider public and therefore play a part of

residents' everyday life.

Residents' responses revealed a more humbling appreciation for the ways that South Bronx residents struggled financially and coped with violence. Jacob explained how shared experiences in economic hardships shaped his neighbors' interactions with one another. Jacob described how the bodega was a space where it was clear that people felt connected with one another based on the shared understanding that poverty affected most people in the neighborhood.

> Poverty has a hand in how people interact with each other. It's why people in bodegas call each other by first name basis because we all know we all struggling. But we gotta do what we gotta do to live… 'cause they're not doing any better than we are if not worse. That's humbling (Jacob).

Residents' identities as inhabitants in the South Bronx are connected to their residential environments because those neighborhoods were memories of coping with financial struggles. For this reason, residents recognized a sense of resilience among others. Although Martin and other residents are socially isolated from other blocks in their neighborhoods, they found pride in knowing that other residents were also trying to overcome barriers to poverty that may not be present in wealthier neighborhoods.

> My people are the poor working class people in the South Bronx. Whether you are documented or undocumented… whether you are Dominican or black… it doesn't matter where you from or if we only had one interaction… I see a lot of people who are struggling and are trying to make ends meet… this is my home (Martin).

Though neighborhood attachment can vary from block to block within a neighborhood, it is clear that residents generally feel proud for surviving economic inequalities that shape their lives. Such meaningful connections with the neighborhood and its residents can be vital for strengthening social ties and collective efficacy. The next section delves into another factor,

using a cultural repertoire, which provides an understanding as to how residents experience a fairly strong attachment to their neighborhoods.

Cultural Repertoire

Ann Swidler (1986) argued against theorists that suggest that low-income individuals residing in poor residentially segregated areas have very clear and different values from the rest of society. Swidler instead pointed out that low-income individuals have access to a repertoire unique to adjusting and interacting with others in urban poor neighborhoods. This can be used to demonstrate that South Bronx residents obtain cultural knowledge that serve as a resource or "tool kit" to make sense of and adjust in their neighborhoods. The process in which residents employ various aspects of culture was found to be part of the socialization process. The "tools" that Swidler referred to in her work were defined as resources to adjust in particular social contexts. These tools build communities based on shared experiences with cultural knowledge and behavior. Though South Bronx residents express how individualistic they and other residential members are in their communities, they use culture to construct their identity as a South Bronx native.

Considering how socially alienating the South Bronx is from mainstream society, residents distinguished their neighborhoods as very unique and "authentic". Residents elucidated their sense of attachment through examples of how a strong presence of various cultural heritages connected them to their neighborhoods. Luis, Remy, Sebastian, and Nadia expressed their pride in residing in the South Bronx when they described certain characteristics that reflect on cultural food, stores, activities outside of residential buildings, and language.

The South Bronx neighborhood was more than just a reminder of the physical decay and economic hardships for some residents. During the eleven years he has lived in his South Bronx neighborhood, Remy (21) felt his environment to be very socially and physically abandoned. Problems with violence and crime only contributed to the social isolation of Remy's neighborhood. He admitted that the South Bronx was nothing more than just a place his family could afford at the time.

> I just thought it was really ugly. There were these big brown buildings and they looked kinda dirty and the streets weren't well taken care of. There were these empty spots down the block from me. Nothing was done about them. It's just barren and an ugly piece of land (Remy).

It was until Remy left home to attend college that he started to reminisce on how prominent Dominican culture was in his neighborhood. He explained how being able to access stores and in an environment with other Dominican residents allowed him to connect with his racial and cultural heritage.

> Now I think it's a really beautiful neighborhood… I realized that there aren't a lot of places where there's really good delicious Dominican food or Dominican people. But back then, I didn't understand the value. Back then it was just food, you know? Afterwards I went farther away and I realized how special it was to me… it's not something everyone can have. Sometimes I talk to my friends and they tell me they never had a plantain or an oxtail before. Like where you been at? Like how did you avoid a plantain? Like do you know how many times I've had to eat plantains because it was the only option? (Remy).

Since Remy was not able to access Dominican food as easily as he did in the South Bronx, his difficulties with finding Dominican food away from home made him aware of the strong Dominican community in his neighborhood.

Luis also felt a sense of community in his neighborhood because there was a strong emphasis on selling cultural products, including food. As a huge supporter of mom and pops

stores, Luis shared how neighborhood stores contributed to connecting South Bronx residents

with their cultural heritages.

> Food is a big thing here. You come to the South Bronx and you can get amazing food…
> Spanish food, West Indian food, soul food, and more… that's why I'm big on supporting
> mom and pops stores. Like we have places like this that benefit us and the community.
> It's a better look (Luis).

Furthermore, Luis identified mom and pops stores as an essential part of the South Bronx culture

because their services facilitate relationships with residential members who can relate to their

racial heritages. As an environment mostly composed of mainly immigrant families, these stores

allow residents to build their cultural capital and network with other people with similar beliefs

and experiences. Luis recalled few mom and pops stores in his neighborhood that not only

provided basic necessities but also built social relationships.

> There's a mechanic shop, a little bodega… down the block we have two small
> pharmacies that aren't too big… There's a small store that sells African garments. I
> wouldn't want anything to change about them. They serve the neighborhood. Just 'cause
> I don't go there doesn't mean other people from the community don't go there (Luis).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, local businesses are more intimate and can provide

opportunities to sustain relationships within the community. Residents are able to have an overall

enjoyable shopping experience. Luis mentioned how placing a Starbucks or a Rite Aid would

change the social atmosphere of the neighborhood, ultimately allowing there to be less of a

strong relationship between store owners and residents based on similar cultural experiences.

Nadia (21) can also relate to Luis' sentiments about neighborhood entities being a huge

contributing factor to fostering a sense of community. As a South Asian woman, Nadia found

herself to be part of a smaller minority in her neighborhood that was mostly comprised of

predominantly blacks and Hispanics. Despite that, Nadia was still strongly connected to her

neighborhood because of how neighborhood activities reflected on the culture of South Bronx

neighborhoods. Consistent outdoor events, which were part of people's everyday life on their

blocks, provided a sense of authenticity to the South Bronx. Nadia described one memory in

particular that reminded her why she felt very attached to her neighborhood.

> When we drove around at night in Manhattan, you see a lot of corporate people coming
> from the bar. But when we came to the Bronx there were always people gathered outside
> of bodegas talking… there were people playing cards in front of the building… (Nadia).

Although Nadia admitted to rarely interacting with others in her neighborhood, she found that

small activities such as playing cards were reflective of an 'authenticity' that Nadia felt most

connected to in the South Bronx. She expressed her fear of gentrification and its effects on

displacing these activities as it would affect residents' ability to connect to their neighborhood.

Sociologist Sharon Zukin delved into the meaning of authenticity and what makes urban poor

neighborhoods distinct than middle and upper class ones. In her book, *Naked City* (2009), Zukin

argued that there were distinctive qualities of an urban poor neighborhood such as family-owned

shops, aging buildings, longtime residents, and neighborhood events that made one community

unique than another.

Zukin discussed how immigrants and low-income individuals also shaped the culture of

urban poor neighborhoods. Sebastian shared his appreciation for how South Bronx residents use

a unique colloquial language to communicate with one another, especially among youth.

Although slang has been traditionally considered vulgar, it is a vital factor in connecting

residents with the social and cultural atmosphere. Slang is a cultural tool for fitting in within a

certain environment and connects residents to their neighborhoods. Sebastian expressed his pride

in common phrases and sayings that reminded him of where he grew up.

> If you from the South Bronx, you just stand out. There's like times where I been to places out of the state and they be like 'you from the Bronx, right?' I'm like, 'yeah how you know?' It's probably how we speak, how we react, how we say 'deadass' for everything, our slang, how we move, and they can tell the differences. But I love that. It's nothing out of the norm. We stand out so much (Sebastian).

Residents are able to personalize their respective neighborhoods despite facing social and economic isolation. Their identity as South Bronx natives reveals their continuous attempt to personalize the neighborhood even when there are structural limitations to develop a community.

While Adrian never felt an established community in his neighborhood due to violence and poverty, he recalled times when he felt proud to recognize other residents from his neighborhood based on how they communicated with each other.

> There's this one OG[4] who almost ran into me and he said, 'yo bro I almost clapped you.' I knew *exactly* what he meant by that. He basically said that I need to be careful with the way I act. I understood the language. I think the language is unique in the Bronx because it's what makes the community. There's a specific social community here. I find it beautiful because it creates a sense of pride. I own it. I grew up with this language and I'm proud of it (Adrian).

It is evident that sharing certain slang phrases and sayings in the South Bronx constructs a non-threatening culture in contrast to how mass media portrays slang among low-income individuals as inappropriate and distasteful. In a way, colloquial language distinct among South Bronx residents is a reminder of how unique their community is in comparison to other neighborhoods.

Summary

In this chapter, I drew attention to measurements of neighborhood attachment based on how South Bronx residents described and perceived their neighborhoods. Furthermore, residents' attitudes about their neighborhoods shed light on social relationships, the effects of displacement

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[4] The phrase "OG" is slang for Original Gangster, which refers to a person who has lived in the neighborhood for a long time and has a strong influential presence.

in their social well-being, and neighborhood hardships. I illustrated how most residents have a fairly strong neighborhood attachment based on shared neighborhood experiences. As a result, they found value in how unique and authentic their neighborhoods were perceived to be in comparison to other neighborhoods in New York City.

However, South Bronx residents find difficulty in asserting their neighborhood attachment in a space where it's difficult to build social and economic capital. As we see in the next chapter, residents perceive their neighborhood as a place of societal pressures, in which they frequently respond and act to obstacles related to educational and financial mobility.

CHAPTER 3:

Educational Attainment and Financial Security

*This just so happened that I **had** to go through with it (Adrian).*

Background

It was an awfully quiet morning on October 5th, 1977 when former president Jimmy

Carter surveyed the South Bronx. Carter was stunned to witness tombstone-like empty buildings,

abandoned areas, and lack of cleanliness. He turned to Patricia Harris who was the Secretary of

Housing and Urban Development at the time and said, "See which areas can still be *salvaged*,"

(Fernandez 2007). The South Bronx was historically recognized as an area that required

salvaging as 300,000 people left the area during white flight and unemployment rates

skyrocketed to 85%. Additionally, *The New York Times* (Severo 1970) conducted a study

focused on the Hunts Point section of the South Bronx and found that there was only a 1 in 20

chance of residents dying from natural death due to illness and aging, which left most residents

in that area dying from either homicide or drug overdose.

Although grassroots efforts and federal programs later influenced the revitalization of

South Bronx neighborhoods[5], the economic and social predicaments of residents till this day

continues to be a problem for low-income residents. Neighborhood "revitalization" policies do

not fully incorporate the socio-economic approach to understanding the lived experiences of

South Bronx residents. The South Bronx remains to be a poor area, where situations associated

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[5] Refer to "The South Bronx" in Introduction.

with living in an urban poor neighborhood frequently isolates residents from navigating

opportunities for upward mobility.

In the previous chapter, I demonstrated the significance of neighborhood attachment and

its implications for residents' perceptions of South Bronx neighborhoods and their quality of life.

Although many residents in the study were very connected to their neighborhoods, their sense of

attachment was found to be a less influential contributor in assisting with their educational and

financial well-being. Contradictory to literature that show a positive association between

neighborhood attachment and quality of life, South Bronx residents are faced with social and

structural barriers to upward mobility. To understand this, I focus on two aspects of quality of

life: educational attainment and financial security.

Many studies share an agreement that higher levels of education are associated with more

job networking, better pay, and ability to mobilize to a higher economic status (Jencks 1972;

Brown 1978; Dickert-Conlin and Rubinstein 2007; Petrilli 2015). For instance, obtaining a

Bachelor's degree can significantly increase people's employment opportunities that come with a

higher pay compared to obtaining only a High School diploma. As of 2017, jobs that pay beyond

minimum wage now look for *at least* a Bachelor's degree. In fact, 41% of employers in America

currently hire college-educated workers for positions that had been primarily held by those with

high school degrees (Brooks 2017).

In the South Bronx, only 16.2% of residents aged 25 and older have achieved more than a

high school diploma, compared to 80.3% of New York City residents at large. Moreover, 7.7%

of South Bronx residents obtained a Bachelor's degree in contrast to 35.7% in New York City.

Given the very low rate of achieving a Bachelor's degree in the South Bronx, the median

household income is $26,216, which is less than half the citywide median of $52,737 (Statistical Atlas 2015). The wide disparities in education and household income in the South Bronx compared to the larger city demonstrates that there are clearly socioeconomic and structural factors that contribute to residents' overall dissatisfaction with their education and financial security.

In order to understand residents' experiences with education and financial security, I explore how various social processes and institutions shape residents' access to necessary resources. I first examine residents' educational experiences and how living in the South Bronx affects their ability to thrive in a school environment. I then apply this framework to examine residents' experiences with building financial security.

Education

The act of selecting a high school to attend is almost close to "buying a product in the open market" (Sherraden 2005: 118). In the process of selecting a high school, parents tend to weigh the advantages of their child attending a private versus public school. From my conversations with residents, it was clear that attending a public high school in the South Bronx entailed regretful experiences. Residents' past experiences and observations about what they heard about public high schools factored into their school selections.

When I began my study, I hypothesized that residents would most likely attend public schools in the neighborhoods. In fact, multiple studies on education revealed the importance of proximity and cost in the school selection process. Sherraden (2005) noted that families tend to select high schools in their residential areas, which would be mostly public schools. That was not necessarily true in my study. While six residents attended traditional public schools in their

neighborhoods, seven residents attended a charter or private school that was outside of the Bronx borough. Among the seven, Jacob was the only resident who attended a private school.

> It was definite to not go to a school in the South Bronx… I was supposed to go to [a public school], but I was too smart to go there. So, I was applying to boarding schools and ended up going to one (Jacob).

Other residents shared similar beliefs about South Bronx public schools; they were aware that they would have to undergo social circumstances that would prevent them from feeling safe in the school environment. This would essentially be an obstacle in their academic success.

> [My parents] weren't going to put me in a school that wasn't good. That's why I transferred (Cameron).

> If I went to a public school in the South Bronx, my life would've been different (Hector).

Academic statistics based on the South Bronx revealed the lowest percentages of any school district in New York City. Even among elementary and middle school students, only 10% of students in the South Bronx were proficient in reading while 13% were in math (Ryley 2015). Wilson (2009) pointed out that many Americans tend to resort to individualistic explanations for inequality. The lack of effort, motivation, and skills were more commonly accepted to understand why urban poor residents had lower educational attainment than those who resided in wealthier neighborhoods. This explanation, however, undermines structural barriers that reflect on the adequacy of schooling and institutional resources in urban poor neighborhoods. In order to explain the barriers to academic success, it is important to consider social processes and economic forces that indirectly shape attitudes about public schools in urban poor neighborhoods.

Damien discussed how poor schooling in South Bronx public schools was not reflective of residents' motivation to study. When there are low levels of institutional support for educational needs, the social environment in urban poor neighborhoods becomes a huge influential factor in how residents perform in school. From early on, Damien's mom was aware that he would not have been able to perform well if he had attended a public school in his neighborhood. Although Damien still attended a public school, he disclosed that he attended one outside of the South Bronx because it was seen as a better option.

> You would be around the same people who are going through the same stuff… it breeds this cycle… this never ending cycle… if you don't leave the neighborhood, then you'll never get out (Damien).

Wilson (2006) discusses this similar cycle in his analysis of concentration effects and social isolation in his study based on Chicago. He demonstrates how important social networks are in allowing residents to socialize with mainstream values, which are lacking in urban poor neighborhoods. It is no surprise that parental concern over their children's ability to learn and thrive in school was very connected to their worries about the surrounding school environment.

Consequently, Damien went to a public high school in Upper West Side with the hope that there would be better educational resources and teachers who would provide the care needed to assist him in the college application process. Damien recalled times that reminded him of his parent's worries over his safety if he had attended a public school in the South Bronx.

> I've seen people be made fun of for going to school. Sometimes people would clown around when I walk out the building to go to school. So I would go around the corner… (Damien).

Damien's interactions with people in his neighborhood demonstrates how his community is socially isolated from values and norms that affect how residents perceive education. In a way,

social isolation constrains one's ability to navigate social networks that would be useful in

academic success. At some point, Damien even considered dropping out of school, but he later

had an understanding that going to school would lead him to opportunities in life. He said, "If I

didn't do school, I wouldn't be doing anything." Sherraden (2005) discussed how many

American families that possess financial resources and wealth are able to access opportunities

easier than those who did not; this draws attention to deep-seated anxieties over urban poor

social environments.

Hector exclaimed how thankful he was for not attending a public school in the South

Bronx. As discussed earlier in Chapter 2, Hector shared the effects of being stuck in a cycle. In

his words, "we see the same things – drugs, guns, and money and that seems like the only way to

make it." This form of social barrier contributes to parental concerns regarding their children's

school selection process; educational opportunities are not as accessible as it appears to be.

Socialization in urban poor neighborhoods affects how residents interact with one another and its

impacts on educational experiences. This finding criticizes literature that suggest that better

schools are needed; in reality, improvements to the social urban poor environment can help with

alleviating social barriers to academic success.

Additionally, the social environment of a public school in the South Bronx can create

tensions with crime and violence. Adrian explained how he often used street smarts[6] to protect

himself. Street smarts may require residents to be cautious of behaviors that may attract crime

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[6] Street smarts generally refers to certain behaviors to ensure safety in areas of high violence and crime. Elijah
Anderson's research (1990) explored street smarts in depth to understand the effects of living in an urban poor
neighborhood.

and violence. For instance, residents who use street smarts might not make eye contact with strangers; this method is a way of coping with anxieties over personal safety on a daily basis.

> I had to be careful of coming home every day. I remember I had to take off my uniform because I could've been approached by students at a rivalry schools. Students have gotten shot at. Weapons were there. Students were slashed because they started beef with a kid. So I had to be careful going home. I had to really be street smart… advanced street smart. I had to take off my uniform and change my pants because the pants were a great indication that I was from the school (Adrian).

Adrian's experiences with using street smarts in a school environment caused him overwhelming anxiety. Being in such an environment places young people at risk of being a victim of violence. Anderson (1999) calls street smarts as the "code of the street" to distinguish how being in an urban poor environment requires adhering to a set of informal rules that regulates interpersonal public behavior. Although street smarts provide a sense of security, most residents feel as if they are on their own when it comes to protecting themselves in public schools.

Considering that South Bronx residents live and attend school in an environment with minimal support and trust, I was curious to understand how violence applies to social situations in a public school setting in the South Bronx, I asked residents to describe an instance where they personally experienced or knew a friend who has dealt with violence in public school. Hector talked about the presence of school gangs and how they were a form of protection from violence.

> I had a friend who left [a charter school] and came right back because he didn't want to be in gangs. If I'm in public school, I would have to get into a gang. If I'm not in one, then I would have to get jumped or bullied. My friend had to fight every day because he didn't want to be in a gang. There's no knowledge in [the school].

Students often find that they have to be a part of a school gang in order to feel more welcomed, respected, and valued in a school environment. This shows that being in a gang does not

necessarily entail a desire to "act out" or cause trouble. Instead, students feel that being part of a school gang is sometimes crucial to avoid conflict.

Although being a part of a school gang provided a sense of inclusion and safety, there were still instutional barriers to academic success in an urban poor environment. The realty of a public school's social environment is so harsh that it can affect how residents overcome barriers to academic success. The next section explores structural forces that shape educational experiences. In addition to social constraints in the neighborhood school environment, structural influences such as funding and resources exacerbates the individual's ability to succeed in an academic environment.

Public Schools as Social Institutions

Initially, I thought that South Bronx residents would describe their experiences with teachers, academic achievement, and learning. Contrary to my expectations, residents' responses revealed that they were not able to experience a standard quality of education due to institutional neglect in providing necessary academic resources.

Ricky attended public school in the South Bronx and experienced the drawbacks of being in a school environment that cut hours to the day when funding was constantly lowered. On a local level, school funds predominately come from property taxes (Kozol 1992). Depending on the wealth of a neighborhood, poorly funded schools suffer the brunt of very little activities to support students' education.

> After school programs went till 5:00 p.m.… to 4:45 p.m.… to 4:30 p.m… then to 4 p.m. Next thing you know, there's no funding for that. So when we all came out of school we saw people selling drugs after school (Ricky).

After school programs typically allow students opportunities for academic and personal growth that are not typically in the school day. Students can apply what they learn in various activities, enhance their academic skills, or participate in engaging non-academic programs that may be of interest to them. Without these after school programs, students cannot acquire the proper support and guidance that are critical to their academic development especially in an urban poor neighborhood. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP 2010) regularly reports national incidence of violent crimes committed by youth. Their findings suggest that violence generally peaks in the hours immediately following the end of the school day, with close to 1 in 5 juvenile violent crimes taking place in the hours between 3 p.m. and 7 p.m.

Studies have shown that afterschool programs can be effectively implemented to assist students to work through situations and develop skills beneficial for their lives. As explained by Wilson's concentration effects theory, the social environment students are in shapes their interactions and motivations in education. The lack of funding for afterschool programs and activities in school is an example of a structural constraint that can shift the social atmosphere of a school environment to non-academic activities. For many residents, the public school environment was no longer a learning space for students when there were drastic cuts to school funding. It was instead a social environment for people to navigate their way in avoiding trouble from crime and violence.

Devine's research (1996) showed that students perceived their school space as an environment to learn how to survive in due to youth violence. Adrian witnessed the effects of underfunding in public schools as it influenced an atmosphere where students began to take

education less seriously and became more involved with school gangs and violence. Adrian explained how that influenced him academically.

> I came into high school with a sixth grade reading level. That's oppression. The value of education had to be instilled in me. At one point, I didn't care about school. I didn't care about graduation. I had 65's and 70's on everything. I was like 'whatever' (Adrian).

Adrian expressed that he took his education more seriously when teachers showed care and believed in his potential to do well. But, even with teachers' guidance, it was clear in my interviews that residents dealt with family stressors that affected their academic performances. Adrian recalled times when his friends were unable to navigate personal support for domestic violence and poverty and, as a result, they struggled in school.

A study by the Bronx Domestic Violence Roundtable (2016) revealed that many of the respondents in the Bronx who were affected by domestic violence were low-income individuals. In 2015, there were 75, 299 reports of domestic violence and 10 intimate-partner homicides in the Bronx alone. This makes the borough itself having the highest number of domestic violence reports. With the additional anxiety of living in poverty, domestic violence has shown to be correlated with lower academic achievement as there is more stress and trauma placed on students (McGaha-Garnett 2013). The lack of efficient emotional health resources such as counseling contributes to the educational disparities in urban poor neighborhoods. Simply put, having helpful and supportive teachers does not exclusively resolve the gap in educational attainment when low-income residents are constantly dealing with poverty, violence, and crime.

Moreover, not having a permanent public school building can affect the academic well-being of students. Due to funding cuts, Martin's physical school building served multiple schools. The impacts of the No Child Left Behind Act, passed in 2001, intended on holding

schools accountable for student achievement based on test scores. However, many low-income schools that underperformed academically were phased out and replaced with multiple schools in one physical building.

The phase out process entailed that students would either be transferred or be placed in a smaller low-performing school in a multi-school building. Under the Bloomberg Administration alone, the Department of Education phased out 154 public schools (New York City Independent Budget Office 2016). Martin shared how the phase out process limited the amount and quality of resources he was entitled to as a student:

> Sharing facilities of a physical school building with other schools made it very challenging for me to accumulate credits. I couldn't get gym credit so I had to write an essay for gym because I couldn't do actual gym. Yeah… I had to write an essay. I felt very impotent… I felt no value when I knew that my school was going to be phased and turned into a multi-school building… I felt like I couldn't do anything about that. I generally felt like we were at the mercy of politicians (Martin).

Not being able to access academic resources due to lack of funding can impact the way students perform in school. Here, it appears that Martin was not only unable to participate in gym activities, but he was in an overcrowded environment that made the school environment an undesirable place to be in. This can, consequently, contribute to students' motivations and outlooks on education.

As we see in the next section, residents who did not attend a public school were able to receive a better quality of education than those who experienced many social and structural constraints. It should be noted that the process of being chosen for a charter or private school involves a selective process for incoming students. Residents' experiences in these schools

reveal the benefits of having supportive teachers and a motivating environment to help them succeed.

Choosing an Alternative Route

Going to a charter school was considered an alternative path to "better" academic preparation in comparison to public school. Charter schools are non-traditional public schools that have more autonomy to determine budgets, class sizes, curriculum choices, and more. Although more studies are needed to understand the effectiveness of charter schools compared to traditional public schools, some studies demonstrate that charter schools have positive effects on student achievement (Sass 2006; Booker et al. 2009).

Sebastian went to a charter school that was relatively small compared to public schools. Overall, he had a decent educational experience that prepared him academically well. Sebastian described how homeroom names created a sense of school community and contributed to a motivating social atmosphere for students to succeed. Homerooms are traditionally class rooms where the teacher records attendance, make announcements, and facilitate activities usually before students attend their classes. Traditionally, students – in both public and charter – are assigned in "homerooms" that are named by their respective room numbers. Sebastian shared how he admired the non-traditional names of his school's homerooms such as 'Dignity' and 'Hope'. Although small, the homeroom names were valuable for Sebastian as they reflected on the students' potential to succeed in a school environment.

One of the effects of living in an urban poor neighborhood is the limited access to educational resources that may assist in students' academic well-being. Most residents in this study generally agree that South Bronx public schools are structurally and socially limited. In a

society where education is needed for people to obtain jobs and navigate spaces to mobilize in, it is clear that underfunded school programs and services affect the progress in residents' educational goals. Residents' educational experiences largely demonstrate that there are very little positive social capital resources (Portes 1998) to help them with academic success. Their neighborhood attachment also does not appear to help them in navigating role models and networking opportunities to help them feel safe as a student. Residents try to mobilize in spaces, where social situations deny them access to feel safe and motivated as a student.

The next section explores how a similar stress and anxiety experienced in social institutions like public schools can also affect financial security for South Bronx residents.

Financial Security

Regardless of how attached South Bronx residents are to their homes, they experience neighborhood conditions that harm their financial outcomes. Majority of residents in this study expressed instability and uncertainty that financial vulnerability generates. Financial vulnerability can infect various aspects of quality of life for residents living in an urban poor neighborhood. Financial vulnerability is commonly measured by the ability to overcome from sudden financial losses or instability such as loss of income or increase in living costs (McLeod and Kessler 1990). Changes in financial behavior both in the market and in individual life situations places low-income people situated in urban poor neighborhoods at a higher risk for future instability. This would put them in a position where they would need more time to recuperate financially; Ratcliffe (2015) in fact shows how South Bronx residents often report feelings of "being behind" due to inadequate savings and increasing debt.

Based on experiences with financial vulnerability and paying for living sustainability expenses, this section explores how perceptions of financial security reveal social and structural inequalities that affect residents' economic well-being.

The American Dream Nightmare

For many South Bronx residents, the American Dream was the reason behind the large influx of Hispanic immigrants starting in the late 1970s. In order to effectively understand the experiences of residents who come from immigrant families, it's essential to consider the American Dream as a context much needed to grasp their financial circumstances. Studies, particularly focused on Hispanics and the American Dream, reveal common motivations to immigrate to the United States. Garni (2010) mentioned that Hispanic immigrants were attracted to the promise of more resources, opportunities for upward mobility, and a stable government that emphasizes on human rights. The U.S.A was perceived as the land of opportunities and, most importantly, success. Sebastian and Cameron explained that their families came to America in hopes of achieving a "better life".

When I asked Sebastian what a better life entailed, he responded saying, "the American Dream is like… working, having a home, going to school, the basic nine to five job, and getting a degree." Sebastian's parents have been working since they were 17 years old. His dad was a jeweler in Dominican Republic and – in hopes of finding a better employment and access to more opportunities for him and his family in America – Sebastian's family immigrated to the South Bronx. However, the struggle to keep up with bills and finding a steady employment, especially after the Recession in 2008, affected his family's financial vulnerability. His dad, as a

result, decided to become a cab driver while Sebastian worked soon after high school to support himself.

The American Dream also symbolizes the ability for any individual, no matter how poor one starts, to build a better life for oneself and their family. However, as we find later on, the idea of pulling yourself from the bootstraps in America is a myth for many South Bronx residents. Shobe, Coffman, and Dmochowski (2009) explained how the American Dream cannot be easily achieved because the dream is "directly associated with their ability to build social networks, assimilate into the workforce, and meet their basic economic needs" (93). This speaks to the structural limitations of financial mobility that prevent many immigrant families from mobilizing.

The American Dream for many immigrant families was more of a nightmare. Cameron's family have been in America since the 1970s. Despite their long residency in New York City, Cameron and her family continue to face difficulties with mobilizing financially. With a family income of only $14,000 a year and a household of three, Cameron resides in an apartment with her dad and sister under the Housing Choice Voucher program, which is commonly referred to as Section 8. This program assists low-income families to rent housing in the private market by paying no more than 40% of their adjusted monthly income toward their rent (NYC.gov).

Cameron discusses the problems with Section 8, including the extensive wait period for eager low-income residents hoping to find an affordable home.

> People have to wait a long time to hear back from them. I see people who have been living here their whole lives that are forced to move out because rent is going up. My rent is $900, which is still a lot for someone who only makes $14,000 a year (Cameron).

Though the ability to connect with other immigrant Hispanics in the South Bronx was a contributing factor, the apartment's affordability became the primary reason for Cameron and her family to continue living in the area. Currently, NYCHA is facing more than $75 million in budget cuts in 2017 under Trump's administration, and they are no longer accepting new Section 8 applications (Durkin 2017). This prevents many low-income residents, especially immigrants, from being able to afford rent in the city, especially when they are struggling with earning sufficient money for their families.

Employment

Residents perceive their financial vulnerability in terms of their difficulties with employment; precarious work affects their ability to sustain a livable lifestyle. With poor pay, unstable employment, and insufficient job benefits, low-income individuals face greater financial vulnerability (Hacker, Rehm, and Schlesinger 2013). Damien grew up with a single mother in a household with other siblings, which added pressure for his mother to find a well-paid and steady job.

> My mom first lost her job when I first went to college. It wasn't the first time either. When I was in college she told me, 'I can't send you anymore money.' We were on government assistance, food stamps, and she was getting unemployment checks but then that stopped. It was pretty hard (Damien).

While Damien pointed out government services that provided his family with financial support such as unemployment checks, he frequently mentioned how they were not enough for his family to sustain a satisfying quality of life. Contrary to popular belief, allocation of government resources only puts a band aid over deeper financial problems related to precarious work. Employment stability and benefits are just as important than government resources. Damien

envisioned his family to be able to sustain on their own without continuous dependency on such

government services so they can avoid future financial shocks in the family.

While Damien felt dismay due to the financial hardships his family had to endure, he

appreciated that the South Bronx did not add the extra burden of paying for costs related to rent

and groceries.[7] This, however, does not change the consequences of insufficient financial

resources to help low-income individuals with finding a well-paid and steady employment.

Luis recalled the trouble he faced with finding a job that paid well since graduating from

high school. Initially, Luis hoped to pursue his interests in photography. During his time

freelancing, Luis came to realize how difficult it was to get by.

> You gotta depend on companies to pay you. You were kinda at their mercy. It wasn't like money coming in consistently. Then I was like, 'let me try the job market again' but then I wasn't paid well. So I decided to be a bus driver (Luis).

Currently, Luis' occupation primarily serves as a means to provide for him and his family. For

him, the South Bronx did not exhibit a job-friendly environment as other people suffered from

precarious work. Without social networks, educational training, and opportunities to develop job

skills, residents like Luis face greater difficulties in the labor market.

Like Luis, Ricky started working at a very young age. He was the only resident in this

study who reported to have done off the books jobs to support himself. An off the books job is

part of an underground economy, where there is still structure in place such as designated areas

that are allowed for people to work on as well as fixed prices. It is an informal way of controlling

the underground labor market. Although doing an off the books job is typically considered

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[7] The reader should note that Damien's experience may not be similar to long-time residents in gentrified areas of the South Bronx. With rising prices in rent and introduction to new and expensive stores, residents find more difficulty catching up with bills.

"criminal" because of its lack of legality, Venkatesh (2006) emphasized that an off the books job

is still considered economic labor or a form of employment for urban poor residents.

> I do off the books music stuff. That's what pays the rent and stuff like that. I also own a hot dog stand too but I only bring it out during the springtime… it's a seasonal job (Ricky).

Though owning a hot dog stand allowed Ricky to perceive a sense of job security, street

vendorship came with multiple challenges. He was only able to bring his stand outside during

warm days. With only a high school diploma, it was not uncommon for residents like Ricky to

struggle with obtaining a well-paid job that allowed them to afford the costs of living.

Ricky had to adjust to not having the proper financial support since he was young. He

shared how not having a father in the household as much added more financial burdens on the

family. At some point, Ricky dropped out of community college to earn money. He would record

songs played over the radio and sell them through cassettes in his neighborhood.

> My son is 12 years old… When I was his age, I was selling cassettes. I used to go over to this bridge [in the neighborhood] and, for the time being, I would sell VHS [cassette tapes] for $5. I used to come in another corner and sell it for $10. I needed to get money. My father was incarcerated so you gotta get [the money] somehow. You can't… you can't be dependent on anybody… who's gonna feed you? (Ricky)

Temporary precarious work became Ricky's main source of earning money. He described the

problems that come with doing off-the-books work, however, when he was caught by police.

> I got locked up 'cause you can't sell these stuff without a license. I was caught transporting cigarettes at one point. But that was my hustle. When your back is against the wall, what are you gonna do? (Ricky)

Ricky continued to work in the studio as his off-the-books work for the time being and, although

he enjoyed working on music, he shared how it continued to be an alternative way to support his

rent, child's expenses, and living conditions. These findings highlight that having a steady job

was a struggle for many residents; this draws attention to how they dealt with living costs as a consequence of financial vulnerability.

Living Costs

Sherraden (2005) stated that low-income individuals tend to consume most of their income for their family's necessities. With very little savings from their earned money, South Bronx residents face difficulties with breaking the poverty trap cycle. Most of the residents who participated in the study, with the exception of one, reported having to live "paycheck to paycheck". Though all of them agreed that the South Bronx was a fairly affordable place to live in, they recalled multiple times having trouble paying for necessary living costs.

> Everything my mom earned went straight to bills and food… she didn't have enough money to feed us so she would send us to the Chinese spot… We're five people having one order of chicken wings (Damien).

> A lot of [financial] instability put me at an anxious position… My dad is behind in paying bills. He's behind all the time… he's constantly struggling and it doesn't stop. There's not a time where we can be like 'phew'... Like he can't pay cable this week (Adrian).

> We don't think about saving money because of our [living] conditions. And you know… I want to save money. I want to see my family in a good space (Martin).

Given the financial insecurities tied to paying for living costs such as food and bills, South Bronx residents in this study undergo more sudden financial shocks in their lives. Residents experience a lack of control over their economic situations that delay the time to be able to move past living paycheck to paycheck. This further supports Hacker, Rehm, and Schlesinger's (2013) claim that unstable financial circumstances that involve paying for household bills can become threatening to people's future's capability to buffer financial shocks.

Financial vulnerability creates a great sense of anxiety, which affects educational experiences. Cameron decided to attend a college away from the South Bronx, but her financial worries as a low-income individual were still present. Cameron often thinks about assisting with her sister's college tuition as well as her family's rent. She shared how sometimes she felt compelled to compromise her educational needs to support her personal needs.

> I used my scholarship money for food and to buy more toothpaste because I didn't want to create a hassle for my family so I buy these necessities for myself. But then I don't have money to buy textbooks. I would have to buy it two weeks into my classes and I end up behind in my classes… A lot of these resources are too expensive…. I have to always ask myself, 'Do I actually need to buy these stuff or am I even going to read them?' It can create an annoying situation (Cameron).

When I asked Cameron if there was anything she could personally do to help her financial situation, she responded saying that she could be working more despite being at school. Ratcliffe (2015) described how perceptions of financial insecurity were connected to general dissatisfaction with economic circumstances. Witnessing family's struggles with debt and lack of savings have shown to contribute to a greater sense of uncertainty and anxiety. Considering the lack of financial assets and wealth in the family, residents like Cameron believe that it is up to them to help their economic situations. This perception of having to constantly work more resonated with Sebastian's economic experiences in high school.

Sebastian decided to not go to college because, at some point, he had to choose between attending to work meetings and classes. There would even be times when he would have to cut school to attend to his work. Even till this day, Sebastian finds difficulty in moving past simply paying for living costs to allocate money towards his savings.

> Every time I get paid it goes to my bills. So I never get to invest in something I want. Sometimes unfortunate stuff comes up and I have to suck it up and pay the bills… we just

> kept adjusting and getting by… you know? That's the thing out here. There's a cycle of just getting by and we just trying to survive instead of trying to live (Sebastian).

With an open mind, Sebastian continues to find a stable job. Feelings of economic isolation prevents residents from accessing the labor market and this adds more pressure on them. As a low-income resident with no college degree, the barriers of accessing a well-paid job in the job market are prominent in urban poor neighborhoods.

Financial vulnerability also affects quality of food and its impacts on academic performance. Nine out of thirteen residents reported struggling with food expenses in the past five years and some of them have even disclosed that there were multiple times when they have felt hungry because of lack of affordable food and money. Adrian admitted that finding healthy food in the South Bronx was very difficult for his family, especially since they were not cost-effective. Financial burdens on the family greatly affected Adrian's health during physical school activities.

> I was doing sports all the time so I couldn't eat a lot and I lost weight because of that. It's difficult to pay for food a lot of times because of my dad's situation… (Adrian).

Adrian explained that there would be days when he did not have a sufficient amount of food to maintain his health. He noticed that he was more fatigued in school and his grades started to drop during this time of financial unrest in his family. In one study by Jyoti, Frongolli, and Jones (2005), students who develop hunger tend to show more anxiety from situations related to poverty. Adrien's experience with lack of nutrient-rich food in the household reflects on the various emotional and cognitive costs of food insecurity that limit him, as a student, to reach his full potential.

Furthermore, structural barriers to education and poor neighborhood services, as mentioned in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, affects employment. Wilson (2009) discussed how access to job opportunities are not solely based off the strength of the labor market, but also the strength of networks and connections. Being in an environment where there are minimal social networks is a disadvantage for South Bronx residents who wish to obtain well-paid jobs. Compared to wealthier families who already have financial resources that can help with their children's social mobility opportunities, low-income families require more accessible social relationships for employment aid as they do not have sufficient wealth for savings.

From my conversation with multiple residents in this study, the effects of poverty were clear when they described their living conditions. In particular, Damien mentioned how his family became aware of the consequences to living in an affordable home in the South Bronx. Damien described his housing conditions and how, at times, his family would struggle with maintaining their health. Although residents' living conditions might not be directly related to their economic experiences, living in apartments that are offered in lower income neighborhoods represents a sign of financial difficulty to afford rent. With that comes with certain compromises to living necessities such as heat and water.

> This building… it looks nice from the outside. But there are many problems… they don't give us heat every night. We had no hot water on Thanksgiving. But they wanna put plants in the building to make the building look nice. But fuck the plants… give us things that we need. We needed space heaters but they drive up the electric bill… We used to take three to four pots of water and boil them, but that creates mold because of the steam. So we got a moldy apartment. We can't take a proper shower so we have to mix boil water with cold water. And then you got all these roaches and bugs all over your dishes (Damien).

The deteriorating conditions in Damien's apartment building are reflective of the landlord and supervisor's negligence to provide a comfortable living environment. Despite that, Damien was reluctant to rate his living conditions as 'poor'. In fact, many residents in this study perceived their living conditions to be 'fair' to 'good' in relation to how it was before. However, it is clear that the extent to which affordable housing actually improves quality of life is questionable. With no landlord or super to check in, residents are only left with calling 311 to report issues. There are approximately 10 complaints for every 1,000 residents residing in the Bronx. In fact, most 311 complaints related to heat come from South Bronx tenants in comparison to 5 complaints for every 1,000 residents in other New York City's boroughs (Givens and Glorioso 2014). That is only the microcosm of the neglect that is seen in the South Bronx.

The anxiety of not having sustainable living conditions adds to the instability already faced by increasing financial vulnerability. Residents have to make a choice whether or not to tolerate the neglect in their apartment or move out to find a better sustainable home at the cost of a higher rent or risk of eviction. Ratcliffe (2015) reports how poor New Yorkers are more than likely to not be able to afford emergencies that may be related to economic changes in the family. This demonstrates that, in understanding financial security in urban poor neighborhoods, detangling the living costs specific to these communities.[8] The burden of living costs reiterates the ways poverty creates a sense of anxiety in overcoming economic hardships.

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[8] The reader should note that the section "Living Costs" includes costs that were commonly discussed in this study's interviews. In reality, there are more costs that affect financial vulnerability and may vary depending on multiple factors such as family size and age.

Summary

In this chapter, my findings highlighted the barriers to obtaining a standard quality of education and overcoming financial vulnerability. Residents struggled adjusting in a space where there were very little resources to help them mobilize. Though many South Bronx residents in this study felt very attached to their neighborhoods, they soon realized that living in their neighborhood was a hindrance to pursuing their future goals in improving their quality of education and obtaining financial security.

In the final chapter, I move on to explore residents' future aspirations and expectations. I analyze the extent to which their attachment to the neighborhood affects their educational and financial aspirations. As we shall see, perceptions of mobility impacted many residents' desires to stay in the South Bronx. Structural barriers and limitations on social capital make it very difficult for many residents to ignore the consequences of living in an urban poor neighborhood despite their desires to continue living there due to their sense of attachment.

CHAPTER 4:

Aspirations and Expectations

I'm attached to this neighborhood but… that doesn't mean I should stay here (Damien).

Sociologist Jay MacLeod (2009) studied aspirations in the context of individual perceptions of one's chances for achieving future goals and desires. His research on aspirations demonstrated that growing up in a lower class environment could affect attitudes of the future and subjective measures of well-being. In this final chapter, I explore residents' future aspirations and expectations in the context of education and careers; I assert that studying aspirations is a way to better understand their socioeconomic conditions and reality of living in an urban poor neighborhood. Although this chapter does not necessarily discuss specific educational and career routes residents aspire to enter, residents share how their neighborhoods engender inequalities that prevent them from achieving their goals.

Considering that majority of the residents in this study have a strong sense of neighborhood attachment, I see if living in the South Bronx benefits or constrains their aspirations and expectations. In my interviews, I show that aspirations and expectations for the future are very intertwined and are difficult to detangle from each other since they believe that they can attain their goals, but achieving them may require compromises given the reality they are living in now. Taken together, I show how residents' educational and financial aspirations are ambitious, but their perceptions of achieving them are reflective of socioeconomic inequalities perpetuated by neighborhood institutions. I emphasize that, though most residents generally

express a fairly strong attachment to the neighborhood, structural barriers to social and economic

resources impacts their ability to achieve their future goals while living in the South Bronx.

Educational Aspirations

Dreams

Attending college is generally considered a step to achieving upward mobility as it

increases networking opportunities for jobs and financial resources. Many South Bronx residents

in this study aspire to have college credentials to be able to build their social and financial

capital. As one of the few residential members in her neighborhood who was enrolled in college,

Cameron recalled how being a first generation student influenced her desire to attend and finish

college. Cameron's family economic circumstances and anxieties over future financial stability

motivated her to escape poverty.

> You grew up your whole life thinking that your parents have it all under control but then you realize 'oh no' -- it's actually up to you to 'save your family'. You're taught that you're the exceptional case in the family (Cameron).

Cameron described how feeling financially limited in the past motivated her to gain some control

over her life and attend college. She shared that she wishes to obtain a Master's degree and

obtain a well-paid job in education in the future. This highlights how images of the future are

tied to an individual's present circumstances; not being able to have control over situations

creates fears about not moving past poverty.

Hector also shared that he would be one of the few people in his family to attend and

finish college. In the past, Hector dropped out of his first year in college due to financial

struggles related to tuition costs. Although his main goal at the moment was to gain financial

stability, Hector explained how he aspired to be one of the few people in his family to show that

he can successfully complete college. Obtaining the credentials of a college graduate meant more than accessing more job opportunities. It was a symbol of achievement and triumph in an environment where there were insufficient opportunities for residents to mobilize.

It was due to the social and economic circumstances that Ricky was in that made him aware of the effects of poverty on his family. He discussed about a conversation with his son that sparked his desire to attend college and take control of his situations.

> I decided to go back to school because of this one conversation with my son and he's like, 'Dad, why don't you go back to school? I'm in school. Go back.' We shook our hands and was like 'Bet.' So I'm back to get my Bachelor's degree (Ricky).

Ricky explained how this conversation with his son reminded him of the importance of being a better role model for his son. Going back to school to obtain a Bachelor's degree was perceived as a step to taking control of one's life to gain opportunities for upward mobility and escape the poverty trap. Education was, in a way, the foundation for achieving better life outcomes and overcoming financial barriers. Ricky reflected on his current academic grades and his hope for a better future for him and his son.

> I haven't been in school for so long because of financial problems. I wanted to get money. Then I went back to college this semester and now I PASSED! I got C+ and all and I was like 'wowww'... A C+ is a lot to me because when I graduated [from high school] everyone in my class was like getting 65s… so now when I see the C+, I'm like 'yes I'm in it again, you know?'... these C+... Imma turn it to B's man… you gotta look at the environment and be like I don't want to be in the same environment for so long… I don't wanna do this… I don't want my son to live the same lifestyle I lived (Ricky).

For Ricky, passing his classes encouraged him to aim for better grades and a better life style than the one he had in the past. MacLeod (2009) noted how education is generally seen as a remedy for social inequalities and a chance to access prestigious jobs and wealth. In a neighborhood where there are weak community institutions to provide essential resources such as social

support and role models, educational aspirations are more meaningful and thus seen as an accomplishment in surpassing one's difficulties in overcoming poverty.

Constraints

Though residents' responses revealed aspirations to attend and graduate from a higher educational institution, some have a rather pessimistic view of the process to achieving their goals. MacLeod (2009) discussed how low-income individuals may have pessimistic views of achieving their goals due to their lack of economic opportunities in their neighborhood. In his research, a group of low-income men perceived their aspirations to be unattainable unless they had better human capital. South Bronx residents discussed how they have to be realistic about the social and economic barriers they must overcome first. Their responses reflected on their main concerns regarding gaining stability and security in their lives more than their desires to pursue their educational aspirations.

Genesis disclosed to me that she was taking a semester leave from college to take some time to work. While she plans on finishing college, Genesis expressed her fears on pursuing her Masters.

> I always knew that I *have* to get a degree… My parents deserve it. Neither of them have a degree. My dad… always told me 'If I had a degree I could've done so much more'... But I don't want to go more into student debt (Genesis).

The fears of going into more student debt overwhelms many low-income residents to consider attending college or, in Genesis' case, a graduate program. This demonstrates that the structural reality of socioeconomic inequalities still looms over residents in urban poor neighborhoods. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) posits that the structural characteristics of an environment or "habitus" perpetuates social inequalities that affect educational goals and achievement. He

explains how school achievement is linked to upper-class human and cultural capital which

makes education a reflection of class hierarchies. Obtaining a higher degree requires an

investment that many residents in this study find worrisome and, to an extent, a threat to

financial security. While Genesis' family and personal encounters with people motivated her to

finish college and achieve her educational aspirations, financial well-being greatly impacted how

she perceived her future and ability to achieve a higher education.

Cameron, in particular, expressed her worries about not being able to achieve her

educational aspirations when she reflected on her family's poverty. She shared how living in the

South Bronx would restrict her ability to succeed in an academic space. When I asked her why

she wished to leave the South Bronx, she described her feelings of uncertainty and fears of not

gaining control over her life.

> I'm so used to living a life where I don't have control. Things like poverty makes me
> worried. What if I end up going back to the Bronx? Do I just pretend that college never
> happened? I can have the ability to deal better with my situations if I leave my
> neighborhood. If something's stressful, I can just take a walk somewhere outside of [the
> neighborhood] and not worry about what's going on. No one can bother me. I just feel
> like I have to leave the South Bronx to get what I want (Cameron).

Cameron explained that she wants to leave her neighborhood soon to pursue her aspirations

because the environment has previously made her feel very anxious to think about poverty and

violence. Being able to leave the neighborhood, for Cameron, was a symbol of taking more

control of her life to achieve her dreams. She, however, expressed how she felt conflicted by her

sense of attachment to the neighborhood as she wanted to stay in a community that she took

pride in for the way residents tried to overcome socioeconomic inequalities. But the lack of

social organization and institutions that would otherwise provide access to social capital

resources and financial support made Cameron nervous about her future. She also described her

discomfort with staying in her neighborhood when she described her social alienation as a

student in college:

> I find a sense of community with people in my apartment building, and those of my age who are in college like me. Other than that, I don't because I feel like we're in different worlds. I feel like I'm in my own world [in the South Bronx] and I would feel more comfortable if I found more college educated South Bronx folks here (Cameron).

This relates to what Sampson (2012) noted about social capital in low-income

communities; he showed how informal ties such as social networks in education are crucial in

navigating opportunities to succeed in an academic space. The social divide that Cameron

experienced in her neighborhood demonstrates that she values having the social support and

positive reinforcement from surrounding peers who have similar educational backgrounds.

Hector described how being around people who either did not wish to pursue a higher

degree or were generally not positive influences made him skeptical of his ability to succeed

academically in the South Bronx.

> I can't live in the South Bronx and achieve that because I would be influenced by what I see out here. I've been influenced in the past… wasting money and going to parties every day… skipping school and hanging with friends instead. I was seeing that around me and I thought it was alright to do it. I thought it was the right thing to do. If I moved out, it would be better for me. There's no benefits to me staying here (Hector).

Hector admitted that the people he previously interacted with affected his academic performance

and socialized him to think that it was okay to not take education seriously like other people in

his neighborhood. Hector felt more motivated to take control of his situations and pursue his

aspirations by moving out of the South Bronx in the future. Thus, the importance of social capital

is clear when South Bronx residents are in an environment with those who also aspire to achieve a higher degree and can be part of their social network.

For Adrian, his relationships with teachers motivated him to consider a Bachelor's and Master's degree. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, Adrian came into high school with a sixth grade reading level. It was until his teachers showed genuine care and support for him and his education that he felt more interested in taking more control over his life. Jargowsky and Komi's study (2011) on social capital revealed that having positive adult role models were strongly associated with more opportunities and motivation to succeed in an academic space.

> Teachers were able to help me overcome academic *and* nonacademic struggles. They taught me who to interact with and taught me how to code switch… I know a lot of people who don't have that kinda skill. Some people just don't change (Adrian).

Teachers are crucial assets to students' academic development especially in an environment where neighborhood services and institutions fail to engage them with activities and support. In a way, teachers filled the role of a secondary parent for residents like Adrian as they guided him in navigating society. Teachers' efforts in providing strong academic support for children can help aspire them to continue learning and develop their intellectual skills. Though Adrian was able to build a strong relationship with his teachers and gain the support he needed to continue on with his education, this may not be the case for everyone residing in urban poor neighborhoods. For those who did not have strong and positive social capital, they felt it necessary to leave their environments in the future.

Taking a different track, the next section explores how South Bronx residents perceive their financial aspirations and expectations. The combination of fear of future financial insecurity

and structural barriers to economic capital pushed residents to search for a sense of control. For some, the desire to acquire financial stability intervenes in their career aspirations.

Career Aspirations

A Meaningful Career

Most residents in this study talked about their desires to have a meaningful career in the future that they would enjoy. It was clear from my conversations with them that the ideal job for them would entail more than just earning money. Martin currently works as a tenant organizer for a non-profit organization in the Bronx. The organization aims to increase awareness on apartment contracts, quotas, and other things that are typically disconnected from tenants' lives. Part of Martin's work requires him to communicate with tenants about their rights so that they can hold landlords accountable. In our conversation, he expressed his desire to continue working with tenants and hopefully start organizing specifically in the South Bronx. He stated that his struggles in the South Bronx affected his aspirations to work in advocacy and community mobilization.

> I'm not doing this work to fulfill any contracts. I'm doing it to build power and get changes done… I never thought about money when I'm doing work. I know I want to see my family in a good space, but personally I see myself doing organizing in the future. When I was younger, I was thinking of success as in financial success… I wanted to be a lawyer and I was really moving towards that direction until I developed a passion for organizing (Martin).

For Martin, success was not determined by his financial outcome, but his overall contribution to society. However, he described his struggle to balance his desire to continue organizing along with his desire to financially provide for his family more. He explained how his neighborhood attachment affected his desires to pursue his career in community organizing. The idea of giving

back to the community was interesting as they looked beyond their financial desires. The neighborhood circumstances for some residents motivated them to be involved in voicing concerns in their neighborhoods through community mobilization and other similar jobs.

Ricky is eager to pursue his dream in becoming a drug counselor to help his neighborhood. In our conversation, it was clear that money was not the driving factor for Ricky's aspiration to pursue drug counseling. Instead, a career in drug counseling can be traced back to his desires to improve his community.

> I want to be a drug counselor to show 'em that drugs is a disease. They're my peoples out here man. It's a disease. I know that 'cause I got family and all that. You know what I mean? People go through things and they just wanna numb their life. Just because they did that you don't think they don't deserve help? Man it's not their choice (Ricky).

Though gaining financial security is important to Ricky, his attachment to the neighborhood motivated him to focus on a career that was more meaningful and provided a direct service to the community in need. In the following section, however, I analyze how some residents feel compelled to put their career aspirations on hold to establish financial security.

Security Before Career

Ten out of thirteen South Bronx residents shared that they were not capable of attaining their career aspirations until they were financially secured. This entailed that residents would spend many years trying to build wealth and obtain a higher income. Amartya Sen (1999) posited that increasing individual resources, connections, and general knowledge can help people obtain better opportunities in the labor market and therefore increase their sense of well-being. This required people to increase the capacity of what they can attain, which affects how long it would take them to establish a career they find most suitable to their interests.

Luis is a bus driver who aspires to continue his work in photography. However, his work schedule makes it difficult at times to allocate time to practice photography. Luis explained how he had to be realistic about his financial circumstances and withdraw from pursuing photography as a career. Putnam (1995) stated that without proper financial education, resources, and networks, it would be very hard to pursue long-term goals. For Luis, he felt that he had to prioritize finding a job that would provide a steady income to help sustain his family's financial well-being. Luis hopes to someday develop his photography projects in the future but, at the meantime, he continues to work on photography as a hobby.

Jacob and Damien emphasized to me how important financial security was for them. They wanted to be able to change their present economic situations and alleviate the financial uncertainty they have experienced in the past. Sherraden (2005) discussed how many middle and upper class families tend to possess financial resources that can help their social mobility and opportunities. This demonstrates that wealthier families with more financial assets are able to secure opportunities and gain advantages in obtaining a better job that would most likely match their career interests. Understandably, Jacob and Damien were more realistic about their financial security and believed that they needed to delay their process in pursuing a career that may, in turn, be harder to achieve with low amounts of wealth and social capital.

> Money is huge for me right now… But I want to be a lawyer in the future. I want to go back home with my money and make it okay for everyone else. I want to bring affordable consultation…. I wanna be able to do things for my people *once* I do stuff for myself (Jacob).

> I would love to start my own organization out here that gives these kids more options and a way out of their situation. But, I need the money to first be financially secure and then I can make the organization (Damien).

Lower financial vulnerability therefore heightens residents' desires to increase savings while working for a job that pays a steady income (Hacker, Rehm, and Schlesinger 2013; Ratcliffe 2015). Regardless of what residents wish to do with their careers, residents' past financial shocks and anxieties over not escaping poverty impacts their ability to mobilize. These financial insecurities intrude residents' lives and invokes a fear of not being able to fulfill demands of the labor market.

A Future in the South Bronx

Exclusionary processes and ineffective institutions and organizations in urban poor neighborhoods affect financial capabilities of low-income individuals. Kasinitz (1994) discusses how economic mobility is a motivation for residents to leave their urban poor neighborhoods. There is a common conception, as Kasinitz explained in his work, that leaving an urban poor neighborhood was sometimes necessary to access resources and better social capital opportunities in order to gain wealth and be financially successful.

Moving out of the South Bronx was perceived as a sign of moving up in class status, forming useful social ties, and connecting with resources to help pursue aspirations. Juliet personally hopes to move out of the South Bronx in order to be surrounded by beneficial networking opportunities for her career goals as an actress. She described how staying in the South Bronx would not provide benefits in pursuing her career aspirations. Beyond that, she explained how there are very little social assets to connect her to a well-paid job and networks.

> I would not stay here. If I moved, I would have a job that would give me money. Safer places and nicer buildings… there's no acting programs here to help me at all. The close to acting is the movie theater. There's just no resources (Juliet).

In a way, residents like Juliet are trying to respond to their own discomfort with present

circumstances and inability to change their surrounding resources by moving out in the future.

Having more control over social networking and work opportunities for future career aspirations

draws attention to how perceptions of mobility are based on the extent to which they are able to

access beneficial opportunities.

On the contrary, Damien wishes to come back to the South Bronx in the future once he is

financially secure. His neighborhood attachment was more apparent when he talked about how

he was motivated by residents' struggles with poverty in the neighborhood.

> I can only think about myself for so long and I know where I come from… I'm more
> comfortable out here. I rather talk to all these hoodlums than rich people. I can handle
> that balance of being from the hood and working in the rich world. I wouldn't mind being
> rich and raising my kid in the hood (Damien).

Damien's experiences with poverty and seeing others who were also going through similar

economic hardships drew him into considering a future in the South Bronx. This form of

attachment to the neighborhood is characteristic of finding solidarity among others who have

also been in a marginalized situation in the past (Stewart et al. 2009).

Structural Barriers

It is evident that limitations on economic resources and social capital shape future

educational and financial outcomes. Many residents express a tension as their attachment to their

neighborhoods complicates their goals of leaving the South Bronx in the future. Sebastian is

currently not in school and, instead, is working for a non-profit organization for three years now.

The organization strives to comfort the homeless through several initiatives such as a clothing

drive. He disclosed that his sense of neighborhood attachment influenced his desire to expand his

work in the non-profit organization. He stated, "living in the South Bronx definitely influenced my work – that's where I got the idea of sharing from." He described his experiences with having little money and how it made him more appreciative of the act of sharing with others.

However, Sebastian's attachment to the neighborhood was conflicted by his experiences navigating opportunities in a space that has various structural barriers and limitations on upward mobility. He described the stores that were frequently found in the South Bronx and how there were very little resources to help residents achieve their goals and aspirations.

> We have so many liquor stores and fast food restaurants that make up the South Bronx…
> I just wanna move out and find better and bigger things (Sebastian).

Residents' motivation to act on their attachment to the neighborhood is limited by things that are beyond their reach. Without beneficial resources and services to help with residents' financial vulnerability, residents find it more difficult to stay in a neighborhood that does not support their goals and quality of life. MacLeod's (2009) findings suggested that low-income individuals routinely questioned whether living in their respective environments, which reinforced patterns of institutional neglect, violence, and resources, could help them in the financial world. Here, it is not only a question of residents' ability to achieve their goals, but also if their surrounding environment is capable of supporting them. If substantial efforts are not put into alleviating socioeconomic inequalities in urban poor neighborhoods, then residents will not able to access networking opportunities for their careers as well as resources to maintain financial security. In fact, most residents claimed that they would continue to stay in their neighborhoods in the future if there were better resources to improve their quality of life and improve their access to financial services.

Compromising a small minority of residents in this study, only three residents expressed a desire to continue living in the South Bronx as they try to pursue their aspirations. These three residents shared a fairly strong sense of attachment to their neighborhoods. In particular, Remy aspires to be involved in recreating community spaces to mobilize other residents to participate in neighborhood activities. His experiences related to struggling with institutional barriers influenced his future goal in becoming an advocate and community organizer.

> I want to build institutions… I want to create artistic projects, community programs, and urban schools. I want my community to be able to take care of itself and have more autonomy. The only way to do this is to live in the South Bronx. I think I can save my neighborhood if I'm in the inside. I have to be on the ground (Remy).

Remy's career aspirations in advocacy and community organization speaks to his identity as a South Bronx native. Building stronger collective efficacy can help with recreating spaces that assist residents with accessing social and political institutions necessary for their well-being (Saegert, Thompson, and Warren 2001). Recognizing the integral role social interactions play in community organizing, Remy continues to have hope that his involvement in more urban poor neighborhoods within the South Bronx can contribute to a greater sense of community for other residents. Currently, Remy is working on creating artistic spaces dedicated to sustaining Bronx communities by organizing educators, activists, and artists to participate in poetry slams, workshops, and networking opportunities.

These findings reveal perceptions of residents' aspirations and how living in their neighborhoods impact their expectations for the future. While residents are realistic about their present circumstances as they hope to take more control of their own situations in the future, their aspirations are ambitious and reflective of their personal desires regardless if they are able

to obtain them or not. Some residents find that they must be able to obtain financial security before pursuing their educational and career aspirations. Overall, residents generally characterize their aspirations and expectations by a new found sense of self-initiative and hope to change the circumstances they are in now.

Summary

This chapter explored residents' aspirations and expectations related to education and financial security. My findings brought light to how residents' perceptions of mobility in those two aspects of their lives were reflective of their overall desire to improve their well-being. Residents' experiences with social and economic hardships revealed the many social, economic, and institutional financial obstacles they believed they must overcome to pursue their aspirations. For many, their neighborhoods and peer group settings oriented them to realistically reflect on their quality of life within their environment and realize, at a young age, that their environment was a hindrance to their future achievements and stability. Residents felt it necessary to search for financial and educational resources *outside* of the South Bronx since they were very limited in their neighborhoods. Many residents, however, felt empowered to return back to their homes once they gained financial stability in the future. This phenomenon was no coincidence at all; residents' sense of neighborhood attachment was tied to their personal identities as a South Bronx native.

That being said, my discussions and conclusion incorporates how effective research and policymaking can encourage educational and employment programs in urban poor neighborhoods to promote upward mobility. Extended studies on social relations on a neighborhood level could be included more in policy-oriented research to understand how to

build collective efficacy and a better sense of community. I assert that additional research on

neighborhood attachment and socioeconomic inequalities can also help develop strategies to

ensure a safe and supportive neighborhood for low-income individuals. Policy makers and

researchers can propose and test the effectiveness of community initiatives and urban planning

developments that would support neighborhood revitalization for long-time residents.

DISCUSSIONS & CONCLUSION:

Implications for Research

Writing about contemporary scholarship on social inequality, Sociologist Herbert J. Gans (2016) has recently criticized the emphasis in studies on the wealthy and called for a bottom-up approach. He said, "Let's look at inequality from the worst off to the middle of the income distribution. This would supplant the current methodology, looking at inequality from the top down. We would have surprising results" (1). Standard measures of inequality are sometimes presented in social sciences without providing meaningful insight to actual accounts of those experiencing social and economic inequalities. Resorting to merely statistical figures and numbers to measure inequality is important but provides a partial picture of social and economic hardships and quality of life. By incorporating individual narratives and subjective measures of mobility and well-being, this study provides a deeper perspective on a reality living in an inegalitarian society. The objective of this study was not to undermine existing research but, rather, to incorporate a bottom-up approach to better develop our analyses on neighborhood inequalities, human and social capital, and quality of life.

I conclude this study by first summarizing my key objectives and findings that reflect on three dimensions of well-being: sense of attachment to an urban poor neighborhood, as well as how it reflects on the context of the economically and socially isolated environment; experiences with educational inequalities and financial vulnerability; and future aspirations and expectations. The findings presented in this thesis elucidate several demographic, social, and institutional

factors within these three dimensions of well-being. They provide an interesting understanding of the impacts of residential segregation and poverty while deepening the literature on neighborhood effects. They do so by presenting a more complex understanding of urban poor neighborhoods, which reject the assumption of homogeneous conditions and experiences.

Summary of Key Objectives and Findings

In my analysis of the first dimension of well-being, I found a more complex understanding of neighborhood attachment based on interviews with 13 South Bronx residents. As a result of their social and economic isolation, residents generally found it difficult to invest in social capital. Experiences with crime and violence specific to an urban poor neighborhood contributed to residents' lack of protection and, as a result, furthered their social isolation. However, despite their difficulties with overcoming barriers of residential segregation and poverty, residents generally found pride living in the South Bronx. Shared experiences in coping with social and economic hardships and utilizing a unique cultural repertoire connected residents to their identity as South Bronx natives. Contrary to my expectations – they would not experience an attachment to their neighborhoods – I was surprised to find that residents experienced an internal conflict to leave the neighborhood. While most residents expressed a desire to leave the neighborhood, they hoped to someday return back once they were financially stable. Residents revealed their struggles to confront this duality but, as I demonstrated in the next chapters, the neighborhood was not perceived as a space to pursue upward mobility.

In my analysis of the second dimension of well-being, I discussed how barriers to education and financial mobility impact the lives of South Bronx residents. Neighborhood attachment was found to be a less influential contributor in building residents' social networks

and connections to life opportunities. This aspect of my study drew attention to economic and social inequalities that contributed to residents' feelings of anxiety and fears of not gaining stability and control over their lives. As a social institution, public schools reproduce inequalities in educational attainment and allocation of resources for students. Residents who attended public schools suffered from poor funding as well as negative peer influences in the school environment. I asserted how crucial it is to tackle structural inequalities to improve the social environment, rather than creating better schools. Given the low levels of education in residents' families, residents reported difficulties in overcoming financial vulnerability. Residents suffered from limited financial resources and social capital to find a steady job and move past living paycheck to paycheck. This finding is also attributed to neighborhood effects that affect residents' reality of economic inequalities and their residential satisfaction.

In my analysis of the third dimension of well-being, I argued that residents' aspirations and expectations revealed an additional understanding of how their quality of life in urban poor neighborhoods affects perceptions of their futures. While many wished to return back to the South Bronx in the future, they confronted the reality of their class status as well as several social and structural limitations of living in their neighborhood. Residents felt that the lack of organizational support, social and financial resources, and neighborhood institutions were obstacles for their aspirations. For many, these disadvantages along with their lack of financial security compelled them to put a hold on their dreams of a better education and career. It was intriguing to find that residents believed that they must establish financial security before attaining a higher degree in education and fulfilling a successful career. In this, most residents

did not acknowledge a need for a stronger social network and community in the future because they believed that they would be "on their own".

Taken together, these three dimensions of well-being illustrated the reality of living in a poor residentially segregated area. Although most South Bronx residents developed a fairly strong sense of attachment to their neighborhoods, they still found difficulty building their social capital as they were unable to build social support in the community. I speculate that this difficulty is reflective of the deeply social, structural, and economical inequalities that intervene in neighborhood relationships.

<div align="center">**Limitations and Further Research**</div>

Due to time constraints, I focused on only one case study: The South Bronx. To fully evaluate the relevance and accuracy of this study, a comparative analysis of multiple urban poor neighborhoods would be more fitting. This way, more concrete patterns can be drawn. Moreover, my study particularly focused mostly on relatively young people because they have yet to fully obtain a secured household income and career. A more inclusive study that includes additional controls for age groups can be conducted to distinguish any possible significant results. Although my sample is not representative of the older population, the two older residents (ages 36 and 37) in my study demonstrated that they have not fully settled or financially mobilized.

Further research should consider conducting an extended case method to fully incorporate how low-income groups navigate life in an urban poor space, while simultaneously understanding the depth of their social isolation and how that affects their neighborhood attachment. Even though existing research indicated the importance of building collective efficacy and community mobilization in improving quality of life, more research grounded on

urban poor neighborhoods should consider the empirical implications of having a strong

community on quality of life. It should be noted, however, that studies on this should try to avoid

the assumption of homogeneity across all neighborhoods.

Discourse related to improving community ties and building efficient social capital

resources are helpful for low income individuals. In order for them to access opportunities to

mobilize, research should bridge the gap between sociology and social policies. Through the lens

of investigating neighborhood attachment and residential satisfaction, quality of life can be

further studied to understand the unavoidable pressures of structural barriers that affect social

relations and thus positive social capital. In the last part of my conclusion, I briefly discuss how

studies on neighborhood attachment can add depth to understanding quality of life in urban poor

neighborhoods; they can also encourage policy changes both on a community and state level.

Policy Implications

The findings presented in this study illustrated the need to develop better social policies

that would alleviate the consequences of social and economic isolation in urban poor

neighborhoods. Plenty of research on how to improve neighborhood conditions has focused on

implementing more employment and education programs.

However, this requires changes to neighborhood institutions such as public schools and

local facilities. An urban residential area should be constructed in a way that does not socially

isolate residents from being able to build their social capital. In my case study on the South

Bronx, residents were only able to socialize on their own block, which significantly restricted

their access to building social networks due to fears of violence. As Portes (1998) noted in his

work, this degree of homogeneity in social relationships based on one block can influence

negative social capital. Even when urban poor residents develop positive relationships with friends in the immediate vicinity, they still bear consequences of being isolated from the rest of society. In order to strengthen positive relationships without perpetuating social isolation, efforts committed to increasing organizational involvement in communities can expose people to educational and financial resources. Ideally, these efforts should not be made at the cost of displacing long-time residents and businesses. More research on neighborhood revitalization can focus on catering to long-time residents without fueling gentrification.

Policies regarding neighborhood safety should cater to ensuring that residents are also not victims of violence and police harassment. Doing so could alleviate some of the anxieties over trusting other residential members as well as law enforcement. My findings confirm that urban poor residents are less likely to interact with each other when they experience ineffective measures of ensuring safety. Allocating crucial educational resources to neighborhood schools and promoting youth-oriented programs can ease anxieties over violence for young individuals.

Lastly, social and financial indicators of individual well-being are – to an extent – reflective of neighborhood conditions. That being said, considering the complexity of the labor market, it is almost impossible for urban poor residents to control structural mechanisms of employment opportunities. Without state involvement to relieve structural barriers to financial security, community mobilization efforts are questionable in its role in improving economic circumstances in neighborhoods and individual well-being. Regardless, research and efforts dedicated to community building resources could potentially reveal ways to build better collective efficacy and, as a result, a better sense of neighborhood attachment.

AFTERWORD:

Reflections as a Researcher

As a South Bronx resident for 17 years, I was sometimes struck by the desire to be an ally to residents of this study. Often times I found myself resonating with the stories told by several participants. At some points, I was even genuinely intrigued – the stories revealed a kind of rare resilience to the difficulties of living in an urban poor neighborhood. I was reminded of times I returned back to my block. I remembered experiencing fear for my safety as a woman of color, fear of the next gunshot outside my window, and now fear of the slowly-creeping gentrification. I found myself appreciating my neighborhood again when I met the thirteen South Bronx residents last winter.

Though I had the exciting opportunity to be able to connect with residents like me for this study, I learned to distance myself as a resident to perform my role as a researcher. I was fortunate enough to be able to sit with residents who trusted me to hear their stories – both good and bad. Their experiences reveals the strength that continues to drive their desires past living in the margins of society; South Bronx residents hold on to the hope that one day their lives will be different and better. That their lives will no longer be solely about surviving but also *living* as well.

The many hours I spent transcribing interviews, outlining my thoughts on a whiteboard, and having sporadic conversations with my fellow colleagues allowed me to focus on developing a study that is not only a senior thesis in sociology but a proposal for future researchers and

policy makers. As a researcher and listener, I learned to detangle the many inequalities (e.g. structural, political, and institutional corruption) to understand the various ways residents cope with them. Though unintentional, these inequalities limit the effectiveness of community ties and often the collective efficacy in improving quality of life.

I was fortunate enough to be able to sit with Sociologist Herbert Gans to share my research. From our conversation, I learned that social and economic inequalities reinforced in urban poor neighborhoods are not coincidental. These inequalities perpetuate social isolation in a community that lacks opportunities for upward mobility. This way of life, without the strength of a community, encouraged me to familiarize myself with developing community building programs in the South Bronx. I also reached out to current program leaders and politicians, including Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., for their input. Though no constructive conversations have been made yet, I believe the interactions I hope to make in the future will allow me to continue challenge underlying problems that are often underheard and misconstrued.

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