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The Truly Advantaged: Examining the Effects of Privileged Places on Educational Attainment

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ABSTRACT

Inspired by William J. Wilson's *The Truly Disadvantaged*, hundreds of studies have focused on the detrimental effects of disadvantaged neighborhoods. Consequently, far less is known about the contextual effects of advantaged neighborhoods, and what is known does not take into consideration long-term exposure. The present study extends research on advantaged neighborhoods by examining how respondents' neighborhood contexts across their entire childhoods influence adult educational attainment. Findings indicate that structural effects in advantaged neighborhoods influence residents' educational attainment—especially for White residents. Results suggest that addressing the issues associated with the truly disadvantaged requires examining the compounding privilege of the truly advantaged.

KEYWORDS

Neighborhood effects; disadvantaged neighborhoods; neighborhood inequality educational mobility

Introduction

The contextual effects of neighborhoods on socioeconomic outcomes gained increased attention after the publication of William J. Wilson's (1987) *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2000; Small and Newman 2001). Study after study has reaffirmed Wilson's assertion that neighborhood conditions influence residents' contemporary and longitudinal wellbeing (Howell 2019a; Johnson 2013; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2000; Sampson 2012; Sharkey 2013; Small and Newman 2001; Wodtke, Harding, and Elwert 2011). In particular, multiple studies have shown that childhood neighborhoods influence educational attainment (Brooks-Gunn et al. 1993; Entwisle, Alexander, and Olson 2005; Johnson 2013; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2000; Turley 2003; Wodtke, Harding, and Elwert 2011), and this in turn affects adult employment status, occupational prestige, wages, and physical well-being (Hout 2012). Yet, the majority of these studies focus on disadvantaged neighborhoods, leaving much unknown about contextual effects in more affluent communities (Howell 2019b).

As important as investigations into disadvantaged neighborhoods are, the nearly exclusive analytical focus on them has the unintentional consequence of downplaying the role that advantaged neighborhoods play in stratifying educational outcomes. In other words, the literature knows relatively little about how neighborhoods at the other end of the neighborhood continuum influence their residents' outcomes and thus perpetuate inequality (Brooks-Gunn et al. 1993; Johnson 2010, 2013; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2000). Those

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who have explicitly highlighted the structural effects in advantaged neighborhoods find that not only do contextual effects influence residents in these communities but also that the underexposure, or lack of exposure, to disadvantage is a stronger contributor to educational inequality than poverty concentration (Brooks-Gunn et al. 1993; Johnson 2010, 2013; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2000). Additionally, these studies find that neighborhood effects have more influence on Whites' educational attainment than Blacks' educational attainment (Brooks-Gunn et al. 1993; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2000).

These findings suggest that the relationship between neighborhoods and educational attainment is asymmetrical. Decades ago, Lieberson (1985) stressed the importance of investigating asymmetrical forms of causation, by which he generally meant that the same variable can have different effects on a given outcome depending on its value (see also York and Light 2017). However, few neighborhood effects studies have explicitly examined asymmetry, and none have done so with comprehensive measurements of neighborhood contexts across entire childhoods. The present study employs annual measurements of neighborhood context across respondents' entire childhoods to provide a rigorous assessment of whether the influence of neighborhoods on educational attainment is asymmetrical.

My analytical strategy for examining whether neighborhood effects are asymmetrical is threefold. First, I deploy conventional measures of neighborhood disadvantage, interpreting lower levels as more advantaged settings, but stratify my analyses by high and low values of neighborhood (dis)advantage to evaluate asymmetry, or difference of effect. Second, I introduce a quadratic neighborhood effect term and stratify this nonlinear relationship by race to examine whether the relationship between neighborhoods and educational attainment differs by racial group. Finally, I reassess my results using a related but distinct measure of neighborhood privilege on educational attainment. By differentiating which neighborhood characteristics drive the relationship between residential context and education, I invert theorization of neighborhood disadvantage to consider more directly the importance and potential mechanisms of neighborhood advantage on educational attainment. I conclude by discussing the theoretical and policy implications of my findings.

How Residential Neighborhoods Influence Educational Attainment

Theoretically, scholars posit that residential neighborhoods influence educational attainment through three primary mechanisms: socialization, institutional resources, and collective efficacy (Small and Newman 2001). Students are socialized by the community's social norms and expectations. Specifically, the social norms and expectations within a neighborhood inform students' long-term goals (e.g., attending college) and short-term actions (e.g., time allotted to completing homework). In turn, these goals and actions influence students' educational attainment (Ainsworth 2002, 2010; Brattbakk and Wessel 2013; Casciano and Massey 2012). Similarly, the institutional resources available within local schools such as textbooks, teachers, and support programs shape both educational aspirations and students' abilities to achieve their own objectives (Ainsworth 2002; Andersson and Subramanian 2006; Brattbakk and Wessel 2013; Lareau and Goyette 2014). Finally, neighborhood collective efficacy shapes the community's social networks and engagement in voluntary associations. These networks and voluntary engagement enhance afterschool and extracurricular programs as well as students' access to mentors who can help them navigate educational institutions (Sampson 2012).

Multiple ethnographies of disadvantaged neighborhoods have illuminated how these neighborhood mechanisms operate in marginalized communities. Specifically, qualitative studies have noted that socialization within disadvantaged neighborhoods discourages academic success and participation in the formal economy (Bourgois 2002; Venkatesh 2006; Wilson 1987). Likewise, they argue that the void of resources limits opportunity and the lack of collective efficacy curtails collective action (Small and Newman 2001). Quantitative scholars utilize these findings to explain the correlations between neighborhood context and educational attainment. Even when quantitative analyses include a wide range of advantaged and disadvantaged neighborhoods, the majority of quantitative scholars pull from qualitative studies of disadvantaged neighborhoods to provide analytical explanations of their results (Johnson 2013). However, these same neighborhood mechanisms could *also* matter at the other end of the neighborhood continuum, maybe even more so.

Colloquial knowledge often presumes that academic success in more affluent neighborhoods is due primarily to individual effort and familial support (Lareau 2002). Yet studies that focus on advantaged neighborhoods illuminate that even in these communities, structural conditions influence residents' educational attainment (Johnson 2013; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2000; Massey et al. 2013). Although the number of studies that focus on advantaged neighborhoods is small compared to the number that focus on disadvantaged communities, especially the number of ethnographies (Howell 2019b), those that do discuss advantaged neighborhoods highlight how the socialization, resources, and collective efficacy in these communities positively affect students' achievements. That is, in advantaged neighborhoods the social expectation is that all students complete high school and go to college. This expectation encourages students to pursue this goal. Furthermore, they are aided in their educational pursuits by their communities' schools, libraries, and afterschool programs, which provide the resources and support needed for their success. Additionally, the social networks within these affluent communities help students navigate the college application process and provide them with connections to internships and other educational opportunities (Johnson 2013; Lareau and Goyette 2014; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2000; Massey et al. 2013).

In fact, some research on advantaged neighborhoods finds that contextual effects on educational attainment appear stronger in more advantaged compared to disadvantaged neighborhoods (Brooks-Gunn et al. 1993; Johnson 2010, 2013; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2000). However, given data limitations, these studies have primarily used only one point in time to measure neighborhood effects. Using a single point in time as a proxy for entire childhood contexts often underestimates the effects of disadvantaged neighborhoods (Alvarado 2018; Chetty, Hendren, and Katz 2016; Wodtke, Harding, and Elwert 2011). Hence, it remains unclear whether advantaged neighborhoods have a potent influence on residents or their presumed effect is merely due to methodological limitations. Addressing these methodological challenges is key to measuring longitudinal contextual effects in advantaged neighborhoods.

Methodological Challenges

The majority of the neighborhood effects literature builds off Wilson's (1987) theoretical premise that childhood neighborhood context influences outcomes in adulthood above and beyond familial and individual characteristics. Empirically testing this claim has two primary methodological challenges: disentangling familial factors from neighborhood effects and accounting for neighborhood change.

Disentangling familial factors from neighborhood effects is difficult because the familial characteristics associated with neighborhood location are also correlated with educational outcomes. That is, never married low-socioeconomic-status parents are more likely to live in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Additionally, the children of never married low-socioeconomic-status parents often complete less education, no matter where they live. Thus, differentiating whether the observed correlations between neighborhoods and education are due to neighborhood contextual effects or the familial attributes common within certain neighborhood types is challenging. To address this methodological challenge, researchers have used one of two research designs: quasi-experiments or geocoded, longitudinal panel data.

Quasi-experimental designs like the Gautreaux Project or the Moving to Opportunity Experiment randomly select low-income residents to relocate to less poor communities. They then compare the residents who moved to those who remained in their original neighborhoods. Randomly selecting movers and stayers eliminates neighborhood selection bias, enabling research to illuminate the impact of neighborhoods void of familial neighborhood selection processes (Casciano and Massey 2012; Chetty, Hendren, and Katz 2016; Fautha, Leventhal, and Brooks-Gunn 2005; Massey et al. 2013). Nevertheless, because all respondents included in the data are low-income families who originated in disadvantaged neighborhoods, researchers are unable to distinguish whether early childhood exposure to neighborhood disadvantage has lasting influences on residents or whether affluent children in advantaged neighborhoods are influenced by their neighborhood context.

Geocoded, longitudinal panel data, on the other hand, utilize nationally representative samples that follow residents over time. Using these data, researchers statistically control for familial characteristics in order to estimate the effect of neighborhoods on outcomes (Johnson 2013; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2000; Sharkey and Elwert 2011; Wodtke, Harding, and Elwert 2011). This approach enables researchers to disentangle neighborhood from familial factors for low- and high-income residents living in advantaged and disadvantaged neighborhoods. Nevertheless, this method still must address the second methodological challenge in the literature: neighborhood change.

Historically, the majority of the neighborhood effects studies measured childhood neighborhood contexts at only one point in time. Yet families do not necessarily live in the same neighborhood across time. Additionally, even when families remain in the same neighborhood, their community's demographics often change over time. Thus, scholars have argued that measuring childhood neighborhood context with only one time point can over- or underestimate residents' exposure to neighborhood disadvantage (Alvarado 2018; Sharkey and Elwert 2011; Wodtke, Harding, and Elwert 2011). This is particularly problematic among highly mobile populations who are more likely to live in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

To address the issues associated with neighborhood change, recent studies have utilized the increased amount of longitudinal data available in nationally representative panel studies (Alvarado 2016, 2018; Chetty, Hendren, and Katz 2016; Sharkey 2013; Sharkey and Elwert 2011; Wodtke, Harding, and Elwert 2011). Specifically, research is now able to quantify residents' yearly neighborhood contexts from birth to age 18 and then use these childhood neighborhood demographics to predict adult socioeconomic status. However, the studies utilizing these recent methodological advancements have not examined

whether the relationship between residential context and educational attainment is asymmetrical. The present study employs these methodological advancements to investigate whether neighborhood effects are asymmetrical across neighborhood (dis)advantage and residents' racial identity.

Data and Methods

The primary sources of data for this study come from the restricted access geocoded Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID)—the longest running national representative longitudinal data set. Since 1968, the PSID has collected annual data on employment, wages, income, education, expenditures, and wealth. Following the initially surveyed families, their children, and their children's children, the sample now includes 9,000 households and over 22,000 individuals. Given the study design, some of these individuals have annual data points from their birth through their early 40s, whereas others have data from mid-life to their death. This variety means that the PSID can be used to answer a wide range of questions, yet it also means that researchers must decide which individuals in the sample are most advantageous for a given research question.

The present study is interested in how childhood neighborhoods influence educational attainment. Thus I restrict the sample to individuals who were in the sample across their entire childhood and were still present in the survey at age 26 or older. To limit confounding effects of different time periods, I only include respondents born between 1975 and 1985. The children born in this time frame were the generation that Wilson (1987) initially theorized would be affected by their neighborhood context. A total of 2,367 individuals met the conditions of this study. The vast majority (94 percent) of these individuals identify as either White or Black—reflecting the U.S. racial dynamics in 1968 when the initial sample was selected.[1] However, this means that too few individuals identify as each of the other racial categories—Latinx, Asian, Native American—to analyze each of these categories separately. Because the experiences of these groups are distinct from one another and from those of Whites and Blacks, I followed the precedent in the literature and excluded these 140 individuals (Sharkey 2013).

In addition to the PSID, this research uses data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau on neighborhood context. Specifically, I utilize the 1980, 1990, and 2000 Census Long Form as well as the 2005–2010 American Community Survey. Following the precedent in the literature, I operationalize neighborhoods as census tracts. To ensure consistent boundaries across time, I normalize all tracts to the 2010 census tract boundaries using Logan, Xu, and Stults's (2014) cross-walk files. From these data sets, I linearly interpolate respondents' neighborhood demographics for all years of the survey. I assign the 2005–2010 American Community Survey data to the year 2010 for linear interpolation.

Educational Attainment

The present study operationalizes educational attainment as completed years in school at 26 years of age.[2] The variable ranges from 5 to 17. All respondents with graduate education are assigned a value of 17 for completed years in school. The upper-end censor was created by PSID but has the advantageous side effect of ensuring that the right-tailed

skew of the distribution does not exacerbate the impact of advantaged neighborhoods on high-socioeconomic-status individuals. Additionally, to test the robustness of the models, I run models with education operationalized as categorical (i.e., less than high school, high school diploma, some college, bachelor's degree, and graduate school) and bivariate (i.e., less than high school and high school diploma). All substantive results were comparable to the findings presented and are available upon request. Finding comparable results across these multiple operationalizations of educational attainment also serves as a sensitivity test to ensure that clustering of respondents at 12 and 16 years of completed school does not bias the results.

Neighborhood Disadvantage Index

Previous neighborhood effects studies that focus on advantaged neighborhoods operationalize advantaged communities in one of two ways: (1) some studies use traditional measures of neighborhood disadvantage but highlight the contextual effects in communities with limited to no disadvantage and (2) other studies utilize measures of neighborhood affluence. In this study, I use both. I begin by using traditional measures of neighborhood disadvantage. In all geocoded, longitudinal studies of neighborhood effects, all neighborhoods—including White upper-class neighborhoods—are given disadvantage index scores. The present study is no different. I am simply investigating whether contextual structural effects have a distinct relationship in disadvantaged communities compared to their more advantaged counterparts.

Following the precedent in the literature, I measure neighborhood disadvantage using an index (Alvarado 2016, 2018; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2000; Sharkey and Elwert 2011; Wodtke, Harding, and Elwert 2011). From study to study, scholars operationalize neighborhood disadvantage with slightly different neighborhood demographic factors. However, consistent across the literature is the use of factor analysis to select neighborhood features that together capture the multidimensional, underlying contextual disadvantage. The index in this study consists of the three neighborhood demographic characteristics that Wilson (1987) theorized as essential to neighborhood disadvantage: the proportion of the neighborhood that is Black, the proportion of the neighborhood living under the federal poverty line, and the proportion of families headed by single parents.[3] These three variables are utilized to calculate a standardized index using all U.S. census tracts (not just the ones in the sample). This index was calculated for 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010 separately. The Cronbach's alphas ranged from year to year starting at 0.85 in 1980, 0.82 in 1990, 0.81 in 2000, and 0.75 in 2010.[4]

Using linear interpolation, a neighborhood disadvantage index was calculated for each census tract in the United States for each year. These yearly neighborhood disadvantage factors were then linked to PSID respondents' addresses. This means that respondents' neighborhood disadvantage scores can vary annually because of demographic changes in their communities *or* residential moves between neighborhoods. I then created a composite score of childhood neighborhood disadvantage by calculating the mean neighborhood index across all years where the respondent was under 18 and living with his or her parents or guardians.[5] In this way, the childhood neighborhood disadvantage index is operationalized with one continuous score that captures one's overall childhood neighborhood context.

This neighborhood disadvantage index enables me to closely mirror previous neighborhood effects studies while highlighting whether these contextual effects are present in communities with limited exposure to disadvantage. To examine possible asymmetry in neighborhood effects, I begin by examining whether the relationship between neighborhood effects and educational attainment is distinct in "advantaged" neighborhoods—communities with disadvantage scores below zero (below average levels of disadvantage)—compared to "disadvantaged" neighborhoods—communities with disadvantage scores above zero. I then introduce a quadratic term to examine the nonlinearity of the relationship between neighborhood disadvantage and educational attainment.

Neighborhood Privilege Index

After completing my analyses with the neighborhood disadvantage index, I checked the robustness of my results with an additional neighborhood index: the neighborhood privilege index. Much like the neighborhood disadvantage index, this variable is a standardized scalar variable calculated for all census tracts in the United States for 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010. Mirroring Ainsworth (2002) and Browning et al. (2006), this scalar includes the proportion of the census tract with bachelor's degrees, proportion of the census tract in professional or managerial occupations, and proportion of household incomes above $75,000 (in 2010 dollars). As with the neighborhood disadvantage index, the Cronbach's alphas of the neighborhood privilege index ranged from year to year, starting at 0.94 in 1980, 0.95 in 1990, 0.95 in 2000, and 0.82 in 2010.

Using linear interpolation, a neighborhood privilege index was calculated for every year for every census tract. Respondents' yearly addresses were then linked to their corresponding census tracts. Finally, using all years for which the respondent was under 18 and living with his or her parents or guardians, an average neighborhood privilege index was calculated. In this way, the neighborhood privilege index is comparable to the neighborhood disadvantage index but incorporates distinct neighborhood characteristics.[6]

Control Variables

As discussed above, the socioeconomic and demographic factors that contribute to families' neighborhood selection also correlate with their children's educational attainment (Sharkey and Elwert 2011; Turley 2003). Thus, neighborhood attributes are in part capturing an aggregated effect of family socioeconomic status. In order to approximate the impact of neighborhood exposure as distinct from family-level features, it is common practice to control for familial socioeconomic and demographic factors.

All statistical models (discussed below) include individual and family-level controls. At the individual level, I control for race and gender. Given the limitations of the data, both race and gender are operationalized as binary variables. Racial identity is measured as White or Black and respondents' gender as female or male.[7] Familial controls are calculated for the time the respondent was living in his or her parents' home and under 18 years of age. These controls include parental income, education, marital status, number of siblings, and number of moves.[8] Parental income is the average household income across the respondents' childhood. Specifically, for every year, I summed the income of the parents present in the household and converted this household income to 2010 dollars.

Then the mean income was calculated across all years during which the respondent was under 18 and lived with his or her parents.[9] Similarly, parental education contains a temporal component. I compared each year of father's and mother's years of education completed, taking the highest attainment as the familial attainment. I then averaged the yearly educational attainment across all years.[10] Parental marital status is operationalized as the proportion of years the parents were married during the respondent's childhood. Number of siblings is the average number of children living in the household across the respondent's childhood. Finally, number of moves is the number of times the respondent moved during his or her childhood.

Research has shown that controlling for parental socioeconomic status produces a conservative estimate of neighborhood effects because where a parent grew up affects his or her own socioeconomic status and neighborhood attainment (Sampson 2012; Sharkey and Elwert 2011; Wodtke, Harding, and Elwert 2011). To adjust for these compounding effects, some research has used inverse probability treatment weights (e.g., Wodtke, Harding, and Elwert 2011). However, the current study uses Sampson's (2012) conceptualization of neighborhood effects as multidimensional and does not try to predict the compounding influence of neighborhood attainment. That said, I also acknowledge that the presented estimates are likely a conservative estimate of the role that neighborhood contexts play in residents' education.

Statistical Modeling

Given that the dependent variable—educational attainment—is continuous, I utilized ordinary least squares estimation to examine the role that neighborhoods have on educational attainment. However, because multiple respondents grew up in the same families, I used multilevel modeling to account for multiple siblings within one family (e.g., Aaronson 1998; Alvarado 2018; Vartanian and Buck 2005; Vartanian and Houser 2010, 2012). Yet, unlike previous neighborhood effects scholars who have used sibling multilevel modeling, I used random effects models to capture the differences across the full range of neighborhood types.[11] Specifically, all models presented in the article were estimated using Stata's "xtreg" command. To examine whether neighborhood effects have a nonlinear relationship with educational attainment and whether neighborhood effects differ by residents' race, I ran a series of stratified models as well as introduced interactions into the models to test for moderation effects.

Results

To examine descriptive differences between disadvantaged and less-disadvantaged (hereafter advantaged) neighborhoods, I divided the sample into two groups: respondents with advantaged childhood neighborhoods and those with disadvantaged childhood neighborhoods. As mentioned above, I define advantaged childhood neighborhoods as those with below-average neighborhood disadvantage (below zero) and disadvantaged childhood neighborhoods as those with above-average neighborhood disadvantage (above zero). To clarify, this means that "advantaged" neighborhoods include both middle-class and upper-middle-class communities.

In this binary conception of neighborhoods, disadvantaged neighborhoods have disadvantage scores ranging from 0 to 5.65 with a mean of 1.60. To help contextualize these standardized factor scores, consider that respondents with a neighborhood disadvantage score of zero lived in neighborhoods that were on average 13 percent poor, 9 percent single-parent families, and 10 percent Black. Respondents with a neighborhood disadvantage score of one lived in neighborhoods that were approximately 26 percent poor, 12 percent single-parent families, and 32 percent Black. Across all the neighborhoods categorized as disadvantaged (above zero on the neighborhood disadvantage scale), the mean percentage poor is 24, mean percentage Black is 52, and mean percentage single-parent is 18.[12]

Conversely, advantaged neighborhoods in this sample have neighborhood disadvantage scores ranging from −1.01 to 0 with a mean value of −0.44. Although the sample has comparable numbers of respondents from advantaged and disadvantaged neighborhoods, advantaged neighborhoods are more homogeneous than disadvantaged neighborhoods—as evidenced by their smaller standard deviation and range (see Table 1). This pattern is expected, given the distribution of U.S. neighborhood disadvantage more generally. Yet even within the homogeneity of advantaged neighborhoods, these communities still vary from those with a score of −1 that on average have 2 percent poverty, 3 percent single-parent families, and 1 percent Black residents, to those with a score of zero which, as mentioned previously, have on average 13 percent poverty, 9 percent single-parent families, and 10 percent Black residents.

As expected given previous research on neighborhood effects, in my sample those who grew up in the disadvantaged neighborhoods completed less education than those who grew up in advantaged neighborhoods—12.97 years compared to 14.11 years. Yet, as seen in Table 1, individuals who grew up in disadvantaged neighborhoods are also more likely to be Black, female, and raised in families with less income, less education, less marriage, more siblings, and more residential moves. All of these controls also correlate with educational attainment. Thus, differences in educational attainment across the two groups might be due to these covariates and not to the neighborhoods themselves. Hence, I now turn to the multiple regression models to examine whether neighborhoods still influence educational attainment when individual and family-level factors are held constant.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for disadvantaged and advantaged neighborhoods.

	Disadvantaged mean (SD)	Advantaged mean (SD)
Dependent variables		
Completed years in school at age 26	12.97 (2.02)*	14.11 (2.01)*
Neighborhood factor		
Disadvantage index	1.60 (1.16)*	−0.44 (0.23)*
Individual demographics		
White	0.19 (0.39)*	0.96 (0.19)*
Female	0.54 (0.50)*	0.51 (0.50)*
Childhood parental controls		
Parents' income	40,703 (33,695)*	84,347 (59,431)*
Parents' years in school	12.29 (2.14)*	14.02 (2.17)*
Proportion of years parents married	0.58 (0.40)*	0.88 (0.22)*
Number of siblings	2.47 (1.00)*	2.26 (0.77)*
Number of moves	3.36 (2.86)*	2.33 (2.36)*
N—individuals (families)	1,067 (497)	1,150 (544)

*Denotes that the two-sided *t*-test comparing the mean of disadvantaged and advantaged neighborhoods has a *p*-value ≤ 0.05.

Because I am specifically interested in whether the contextual neighborhood effects that are present in disadvantaged neighborhoods are also present in advantaged neighborhoods, I first ran stratified models—examining each type of neighborhood separately. Table 2 reports that, when holding individual and family-level factors constant, neighborhood structural effects influence educational attainment in advantaged neighborhoods. Specifically, residents who grew up in the 1980s and 1990s in neighborhoods with 2 percent poverty, 3 percent single-parent families, and 1 percent Black residents completed an additional 1.16 years in school compared to their counterparts who grew up in average neighborhoods—those with 13 percent poverty, 9 percent single-parent families, and 10 percent Black residents. In other words, even when holding individual and family-level factors constant, contextual effects matter for residents in advantaged neighborhoods. This finding confirms previous research that finds that structural effects are particularly potent in advantaged neighborhoods (Johnson 2013; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2000).

Table 2 also reports that when holding individual and family-level factors constant, these same neighborhood effects are not statistically significant in disadvantaged neighborhoods. To contextualize this finding, consider a child who grew up in a neighborhood with approximately 13 percent poverty, 9 percent single-parent families, and 10 percent Black residents. Results indicate that this child would have completed a level of education comparable to that of a child who grew up in a neighborhood that was 60 percent poor, 57 percent single-parent, and 89 percent Black.[13] To ensure that the difference between these two models is not due to sample size, I ran a pooled model with all respondents and interacted every independent variable with a dummy variable denoting whether one's childhood neighborhood was advantaged or disadvantaged. The interactions in this model examine whether the magnitude of the coefficients in disadvantaged neighborhoods is distinct from their corresponding coefficients in advantaged neighborhoods. As denoted in Table 2, the difference between the neighborhood effects is indeed significant ($p < 0.05$), indicating that it is not merely a particularity of this sample but reflective of a larger population trend. Additionally, to ensure that the large range in neighborhood disadvantage scores found in disadvantaged neighborhoods did not skew these results, I limited the

Table 2. Coefficients from regressions predicting educational attainment stratified by neighborhood.

	Disadvantaged coefficient (SE)	Advantaged coefficient (SE)
Neighborhood factor		
Disadvantage index	−0.07 (0.06) †	−1.16 (0.26)* †
Individual demographics		
White	−0.12 (0.16)	−0.29 (0.29)
Female	0.55 (0.11)*	0.61 (0.10)*
Childhood controls		
Parents' income	0.10 (0.02)* †	0.03 (0.01)* †
Parents' years in school	0.25 (0.03)* †	0.34 (0.03)* †
Proportion of years parents married	0.47 (0.19)*	0.47 (0.26)*
Number of siblings	−0.20 (0.06)*	−0.16 (0.07)*
Number of moves	−0.04 (0.02)	−0.07 (0.02)*
Constant	13.38 (0.13)	13.08 (0.29)
Between R^2	0.3719	0.3428
N—individuals (families)	1,067 (497)	1,150 (544)

*Denotes that the coefficient is statistically significantly different from zero with a p-value ≤ 0.05.
†Denotes that disadvantaged neighborhood coefficient is statistically significantly different from advantaged neighborhood coefficient with a p-value ≤ 0.05.

sample to respondents who grew up in neighborhoods within one standard deviation of the average neighborhood and reran the models. These supplemental models (available upon request) re-affirm the above findings.[14]

Moreover, the only other coefficient that is significantly distinct between the two models is parental income. Specifically, for those living in disadvantaged neighborhoods, every $100,000 increase in household income corresponds with one more year of education. Yet, for those in advantaged neighborhoods, a $100,000 increase in household income corresponds with an increase of only one third of a year more education. In other words, educational attainment in disadvantaged neighborhoods is more dependent on the individual family's income, whereas in advantaged neighborhoods, residents' educational attainment is more dependent on the neighborhood context. This pattern gives additional evidence of the potency of structural effects on residents in advantaged communities.

In summary, these initial models indicate that structural effects *do* influence educational attainment in advantaged neighborhoods. However, the findings in Table 2 might be due to the arbitrary distinction between neighborhoods that have more than average disadvantage versus less than average disadvantage. To eliminate this arbitrary cutoff while still examining whether structural effects influence educational attainment in advantaged neighborhoods, I excluded the binary neighborhood categories and introduce a quadratic neighborhood disadvantage term.[15] As shown in Figure 1, this model demonstrates that the impact of neighborhoods is nonlinear. That is, when comparing comparable individuals within comparable families, neighborhood structural effects have substantial influence in the most advantaged neighborhoods. Yet residents' educational attainment is nearly identical for those growing up in moderately to extremely disadvantaged neighborhoods. This provides additional evidence of the potency of neighborhood effects in advantaged neighborhoods.

Taken together, Table 2 and Figure 1 demonstrate the contextual effects of advantaged neighborhoods on educational attainment. However, these findings might be due to the unequal distribution of racial groups across U.S. neighborhoods. On the whole, in the United States, Whites do not live in the inner-city, marginalized communities widely discussed in the literature (Massey and Denton 1993). In fact, in this sample, 96 percent of the residents who grew up in advantaged neighborhoods are White, whereas 80 percent of residents who grew up in disadvantaged neighborhoods are Black. Thus, these findings might simply reflect racial differences and not differential neighborhood effects.

To test the possibility that advantaged neighborhoods only appear to have strong neighborhood effects because of the disproportionate number of White residents, I ran models stratified by race. In both models, I included the quadratic neighborhood effects term. As reported in Table 3, both the linear and quadratic neighborhood disadvantage terms have statistically insignificant affects on Blacks' education attainment. In other words, Blacks with comparable families complete the same level of education no matter whether they grew up in the most or the least disadvantaged neighborhoods. However, for White residents, neighborhoods have a statistically and substantially significant influence on their educational attainment. As with the full sample, the influence of neighborhoods on Whites' education is nonlinear. Whites who grew up in the most advantaged neighborhoods are positively influenced by their communities even more than Whites who

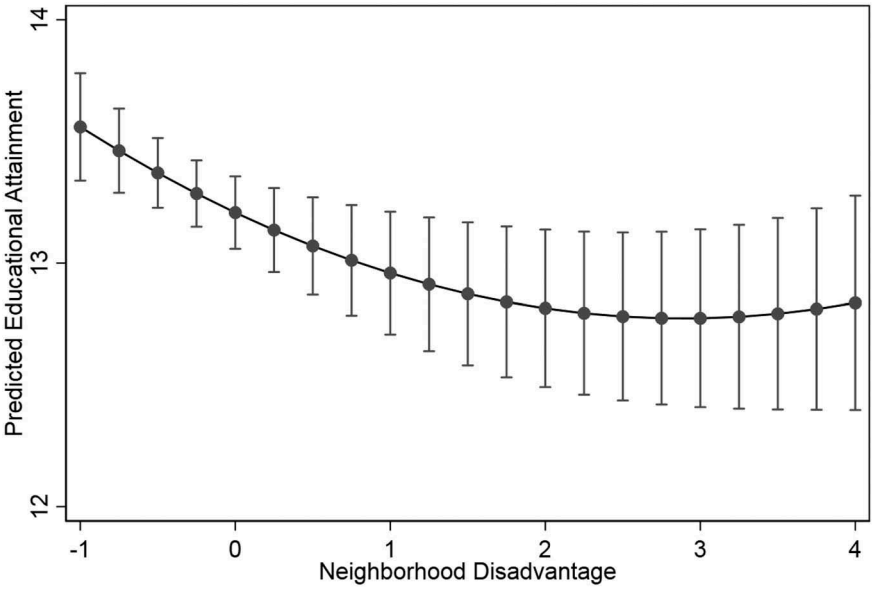

Figure 1. Predicted educational attainment by neighborhood disadvantage.
For consistency with the prose, the *x*-axis is labeled as −1 to 4, but in the model the neighborhood disadvantage index was shifted so that the minimum was zero.

Table 3. Coefficients from regression predicting educational attainment stratified by race.

	Black coefficient (SE)	White coefficient (SE)
Neighborhood factor		
Disadvantage index[1]	−0.12 (0.21)[†]	−1.03 (0.33)*[†]
Disadvantage index squared[1]	0.01 (0.03)[†]	0.34 (0.14)*[†]
Individual demographics		
Female	0.56 (0.12)*	0.60 (0.09)*
Childhood controls		
Parents' income	0.08 (0.03)*	0.04 (0.01)*
Parents' years in school	0.21 (0.03)* [†]	0.36 (0.03)* [†]
Proportion of years parents married	0.55 (0.19)*	0.46 (0.23)
Number of siblings	−0.24 (0.06)*	−0.11 (0.07)
Number of moves	−0.05 (0.02)*	−0.06 (0.02)*
Constant	13.46 (0.30)	13.80 (0.18)
Between R^2	0.3409	0.3375
N—individuals (families)	916 (383)	1,308 (591)

*Denotes that the coefficient is statistically significantly different from zero with a *p*-value ≤ 0.05.
[†]Denotes that Black coefficient is statistically significantly different from White coefficient with a p-value ≤ 0.05.
[1]For this model, the neighborhood disadvantage index was adjusted so that the minimum was zero to ensure that squared negative values were distinct from their positive counterparts.

grew up in average neighborhoods, whereas Whites who grew up in disadvantaged neighborhoods completed levels of education comparable to those of their counterparts in average neighborhoods. To confirm that these racial differences are not due to differences in the sample size of White compared to Black respondents, I once again ran a pooled model where I interacted all independent variables with respondents' racial

identification. Both the linear and quadratic neighborhood effects coefficients are statistically distinguishable, showing that the differences observed in this sample are likely true of the full population.

In summary, Whites are concentrated in more advantaged neighborhoods, and residential location has a profound impact on their educational attainment (as shown in Figure 2). Specifically, Whites living in the most advantaged neighborhoods are most strongly influenced by their neighborhood context. Blacks, on the other hand, are spread more equitably across neighborhood types–though disproportionately concentrated in disadvantaged neighborhoods–and neighborhoods have little influence on their education attainment. In short, as previous research has demonstrated, childhood neighborhoods do influence adult socioeconomic status, but this influence is particularly strong for White residents in advantaged neighborhoods.

To further investigate the influence of advantaged neighborhoods on residents, I ran additional analyses using a neighborhood privilege index. As with the neighborhood disadvantage index, the results in Table 4 indicate that children who grow up in more advantaged communities completed more education. Furthermore, in supplemental analyses I found that this relationship between childhood neighborhoods and educational attainment was stronger for the most advantaged neighborhoods. Finally, I introduced the privilege index into a model with the disadvantage index.[16] Results indicate that the effect of the privilege index is larger in magnitude than the effect of the disadvantage index. Moreover, introducing the privilege index reduces the influence of the disadvantage index to statistical insignificance. Once again, these models indicate that neighborhood contextual effects influence residents in advantaged neighborhoods.

Discussion and Conclusion

Since Wilson's (1987) *The Truly Disadvantaged* recentered sociological attention on neighborhood inequality, the neighborhood effects literature has repeatedly demonstrated that childhood neighborhoods influence educational attainment above and beyond

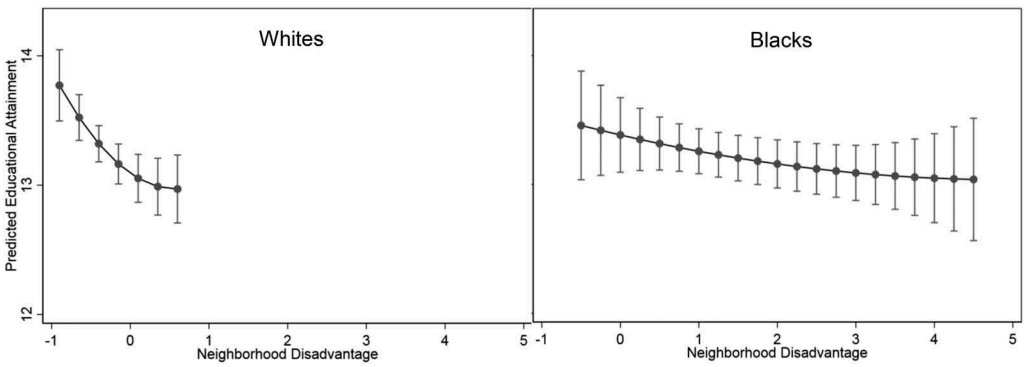

Figure 2. Predicted educational attainment by neighborhood disadvantage and resident race.

Note: For consistency with the prose, the *x*-axis is labeled as −1 to 4, but in the model the neighborhood disadvantage index was shifted so that the minimum was zero.

Table 4. Coefficients from regression predicting education using privilege index.

	Model 1 coefficient (SE)	Model 2 coefficient (SE)
Neighborhood factor		
Privilege index	0.18 (0.06)*	0.15 (0.07)*
Disadvantage index		−0.08 (0.05)
Individual demographics		
White	0.00 (0.10)	−0.13 (0.13)
Female	0.58 (0.07)*	0.58 (0.07)*
Childhood controls		
Parents' income	0.04 (0.01)*	0.04 (0.01)*
Parents' years in school	0.29 (0.02)*	0.29 (0.02)*
Proportion of years parents married	0.62 (0.14)*	0.57 (0.14)*
Number of siblings	−0.17 (0.04)*	−0.16 (0.04)*
Number of moves	−0.06 (0.02)*	−0.06 (0.02)*
Constant	13.31 (0.08)	13.42 (0.11)
Between R^2	0.3921	0.3929
N—individuals (families)	2,227 (969)	2,227 (969)

*Denotes that the coefficient is statistically significantly different from zero with a p-value ≤ 0.0.5.

parental and individual characteristics (Chetty, Hendren, and Katz 2016; Massey et al. 2013; Turley 2003; Wodtke, Harding, and Elwert 2011). The majority of the theoretical discussions and analytical conclusions in this literature focus on disadvantaged neighborhoods and their detrimental impact on residents (Johnson 2013; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2000). However, some research has also focused on the contextual effects of advantaged neighborhoods (Brooks-Gunn et al. 1993; Johnson 2010, 2013; Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2000). These studies have found that neighborhoods with limited disadvantage have equitable, if not stronger, structural effects on residents' educational attainment. Nevertheless, these studies operationalize neighborhood effects with only one time point in respondents' childhoods.

The present study expands the study of advantaged neighborhoods by utilizing respondents' entire childhoods to measure neighborhood context (Alvarado 2016; Sharkey and Elwert 2011; Wodtke, Harding, and Elwert 2011). Findings suggest neighborhood structural effects are asymmetrical. In fact, neighborhood contextual effects are strongest for White residents in the most advantaged spaces. These results suggest that educational inequality is driven by the compounding privileges of the most advantaged residents.

Given the limited number of studies on average or advantaged neighborhoods, especially ethnographies, it remains unclear exactly how the advantages compound within neighborhoods to enhance the educational attainment and thus socioeconomic opportunities of the privileged. It is also unclear exactly why White residents benefit more from privileged neighborhoods than their Black neighbors. Previous research illuminates that racially segregated networks, racialized tracking in public schools, and racially separate peer groups funnel opportunities to White children even when their Black peers are in the same neighborhoods and schools (Royster 2003; Turley 2003). These mechanisms are likely at play in the presented findings, yet future research should further investigate the processes within advantaged neighborhoods that enable residents generally and White residents specifically to succeed in education. Additionally, quantitative scholars should investigate further the effects of affluent neighborhoods by incorporating neighborhood privilege indexes into their analyses.

In short, more research is needed to create an explicit and robust theory of advantaged neighborhoods and how they facilitate the intergenerational transmission of socioeconomic privilege. Conducting research on these mechanisms will enable researchers to propose new tax benefits, federal policies, and neighborhood programs that can ensure that advantage is equitably distributed and not unduly concentrated. Nevertheless, even without future studies on advantaged neighborhoods, this research demonstrates a need for neighborhood studies and interventions to consider the truly advantaged.

Reframing the neighborhood effects conversation to encompass the influences of advantaged neighborhoods does not diminish the very real and detrimental socioeconomic and physical consequences that Black and poor families in impoverished Black neighborhoods endure. In fact, the results of this research reaffirm that socioeconomic opportunities are unequally distributed across U.S. residents, which has negative implications for the most disadvantaged. However, when the focus is exclusively on disadvantaged communities, the implication is often that urban marginalized neighborhoods are especially ineffective and thus responsible for the observed disparities (Small 2015). Yet, what this research suggests is that the observed inequalities are due to the privileges in advantaged communities. Thus, policy interventions should concentrate less on moving individual families to "better" neighborhoods or targeting specific communities for economic development. Instead, scholars and practitioners should consider solutions that deliberately address compounding neighborhood advantage. If, like Wilson, we want to rectify the injustices faced by the truly disadvantaged, we must also consider the truly advantaged.

Notes

1. In the late 1990s, the PSID added immigrant families to reflect the increase in immigration since 1968. However, these added families do not yet have enough data to meet the conditions of this study. Given the findings of Howell and Emerson (2017), I operationalize all multiracial individuals as the racial group lower on the ethnoracial hierarchy.
2. After 1997, PSID conducted surveys biannually. Thus, depending on the respondents' birth year, they might be interviewed at age 25 and age 27 but not age 26. For these individuals, we use their educational obtainment at age 27.
3. Additional disadvantage indexes were considered with various neighborhood characteristics such as proportion with at least a high school diploma, mobility rate, unemployment rate, and average room per capita. Results were comparable to those presented in the article and one additional index, the neighborhood privilege index, is used as a robustness check. I chose the three variables used in the study because of their theoretical relevance to the literature's primary arguments.
4. Cronbach's alphas measure the internal consistency between variables. Over time the Black population has desegregated and become less concentrated in poor tracts with high proportions of single-parent families. Hence, the disadvantaged index's Cronbach's alphas have decreased.
5. Given that not all places were assigned census tracts or BNAs (rural tracts) in the 1970 census, the neighborhood disadvantage index was calculated starting in 1980. Because the sample was born between 1975 and 1985, this means that for some individuals the neighborhoods they lived in during the first few years of their childhood were not included in the averages.
6. Scholars often combine "disadvantaged" (i.e., poverty rate) and "privileged" (i.e., proportion with bachelor's degrees) neighborhood characteristics into one factor (e.g., Chetty, Hendren, and Katz 2016; Turley 2003; Vartanian and Buck 2005; Vartanian and Houser 2010; Wodtke, Harding, and Elwert 2011). I explore such combinations starting with seven different

variables common in the literature, including Black proportion, poverty, single-parent families, median income, bachelor's proportion, unemployment rate, and percentage in professional or managerial occupations. However, internal consistency is higher when these variables are divided into two indexes. Moreover, the correlation between the disadvantaged and privileged index is only −0.4457 in 1980, −0.4826 in 1990, −0.5925 in 2000, and −0.5722 in 2010. These findings echo Small, Manduca, and Johnston's (2018) research, which suggests that poverty and wealth coexist within neighborhoods. Using two indexes enables me to capture the existing neighborhood heterogeneity.

7. PSID to date has only allowed respondents to choose from binary gender categories.
8. All models were also run with regional controls. However, region was not substantively or statistically significant and thus was not included in the final models.
9. Though the exact dollar amounts are displayed in the descriptive tables, for the models, income was divided by 10,000 so that coefficients were easier to interpret.
10. Alternative approaches include parental educational attainment at one point in time or the highest educational attainment in the entire time period. These approaches, however, lose some of the complexity available in the data. For example, consider a hypothetical family whose father is college educated but whose mother has a high school diploma. The father dies when the child is 5. Though this child will benefit from having a father who was college educated, he or she was primarily raised by his or her high school–educated mother. Thus, the child's educational attainment will likely reflect this fact. The temporal approach enables us to capture this complexity.
11. Previous scholars have used sibling fixed effects models to examine within-family differences net of unobserved family-level confounders. Although most siblings have slightly different neighborhood conditions across their childhoods, the vast majority of families remain in socioeconomic and racially similar communities (Sampson 2012; Sharkey 2013; Sharkey and Elwert 2011). In fact, familial race persist as one of the largest determinants of neighborhood location (Besbris 2016; Howell and Emerson 2018; Howell and Korver-Glenn 2018; Korver-Glenn 2018). Thus, fixed effects models are unable to capture how neighborhood effects differ across the most and least advantaged neighborhoods.
12. To be clear, neighborhoods can have differing values on individual variables and the same neighborhood disadvantaged factor because they are composite scores. Thus, the proportions provided here are simply the mean values across all neighborhoods with a particular factor score.
13. This is the average proportion for neighborhoods with a neighborhood disadvantage score greater than 4.5.
14. In addition, supplemental models using a hybrid approach found the both within-family (fixed effects) coefficients and between-family (random effects) coefficients were comparable in magnitude, direction, and statistical significance to the results presented in Table 2.
15. Before I introduced the quadratic term, I shifted the neighborhood disadvantage index to the right such that the minimum value was zero instead of negative one. This ensures that the quadratic term is distinct for the positive and negative values.
16. Although the two are correlated ($r = 0.53$), multicollinearity is not an issue in the model. See endnote 6 for further explanation.

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