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The Role of the Neighborhood in Making Welfare Reform Possible

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This article will analyze the role of the neighborhood in making welfare reform possible. It will consider the neighborhood and its environment as a context for welfare reform, the influence of neighborhood conditions and effects, recent neighborhood theory building, the neighborhood as a source of relevant values, and finally neighborhood programs that contribute to welfare reform.

Key words: welfare reform, neighborhood, social values, social capital, collective efficacy, personal responsibility, self-sufficiency, personal and family sustainability, neighborhood programs, multi-service center

The great recession of 2008-2009 and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (The Recovery Act) have stimulated a new debate concerning how to implement welfare reform in the United States. Despite the fact that the Recovery Act included a program for neighborhood stabilization to respond to increasing housing foreclosures, with few exceptions in the welfare reform debate, the neighborhood has not been considered as a resource to overcome barriers to employment, as a source of neighborhood conditions, or as a context for the experience of work and raising children (Koss, 2008; Siegel, Green, Abbott, & Mogul, 2007; Steptoe & Feldman, 2001).

This seems contrary to classic studies suggesting that the...
neighborhood environment and conditions are related to the labor market, employability, and welfare receipt. William Julius Wilson (1991) suggested labor force is associated with the social environment in the neighborhood in two ways: (1) People in an environment that forces weak labor force attachment, and have similar limited educational and occupational skills, confront greater risk of persistent poverty. This mindset is embodied in the neighborhoods in which individuals reside. It impacts prospects of marriage to a stable breadwinner, and the overall context in which people live; and (2) “The social context has significant implications for the socialization of youth with respect to their future attachment to the labor force” (p. 10). A youth from a family with a steady breadwinner and a neighborhood where most of the adults are employed will tend to develop some disciplined habits associated with steady employment.

Vartanian (1999a), using data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, showed that the neighborhood economic conditions of adolescents were related to their future labor market success. In a related study, he showed that childhood neighborhood conditions were related to adult welfare use (Vartanian, 1999b). His findings suggest that living in a disadvantaged neighborhood is negatively related to future employment and labor market success. In a later study, Vartanian, Buck, and Gleason (2007), using the same data sources, found that childhood neighborhood disadvantage has negative effects on adult neighborhood quality for those living in the lowest quality race-specific neighborhoods. Blacks tended to live in more disadvantaged neighborhoods than whites and had fewer choices of advantaged neighborhoods to live in as adults.

As a response to the lack of consideration of the neighborhood in the welfare reform debate, this article will analyze the role of the neighborhood in making welfare reform possible. It will review changes in the debate occasioned by the great recession and the Recovery Act. Then it will respond to these changes by considering: the neighborhood and its environment as a context for welfare reform; the influence of neighborhood conditions and effects; recent neighborhood theory building; the neighborhood as a source of relevant values; and finally, neighborhood programs that contribute to welfare reform.
The Great Recession, Welfare Reform and Social Values

The great recession of 2008-2009, which began in September 2008 with the failure of a financial institution (Lehman Brothers, and the threatened demise of others, e.g., Citibank, Merrill Lynch), changed the framework for capitalist enterprise and forced a new look at social and entitlement programs and the role of welfare reform. With lack of regulation and new financial instruments (credit default swaps, derivatives, collateralized debt obligations, mortgage-backed securities), the average wage earners and investors were unable to explain the huge drop in the stock market, threats to their financial security, housing foreclosures, job losses, and increasing unemployment. Values of unlimited opportunity or personal responsibility—hallmarks of capitalist enterprise—seem inadequate to explain the greed and avarice threatening the lifestyles of most Americans.

On February 17, 2009, four weeks after his inauguration, President Barack Obama signed into law a $787 billion economic stimulus package officially known as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (The Recovery Act). On the face of the political debate, this was meant to stimulate the economy and job growth. Yet this act is also one of the greatest social welfare legislations in American history. In the health care realm, the spending included $87 billion for Medicaid, 24.7 billion to subsidize private health insurance for people who lose or have lost their jobs, $19.2 billion for health information technology, and $10 billion for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) (Steinbrook, 2009). The Recovery Act also created a Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) Emergency Contingency Fund (funded at $5 billion), under which states can receive 80 percent federal funding for spending increases in funding years (FYs) 2009 or 2010 over FYs 2007 or 2008 in certain categories of TANF-related expenditures (Lower-Basch, 2009). These include basic assistance (cash grants to low income families), non-recurrent short-term benefits, and subsidized employment (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2009). The National Association of State TANF Administrators (2009) indicated that the program guidance was truly designed to get temporary assistance contingency funds flowing to states rapidly.
The Recovery Act, and particularly its welfare provisions, has stimulated a new debate about the values underlying welfare reform and American social values in general. Writing in *Human Events: The National Conservative Weekly*, Rector and Bradley (2009), criticize the recovery act, indicating that,

> under the stimulus bill, the federal government will pay 80% of cost for each new family that a state enrolls in welfare; this matching rate is far higher than that provided through the old AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) program. The stimulus bill thus eliminates the reform goal of reducing dependency and returns to the old policy of providing states incentives to build up their welfare caseloads. (p. 8)

This concern about encouraging dependency ignores the current welfare emergency related to the loss of jobs in a recession. It also fails to point out that the stimulus bill provides only for a temporary program to last two years. This signals a growing debate about the values underlying welfare and whether they apply to all parties equally. When money centers are maximizing their profits at the expense of others, and paying large bonuses after accepting bailouts funded by taxpayers, the question of personal responsibility acquires new meaning and the concept of work opportunity assumes opportunity exists.

In accord with the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), the emphasis of the states in administering the TANF welfare program has been on "personal responsibility" and "work first," as primary forces for increasing income, living more productive lives, and ensuring family well-being (Pavetti, 2000). These goals were partially reinforced through time limits for receipt of cash benefits and sanctions for violation of employment and training rules (Danziger & Seefeldt, 2002; Lindhorst & Mancoske, 2006). Hawkins (2005) indicates "A focus on the concept of 'self-sufficiency' —and its related terms 'independence,' 'self reliance,' and 'self supporting' have become the embodiment of poverty reduction policy" (p. 77).

Personal responsibility and self-sufficiency alone do not respond to the need for collective and collaborative responses
in periods of economic urgency. Recent Census Bureau data show the nation lost substantial ground in 2008 on poverty and incomes (Pavetti, 2009). The number living in poverty jumped by 2.6 million to 39.8 million people. The poverty rate rose to 13.2%, the highest since 1997. This includes only the earliest months of the recession; the figures for 2009 will look much higher. In the present economic situation, if neighborhood conditions deteriorate, more collective responses seem necessary.

Neighborhood Conditions and Effects

Several recent studies have shown the importance of neighborhood conditions and effects. Siegel, Green, Abbott and Mogul (2007), in a study conducted for the State of Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, developed an index of neighborhood conditions. Specific neighborhood conditions composed the index: unsupervised children or teens; lack of recreational programs for children; assaults/fights; vandalism; use or sale of drugs; lack of police supervision; vehicle break-ins, rundown/abandoned houses, poor street lighting; thefts; gangs; and guns. The index, based on the above conditions, was related to quality of life for leavers (Tau B = -.187, p < .05) and returners to welfare (Tau B = -.196, p < .01). They showed that the neighborhood conditions of those who returned to welfare were significantly different from the conditions in the neighborhoods of those who had left welfare and not returned, especially in use and sale of drugs and presence of guns. An alarming 71 percent of returners indicated the use or sale of drugs in the neighborhood, compared with a still high 51 percent of leavers, whereas 42 percent of returners reported the sale of guns in the neighborhood compared with 27 percent of leavers. Sixty-four percent of leavers and 61 percent of returners indicated the presence of unsupervised teenagers in the neighborhood. For returners particularly, the combination of availability of drugs, unsupervised teens in the neighborhood, and availability of guns in the neighborhood seemed potent.

Steptoe and Feldman (2001) indicate that people in lower socioeconomic areas report more problems with the neighborhoods in which they live. They showed a positive relationship between a scale of neighborhood problems (litter in the street,
smells and fumes, fear of walking around after dark, problems with dogs, noise from traffic or other homes, lack of entertainment, traffic and road safety, lack of places to shop, vandalism, and disturbance by neighbors and youngsters) and lack of social capital, poor health, and individual deprivation levels. The scale was also related to psychological stress and inability to carry out the tasks of daily living, both of which can interfere with the capacity to work.

Mulia, Schmidt, Bond, Jacobs, & Korcha (2008) utilized data from the Welfare Client Longitudinal Study which followed a representative sample of poor women with children receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) over a 4-year period. The study was conducted in a metropolitan county in Northern California which was selected for its demographic and geographic heterogeneity and was concerned about issues that affected problem drinking among low income women (on welfare). A “stress process model” specified psychological stress and problem drinking as a function of exposure to severe economic hardship; stressful life events; and disadvantaged, unsafe neighborhoods. Neighborhood disorder was measured by averaging across eight items on the perceived frequency of the following neighborhood occurrences: (1) drug arrests or busts; (2) people being mugged; (3) people selling drugs; (4) drive-by shootings; (5) people sleeping in public places at night; (6) homes being robbed; (7) arrests for public drunkenness; and (8) teenagers loitering during school. Approximately three-quarters (74%) of the women lived in neighborhoods characterized by disorder, evidenced most commonly by teenage loitering during school hours, drug-related arrests, or people selling drugs. Both neighborhood disorder and stressful events were correlated positively with psychological distress and problem drinking. “Moreover, a 1-unit increase in the neighborhood disorder score—for example, from never observing any indicators of neighborhood disorder to observing all indicators ‘sometimes’—increased the odds of a transition to problem drinking by 94 percent” (p. 1287).

With findings like these suggesting the importance of neighborhood conditions, the separation of personal responsibility and self-sufficiency from conditions found in one’s personal
surroundings may be artificial. Improving the neighborhood and its barriers to quality of life may be as important to labor market success as addressing other barriers to employment.

Furthermore, it may be that neighborhood characteristics that affect the ability to work can affect the ability to obtain child care. The ability to access child care may be influenced by the inevitable hurdles faced by those living in an impoverished environment. Where crime, drugs, and violence are rampant in neighborhood with high rates of poverty, it may be difficult to find a trustworthy child care provider nearby (Siegel & Abbott, 2007). Having to transport a child to a more distant destination may create additional obstacles to getting to work. Therefore, neighborhood conditions may be neglected variables in the struggle to secure child care, a critical barrier to successful employment.

Methodological Issues

Recent studies have supported the importance of neighborhood effects on a variety of poverty issues and other social problems. However, there are often methodological issues in the studies. Specific characteristics of the neighborhood (e.g., attitudes towards drugs and violence, living in a high poverty neighborhood, or a neighborhood populated by single mothers) are often chosen as indices of neighborhood effects and compared to the effects of other variables such as family or peers. Haney (2008), echoing Jencks and Mayer (1990), laments that researchers often rely on a “black box” neighborhood effect, a-theoretically utilizing neighborhood poverty rates to explain individual outcomes. He suggests, “even more importantly, no prior research on the employment and welfare receipt of unmarried urban women accounts for neighborhood characteristics as a focal part of the study” (p. 5). This seems largely true except for a few studies mentioned above. For the findings on neighborhood effects to be meaningful, various aspects of the neighborhood environment should be included in measures of the neighborhood. Otherwise, the specific influences of the neighborhood and neighborhood conditions are underestimated. It seems the more extensive the measures of the neighborhood, the more one tends to find neighborhood effects.
Another issue is that neighborhood effects studies often analyze negative social conditions and their relationship to social problems. This ignores the potential strength of neighborhoods in creating ties and bonds, social supports, and collaborative activities. Saleebey’s (2004) seminal article begins from a strengths perspective when he discusses the power of place. “There is a sense of the environment that social work has to a significant degree, ignored—that is, the immediate, proximal, often small environment where people play out much of their lives” (p. 7). In discussing the “power of small” he notes that we live most of our lives in a small compass (rooms, apartments, city blocks) and from these contexts “for the rest of our lives our well-being is dependent upon getting about the right amount of stimulation and nurturance” (p. 8). The power of small includes the idea of neighborhood which “allows us here to explore the power of geographical/interactional smallness in terms of the power of context” (p. 10).

Neighborhood Theory Building

There has been a great deal of theory building designed to help us understand neighborhood characteristics, their affects on residents’ lives, and the potential of the neighborhood to promote efficacy. An important contribution for the understanding of neighborhood effects has been the development of social capital theory (Osterling, 2007; Putnam, 2000). Putnam (2000), in his use of the term “social capital,” defined it broadly “as connections among individuals and social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (p. 19). The development of social capital theory has meant a shift from solely individual interpretations of human behavior to an emphasis on the importance of social processes, ties, bonding, and the potential strength of networks within neighborhoods. As such, various types of social capital have been conceptualized to emphasize the functions of different types of ties. Typically a distinction has been made between bonding social capital or intra-community relationships and bridging social capital or extra-community relations (Brisson & Usher, 2007). Bridging social capital encompasses outward-looking networks that connect diverse groups of people and
can be useful as a source of information or external assets. Bonding social capital refers to inclusive and dense social networks within fairly homogenous groups that can be a source of support and strong in-group trust and reciprocity (Osterling, 2007; Putnam, 2000). Social capital theory emphasizes the importance of "weak ties" or social networks that exist beyond one's social group and may create opportunities beyond what is usually available in one's own social group. Social capital theory offers the hope that low income families, despite limited access to resources, can build capital or wealth through investments in relationships with friends, neighbors, politicians, police, business owners, and everyday people.

Despite its contribution to an understanding of neighborhood ties, social capital theory has been criticized in several areas. The concept may have become too broad with too many interpretations, so it means many different things to different people, thereby having an umbrella effect and diminishing its utility (Brisson, 2009; Brisson & Usher, 2007; Sampson & Graif, 2009). Another concern is that other forms of capital (e.g., financial and human) can be accumulated in arithmetic terms such that the more you use, the less you have, where social capital with its emphasis on ties seems to increase the more you use it. It is not as tangible as human capital because it exists in the "relationships among persons" (Coleman, 1988, pp. S100-S101). Additionally, social capital theory may lack context (Brisson & Usher, 2007). Social capital may not be effective if other resources are lacking or because of forces in the economic and political environment. Social capital may be trumped by more macro-effects or social policy. Economic capital, political power, and neighborhood resources may all serve to enhance the ability of social capital to yield a positive return to the community (Osterling, 2007; Warren, Thompson, & Saegert, 2001). As a moral concept, social capital may be neutral, as ties, bonds, and relationships within neighborhoods may be used for negative (e.g., crime and drugs) as well as positive effects (Patillo-McCoy, 1999; Sampson, 2004). Finally, social capital may be used in different ways in poor neighborhoods than in more economically sufficient ones. For example, it may be used to acquire basic necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter. Thus, the types of resources that result from
social capital may be different in poor neighborhoods (Cohen, 2001).

To address the limitations of social capital theory, the limitations of parochial social ties to create social control, and the changing nature of personal relationships in neighborhoods, Sampson and colleagues (Sampson, 2003; Sampson & Graif, 2009; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997) have proposed an emphasis on the concept “collective efficacy.” Sampson (2003) explains,

A major feature of communities that we have closely examined is the capacity of residents to achieve social control over the environment and to engage in collective action for the common good. Strong ties among neighbors are simply no longer the norm in many urban communities, because friends and support networks are increasingly organized in a parochial local fashion. Weak ties may be critical for establishing social resources, such as job referrals, because they integrate the community by bringing together otherwise disconnected groups. (p. S58)

For urbanites, when strong ties are tightly restricted geographically, especially in low income communities, this may actually produce an environment that discourages a response to local problems. Therefore, Sampson and colleagues focused on mechanisms that facilitate social control without requiring strong ties or association, highlighting the combination of a working trust and shared willingness of residents to intervene in social control. Sampson and Graif (2009) indicate,

This linkage of trust and cohesion with shared expectations for control was defined as neighborhood ‘collective efficacy.’ Just as self-efficacy is situated rather than global (one has self-efficacy relative to a particular task), a neighborhood’s efficacy exists relative to a specific task such as maintaining public order. (p. 1581)

Distinguishing between the resource potential represented by personal network ties, on one hand, and shared expectation among neighbors for engagement
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in social control represented by collective efficacy, on the other, helps clarify disputes about neighborhood social capital. (p. 1582)

Sampson further (2004) indicates:

Moving away from a focus on private ties, use of the term ‘collective efficacy’ is meant to signify an emphasis on shared beliefs in a neighborhood’s capability for action to achieve an intended effect, coupled with an active sense of engagement on the part of residents. Some density of social networks is essential, to be sure, especially networks rooted in social trust. But the key theoretical point is that networks have to be activated to be ultimately meaningful. (p. 161)

An emphasis on collective efficacy which is task specific and goal oriented is more definable than social capital and paves the way for action. For this author, this still leaves the question of context: how does collective efficacy work in an economic recession?

Underlying Values in the Neighborhood

The discussion so far helps make explicit some of the reasons there has been little attention paid to the neighborhood and neighborhood conditions as barriers to employment or as a context for raising children in the welfare reform debate. Social capital theory emphasizes ties between neighbors, norms of reciprocity, and trustworthiness that arise from them. Collective efficacy provides an emphasis on interdependence, task specificity, and the accomplishment of mutual goals.

It seems at first glance that an emphasis on self-sufficiency—a major goal of social policies and welfare reform legislation since the 1960s—is at odds with concepts emphasizing mutuality and collective action. Various interpretations of the meaning of self-sufficiency have been proposed, including “a shift from dependency to self-sufficiency” (Benning, 1996; Hawkins, 2005), non-reliance on public assistance, holding a paying job or being in a state of well-being, with limited reliance on welfare benefits (Cancian & Meyer, 2004). Therefore, it seems there are different assumptions underlying what is
valued in the neighborhood and the values underlying welfare reform. A reconciliation is needed between value assumptions in both areas, so that neighborhood conditions as well as solutions can re-emerge as part of the welfare reform debate.

One is reminded that, in this country, welfare (e.g., TANF) is a selective program with a means test that carries a great deal of stigma. It is in accord with a residual conception of social welfare, in which it is seen as a short-term back up to the normal institutions of society (see, for example, Karger & Stoesz, 2007). An emphasis on work is promoted, with time limits and sanctions, as well as individualized training. Personal responsibility, as in the PRWORA, would seem to come from a moral perspective regarding the sufficiency and worthiness of those on welfare and is concordant with a work test of one's value.

If we follow the work of Wilson, Vartanian, and Sampson, both the individual and the neighborhood in which individuals reside may be victims of similar processes in society, including concentrated disadvantage and segregation and lack of access to networks of employment. More recently, these processes may include the result of economic abuse, unemployment, and housing foreclosures, all of which affect the neighborhood. In this context, "self-sufficiency" and "personal responsibility" may be oversimplifying the difficulty of welfare recipients or the underclass in gaining social capital or collective efficacy. Coulton (2003) suggests:

from an ecological perspective, employment is not simply the result of individual attributes such as skills and ambitions, but is embedded within a social, economic, and physical context. Some neighborhoods or communities confer advantages in the search for employment and some, particularly those where many welfare recipients live, present employment disadvantages. Settlement patterns, infrastructure, social relationships, and institutional arrangements within neighborhoods, cities, and metropolitan regions can be positive forces or impediments to achieving the employment and self-sufficiency goals of welfare reform. (p. 160)
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Self-sufficiency and personal responsibility in the sense of moving people from welfare to work and from dependency to independence may be legitimate as objects of social policy. However, they may be limiting in overcoming poverty, locational disadvantage, and neighborhood effects, as well as economic and physical stratification. From a social psychological perspective, the attitudes of society toward the poor, disadvantaged, and minorities may limit the viability of self-sufficiency and personal responsibility. Collective efficacy and a focus on using the neighborhood to promote interdependence and shared social goals would seem additive. It would seem efficacy and sufficiency both are goal oriented and related to well-being and that well-being of the self and the collective are mutually supportive.

Limits of Self-sufficiency

While self-sufficiency is a widespread goal of social policy, the use of the term is problematic. It becomes particularly offensive when the economic institutions of society (e.g., the banks and others) develop policies which accumulate risk and seem oblivious to the economic plight of the average consumer. Hawkins (2005), in reviewing use of the term, indicates the following reservations: (a) self-sufficiency is difficult to define, and, thus, even more difficult to evaluate; (b) the term is itself limited, unattainable, and insufficient for policy making; (c) views of self-sufficiency that assume paid work and lack of "dependency" on income-based government benefits belie how people of any income bracket actually live; and (d) the term and its concomitant policy approach suggest that people who are not "self-sufficient" are somehow "insufficient" (Bratt & Keyes, 1997). Bratt and Keyes also argue that nearly all American citizens, regardless of income, receive some form of government assistance. They offer a "continuum of self-sufficiency" with different levels representing varying degrees of self-sufficiency. Hawkins (2005) also adds:

Such notions suggest that the focus on self-sufficiency, independence, and dependence should be reframed as interdependence. Even the most rugged individualist likely benefits from a number of governmental and
non-governmental resources from public housing subsidies to tax deferred college loans to tax deductions on vacation homes and primary residence. (p. 80)

Freeman (1997) indicates how the emphasis on self-sufficiency by many leaders is based on their world view and value orientation. Norm-based definitions, which are restrictive or punitive towards individuals who do not achieve these goals, may deny the influence of the environment. They also may deny the potential of group behavior, social supports, shared responsibility, reciprocity and mutual independence, as well as power across systems, which are more in accord with social capital and collective efficacy.

Personal and Family Sustainability and Social Values

In the search for values to support the connection between the neighborhood and welfare reform, we can consider an alternate goal of "personal and family sustainability" (Hawkins, 2005). Hawkins (2005) suggests that:

personal and family sustainability is based on the premise that society can more effectively reduce poverty using a model that is multifaceted, culturally appropriate, and reflective of the reality of poverty and welfare usage. Sustainability is in fact, widely used as a concept and goal for environmental and global economic issues, and has recently made leeway into the community and social development areas in the United States. (p. 82)

The ecological/environment framework, the community development focus, and the social justice perspectives all share an understanding of sustainability as a holistic examination of the human condition, focusing on creating unified solutions rather than incremental and patchwork policies. Agyeman (2005) states, "Achieving sustainable development requires an emphasis on quality of life, on present and future generations on justice and equity in resource allocation, and on living within ecological limits" (p. 674).

At the community level, sustainability and sustainable
development both concentrate on community development that is future-oriented and focuses on renewal and replenishing resources. Furthermore, the social justice perspective offers a useful connection between sustainability and social welfare policy (Garces, 2003).

Hawkins (2005) attempts to transfer these ideas to the personal and family level by suggesting that the personal and family sustainability (PFS) approach reflects the complexity of poverty and is consistent with the community development idea of sustainable communities. From this perspective he defines personal and family sustainability as "maximizing full human potential to establish long-term economic, physical, psychological, and social well-being for individuals and their families" (p. 86).

In the present economic environment, sustainability as a concept has gained more meaning as people struggle to maintain their homes and their jobs and, thus, sustain their lifestyles. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 includes substantial funding for a number of important housing and community development programs, including the Public Housing Capital Fund, Community Development Block grants, and the Neighborhood Stabilization Program. The latter was created under the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008 (HERA), "to support state and local efforts to stabilize neighborhoods with high numbers of abandoned and foreclosed upon homes" (National Association of Housing and Redevelopment, 2009). Just as poverty became more legitimate and less stigmatized under the great depression, and work programs characterized the New Deal era, with the housing foreclosures and high unemployment of the recession of 2008-2009, neighborhood stabilization, a.k.a. sustainability, becomes more permissible. When large numbers of people are in similar situations together, it mediates against stigma.

Balance of Social Values

A review of the welfare reform and neighborhood effects and theories literature has suggested a balance of social values to reconcile welfare reform efforts and developmental efforts
within the neighborhood. Key aspects of this model are that it applies to all neighborhoods, it is non-exclusionary, and it balances varying perspectives on social justice.

As a social welfare goal and neighborhood value in this country, it would seem to this author that sustainability needs some balance. As a capitalist country, the United States emphasizes the value of equity; what one gets and what one is entitled to depend on the value of one's work and one's level of contribution. From this perspective, personal and family sustainability may seem utopian or lacking personal responsibility. Sustainability will be more acceptable as a value if it includes personal responsibility.

Personal responsibility seems more appropriate as a social welfare and neighborhood value than self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency is difficult to define and identify; it seems to be related to its opposite (insufficiency). It may undermine group and neighbor activities, and it carries the stigma of welfare. Personal responsibility, on the other hand, signifies that everyone has a part in determining their ultimate future. This includes putting forth their best effort and making contributions to the society.

Personal responsibility, however, has little meaning unless it applies to all members of the collective, not only the most disadvantaged, stigmatized, or those who are on welfare. Captains of industry, money managers, and legislators all are subject to this value. Therefore, it argues against corruption and unmitigated self interests, as well as unsubstantiated welfare dependency. Personal responsibility connotes universal public responsibility.

We need to recognize that people do not develop and are not sustained on their own; they need the support and developmental efforts of the collective (in the community). In the United States, with its immigrant tradition and history of succession, gentrification, and segregation, the neighborhood collective has been associated with one's identity.

Furthermore, sustainability needs an action component suggested by efficacy. Collective efficacy as a neighborhood value emphasizes a bias toward action and is contrary to norm-based conceptions of self-sufficiency in which only individual problems and pathology are seen as primary barriers to employment. Collective efficacy in being task oriented
and related to specific goals addresses the problems of social capital theory, which for many has become too diffuse and unmeasurable as a means of determining characteristics of the neighborhood. However, it does include neighborhood ties and trust necessary for social support. This leads us back to a more structural-functional interpretation, in which different neighborhood structures and programs can be considered efficacious for various tasks. In this context, collective efficacy also has a broader societal meaning, as all citizens have responsibility for insuring a just, tolerant and sustainable society.

Neighborhood Programs

The neighborhood is crucial—both as a context for social policy that relates to welfare reform and as a source of values and consequent programs to address the poverty of those on welfare. From a macro perspective, welfare recipients disproportionately reside in neighborhoods with high concentrations of welfare receipt and social distress, as well as residential segregation (see Brock et al., 2002). Social policy must address these neighborhood characteristics for welfare reform to be successful. This relates to values of collective efficacy, personal responsibility and family sustainability.

Though nominally not considered welfare programs, neighborhood strengthening programs such as community building, comprehensive community initiatives, and community development corporations must be mentioned as means of improving the social environment, and therefore, the social capital and collective efficacy of poor neighborhoods. Schriver (2004), following Walsh (1997), indicates community building takes a more comprehensive approach to poverty in theory and practice because it goes beyond analyzing poverty only in terms of jobs and income “but also as a web of interwoven problems that can lock families out of opportunity permanently” (Schriver, p. 498). In addition, community-building initiatives work toward poverty reduction at multiple levels to address economic, social, and political marginalization that lock people and communities into poverty. Central to community-building efforts is the idea of rebuilding a sense of community support and sustainability.
Austin and Lemon (2005) indicate comprehensive community initiatives (CCIs) are another type of neighborhood strengthening program.

CCI’s are large-scale approaches to improving conditions in poor neighborhoods through increased collaboration and coordination among various organizations within the neighborhood to address neighborhood poverty and fragmented service delivery... Local governments, community-based organizations and residents are typically involved in planning and implementing services that meet the needs of the neighborhoods, including workforce development, housing, public safety, infrastructure, environment, health, education, and other human services. (p. 87)

CCIs attempt to increase both the social capital in a community and the participation of residents in the planning and management of the CCI.

Community Development Corporations (CDCs) are one of the prime vehicles for delivering housing and other services to low income households. There is no one exact definition of CDCs, so their role is considered from several perspectives. Bratt and Rohe (2007) define them as follows:

Community development corporations, or CDCs, are non-profit organizations that produce and rehabilitate housing for low-income households, as well as sponsoring economic development and social service programs (e.g., commercial real estate development, childcare, and services for youth and the elderly). (p. 63)

Austin and Lemon (2005) indicate CDCs are nonprofit organizations governed by community boards that often include representatives from financial institutions, governments, or foundations. They most often are involved in housing development, homeownership assistance, encouraging resident involvement in neighborhood affairs, and economic, commercial and business development. CDCs are crucial for providing financial capital for neighborhood development efforts, including improving the physical structure of the neighborhood.
Squazzoni (2009) finds there is broad agreement that community organizations, in particular CDCs, are playing an increasingly pivotal role in mastering and fostering local economic development initiatives by bringing corporate business, civic organizations and public agencies into concrete collaborations. One problem with CDCs is that they need to be "financially responsible, savvy developers, but these roles may conflict with community advocacy" (Bratt & Rohe, 2007, p. 70). It is critically important to blend development with organizing to provide financial capital while maintaining social capital and collective efficacy.

Place-Based Strategies

Austin & Lemon (2005) propose "earnings and asset development to increase financial self-sufficiency" (p. 66), which has traditionally been a focus of many anti-poverty strategies. They divide earnings and asset development into two overall strategies: employment program strategies and asset development strategies. The former includes place-based strategies that target employment services to an entire neighborhood, linking low-income parents to "good jobs," and the use of work incentives and supports. The latter focuses on promoting banking and savings accounts, promoting low-income car and home ownership and linking families to the earned income Tax Credit (EITC).

In accord with its focus, this article will concentrate on placed-based strategies which make use of the values of social capital and collective efficacy. Targeting an entire neighborhood is considered helpful in linking low-income workers to a system of supports and services that would raise their income and benefits. Different strategies for targeting the neighborhood are mentioned in the literature and will be used here as examples (Molina & Howard, 2003). Austin and Lemon (2005) describe the neighborhood jobs initiative (NJI), developed by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, as a saturation strategy to target employment services to an entire neighborhood.

The goal of the NJI was to substantially increase employment and earnings among a large number of
residents within the targeted neighborhoods so that regular employment would become a community norm. Implemented from 1998 to 2001 in five high priority neighborhoods (Washington, D.C., Chicago, New York, Hartford and Forth Worth), each site adapted their programs using the following three components: (1) employment-related services and activities such as job development, training and counseling; (2) financial incentives to work, including increasing participants' use of the Earned Income Tax Credit, earnings disregards for TANF recipients, child care subsidies, Medicaid, food stamps and wage subsidies; and (3) community supports for work, including increasing the quality and quantity of residents' social networks to facilitate the sharing of information. (p. 67)

Molina and Howard (2003) describe another approach:

A second strategy was to see if there was a 'ripple effect' e.g. if a large number of people in the neighborhood obtain and retain good jobs that in turn would create positive changes in the neighborhood. These 'spillover effects' were intended to improve a wide range of neighborhood indicators including health, education and safety. (p. 5)

Ragan (2002) gives an example of yet another place-based strategy which uses the concept of the multi-service center, The Montgomery County Department of Job and Family Services (MCDJFS) in Ohio.

The most striking characteristic of the human service system in Montgomery County, Ohio is the size and scope of the Job Center. Located in a building that was previously a furniture warehouse in Dayton, the county seat, the Job Center has five and one half acres of office space under one roof. With ample parking and well served by the public transportation system, the Job Center is the locus of many human service programs, employment programs, and service providers. (p. 3)

This makes possible many community-based initiatives based on social values. MCDJFS has been instrumental in
developing the Targeted Community-Based Collaborative program, which complements the programs and services available at the Job Center by providing neighborhood-based supportive services. Social capital and collective efficacy are maximized through the "FISH" philosophy (based on the work style of fishmongers at the Pike Street market in Seattle), which is the center’s approach to customer service, as well as staff relationships. It emphasizes a positive, pro-active approach to interactions between staff and clients.

In Montgomery County, "one stop" really means one stop, as there are 47 partner agencies at the Job Center that provide government-administered programs and privately-administered services. "Because so many services are jointly located, it is easy for clients to determine where in the county they should go for services, and because all services are on site, accessing multiple services is simplified. In addition, because the emphasis is on employment, clients and the larger community see the Job Center as just that, rather than a welfare office." The value of personal responsibility is facilitated in this way.

With the possibility of many families facing termination of assistance due to the 36 month TANF time limit in Ohio, the county determined that a new strategy was needed with a range of supportive services. Thus relationships with Targeted Community-Based Collaboratives (TCBC) now provide "hard to serve" families with a range of supportive services. In accord with the value of family sustainability, these include:

- Family planning services
- Referral services for substance abuse and family violence
- Family crisis intervention
- Job search and placement assistance referrals
- Education and training referral
- Family life education
- Truancy intervention and counseling
- Juvenile justice intervention
- Youth and adult mentoring programs
Community education and community service networking

Tutorial and academic coaching (Ragan, 2002, pp. 5-6)

The TCBC target population is families with gross monthly income less than 200% of the Federal Poverty Guideline (FPG) living in neighborhoods with median family incomes below 200% of the FPG. There are now 30 such cooperatives in Montgomery County.

Neighborhood Self-Sufficiency Centers


While the principal tenet of the new welfare to work legislation was to move people into employment, the partnership recognized that successful, sustained family self-sufficiency would be obtained only by providing for the needs of the entire family in their own neighborhoods. (Schmidt & Austin, 2004, p. 218)

From this idea came the concept of developing neighborhood centers in areas where CalWORKs (need to define CalWORKs) participants needed them. From our prospective, values of family sustainability and collective efficacy were added to the usual self-sufficiency mix. After reviewing all submissions, six centers were selected to share in the $2 million federal welfare-to-work funding (plus $750,000 foundation funding.)

For example, the North County Consortium provides services to employed CalWORKSs participants who are still receiving aid and live in the northern part of Santa Clara County. The consortium is made up of businesses, agencies, and schools that have successfully served CalWORKS participants in the
past and offers job-retention services, case management, educational services, skills upgrade, child care, recreation, support services such as substance abuse and domestic violence workshops, and homeless services. According to Schmidt and Austin (2004),

The North County consortium has four neighborhood outreach centers located in high poverty areas at two elementary schools and two adult education centers. Each center has a site coordinator who provides case management services by assessing the customer's needs upon enrollment and assisting in developing a plan of action for reaching desired goals. (p. 224)

The adult education teachers in each center provide instruction on basic reading, writing, and math, while volunteers provide individual tutoring. At the elementary school sites, computer-assisted basic skills training is provided, along with an adult education instructor to guide students through the curriculum, monitor progress, and provide assessment and feedback. Families are encouraged to take part in the elementary school program called Even Start that provides child care and instruction for children while parents attend literacy class. (p. 225)

Neighborhood Jobs Pilot Initiative (NJPI)

Another example of a neighborhood place-based initiative is the Neighborhood Jobs Pilot Initiative, a public-private-sponsored neighborhood-based workforce development system. Svihula and Austin (2004) provide a case example that began as a partnership between the Alameda County Social Services Agency (SSA) and the Rockefeller Foundation in 1998. The primary difference between the NJPI and other community collaboratives is the focus on employment and training-based interventions. One example is the South Hayward Neighborhood Collaborative. The collaborative worked with Glad Tiding Church (GT) to establish on-site education and training services and the Glad Tidings Community Campus (GTCC), which offered high school and college programs as well as business training for the working poor and welfare
recipients. In January 1999, GT created the Institute for Success (IFS), which is a thirty-day Work First employment model that concentrates on job search activities, motivation, critical thinking skills, and retention.

The facility has a training center and lab with twelve computers and a computer library. Key components of the IFS program include personal plan development, weekly progress evaluation, a learning objectives workbook, self-esteem and personal development exercises, and interpersonal communication and job search strategies. Soft skills training, as well as customized job search, career, and family planning services, are provided through the IFS curriculum and staff. The Hayward Adult School provides on site computer, GED, English as a second language, vocational training (such as basic food preparation, carpentry, typist, and data entry), and certificate programs. The IFS enhances the thirty-day job club program with support services to assist with the transition to work. Measures of success [of those who enroll in the IFS program] are based on numbers of participants enrolled, placed in jobs, and job retention at thirty, sixty and ninety days. (Svihula & Austin, 2004, p. 195)

Summary

Much of the welfare reform literature has ignored the neighborhood as a context or environment for welfare reform, as well as a source of neighborhood support. Neighborhood theory building increases understanding of the influence of neighborhood conditions and neighborhood effects as forces influencing well-being and the ability to work. This opens up a broader consideration of social values to underlie welfare reform policy—values such as social capital, collective efficacy and family sustainability along with personal responsibility gain prominence. These, in turn, inform the type of neighborhood programs that make welfare reform possible.

There are a variety of neighborhood-based programs (some beyond the scope of this paper) that can help make welfare reform possible. These include: asset-based strategies, such as linking low income clients to new jobs, job incentives and
supports, and means of transportation; income programs, such as the earned income tax credit; and housing support programs (public housing, section 8). In accord with its focus, this article gave examples of three neighborhood strengthening programs (community building, comprehensive community initiatives and community development corporations) that can improve the environmental context for welfare reform. Finally, several placed-based strategies (neighborhood jobs initiative, multi-service centers, neighborhood self-sufficiency centers and the neighborhood job pilot initiative) which facilitate successful welfare reform were reviewed.

References


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