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Changing neighborhoods and occupations: Experiences of older African-Americans in Detroit

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Abstract

Neighborhood characteristics are relevant to understanding occupations and associated outcomes, yet few empirical studies have focused on neighborhood as the unit of analysis when examining person-environment-occupation relationships. The purpose of this report is to begin addressing that gap. We present findings from a qualitative investigation conducted as part of a larger mixed methods study of 100 African-Americans aged 55 and older living in a variety of neighborhood contexts. With a subsample of older adults ($n = 20$), we utilized participant-generated photos and photo-elicitation interviews to examine the question of how participation in everyday occupations changes (or not) for older African-Americans residing in urban neighborhoods that have undergone significant physical and socio-demographic changes. Data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach in combination with a constant comparative method. Occupational change was conceptualized as four primary types: (a) spatio-temporal changes to participation in occupation, (b) changes to social participation, (c) heightened vigilance during daily occupations, and (d) actions to preserve and protect the neighborhood. The findings provide insights about the ways that neighborhood deterioration is related to occupational change. We discuss the potential impact of participants' occupational changes on health and well-being, and we assess the issue of neighborhood and occupation as relevant to occupational justice in urban contexts.

Keywords

Neighborhoods; African-Americans; Photo elicitation interviews; Transactional perspective

The influence of environments on participation in everyday occupations has long been central to occupational science theory and scholarship. More recently, scholars have argued that environmental contexts indirectly shape what people consider as 'possibilities' for occupational engagement (Rudman, 2010; Rudman & Huot, 2013). In turn, the availability and nature of occupational opportunities (or the lack thereof) have the potential to impact health and well-being. One environment that occupational scientists have not yet well investigated, but that should be of concern to researchers, is the neighborhood.

Although administrative boundaries such as census tracts are commonly used to operationalize ‘neighborhoods’ for research purposes, how to best define a neighborhood remains contested (Cutchin, Eschbach, Mair, Ju, & Goodwin, 2011). Regardless of how neighborhoods are defined, three decades of research have established that neighborhood conditions are important to health (Evans, 2003; Kawachi & Berkman, 2003). For example, the quality of one’s neighborhood has been linked to increased morbidity (Barber, Hickson, Kiwachi, Subramanian, & Earls, 2015), mortality (Haan, Kaplan, & Camacho, 1987) and the degree to which individuals engage in a range of health behaviors including healthy dietary intake and physical activity (Thompson & Kent, 2014).

Neighborhood characteristics have been theorized as relevant in understanding occupations and associated outcomes (Stadnyk, Townsend, & Wilcock, 2010). Specifically, neighborhood as ‘place’ is conceptually important to occupation because they are a nearly universal aspect of life across populations and cultures, replete with shared occupations, rules, and rituals that contribute to the health and well-being of their members (Hamilton, 2004). Neighborhoods have been posited as an important mid-level unit of analysis for understanding occupation, because neighborhoods are an intermediate sized community that act as a functional mediator between the individual and the larger society (Christiansen & Townsend, 2004). Neighborhood conditions, in other words, can be viewed as an important site for the intersection of both individual level influences on occupation (e.g., habits, personal preferences, capabilities) and larger societal level influences (e.g., opportunities for employment or land use regulations). As such, research about the person-neighborhood-occupation relationship could provide important insights about how macro and micro-level influences transact and shape occupational engagement.

Despite the theoretical importance of neighborhoods to both occupation and health, scholars have noted that there are few empirical studies specifically focused on the neighborhood as the unit of analysis (Haak, Fange, Horstmann, & Iwarsson, 2008). The purpose of this report is to contribute empirical research about neighborhoods and occupation, and thereby begin to address that gap. We present findings from a qualitative study examining the role of neighborhoods in older African-Americans’ daily occupations in Detroit. Specifically, our research examined the question of how participation in everyday occupations changes (or not) for older African-Americans residing in urban neighborhoods that have undergone significant physical and socio-demographic changes. We focused our inquiry on urban dwelling older African-Americans in Detroit because, like many other ‘rust belt’ cities in the US, Detroit has undergone significant economic and socio-demographic changes which accelerated after the recession in 2008. While neighborhood change is constant anywhere, we hypothesized that because of the accelerated nature of neighborhood change in Detroit, residents would be more able to reflect on the relationship of their everyday occupations and their neighborhoods. We focused on older African-Americans because, in Detroit, African-Americans constitute 82% of the population and often reside in less desirable neighborhoods that have undergone disinvestment and related socio-demographic shifts (e.g., loss of employment, residential instability, and increasing crime) that may negatively affect health and occupation. Moreover, we anticipated that such changes may be especially significant for older residents because of their potentially longer-term relationship with their

neighborhoods and because many older African-Americans face aging in place in less than optimal urban environments (Byrnes, Lichtenberg, & Lysack, 2006).

The transactional perspective informed the way that we thought about the research question, data, and analysis. We drew upon transactionalism's attention to holistic situations and the way people respond to situational problems through inquiry and re-coordinate their relationship to the situation (Cutchin & Dickie, 2012; Dickie & Cutchin, 2013). We also viewed occupations as the product of and the means through which individuals constantly coordinated themselves and their environments (Cutchin, 2013). Further, the transactional perspective sensitized us to consider what the possible problematic situations might be that arise as part of everyday person-neighborhood negotiations among our sample and how occupations contribute to their resolution (Dickie, Cutchin, & Humphry, 2006). Through this orientation we therefore aimed to develop an initial understanding of the neighborhood and occupation relationship for our particular sample and thereby contribute to the development of research on neighborhoods in occupational science.

Methods

Sample and recruitment

The qualitative investigation was conducted as part of a larger mixed-methods study examining the relationship among daily occupations, neighborhood environmental stressors and the body's stress response (measured via salivary and hair cortisol) among 100 African-Americans aged 55 and older living across a wide range of neighborhoods in Detroit. Inclusion criteria for the study included self-identifying as African American, being age 55 or older, living within the city of Detroit, and being able to participate in daily occupations and move about the neighborhood environment without physical assistance from another person. The study protocol was approved by the authors' institutional review board and all participants were recruited and enrolled via approved informed consent procedures.

Participants for the larger study were recruited from the authors' institutional Participant Resource Pool (PRP). The PRP is a volunteer registry of 1400+ African-American individuals age 55 and older willing to participate in research of interest to them (Chadiha et al., 2011). From the PRP registry, we drew a stratified random sample of participants from five strata of neighborhood adversity as determined by a neighborhood (census tract) adversity index. That index was composed of the sum of three measures: poverty rate, proportion of housing units in less than good condition, and proportion of unoccupied housing units. Those measures were collected from the 2010 US Census and the 2009 Data Driven Detroit Residential Parcel Survey (Data Driven Detroit, 2009; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010) and transformed into z-scores to provide an equal weight for each within the index. We augmented random sampling with snowball sampling. The latter approach contributed 37% of the full sample of 100 participants.

From that sample of 100 older African-Americans, 20 participants were invited to participate in a qualitative portion of the study through purposive sampling intended to maximize variation on neighborhood adversity. Specifically, during the informed consent process for the larger study, participants were asked if they would be willing to participate in

the additional qualitative component (if so, informed consent was obtained). We invited participants into the qualitative component in the order that they were enrolled into the larger study until we met our recruitment goal for the qualitative component. Our goal was to have 20% of the larger sample participate in the qualitative component ($N = 20$) and to maximize variation across the five strata of neighborhood adversity within the qualitative sample. Although we made efforts to recruit equal numbers of males and females into our qualitative sample, fewer males agreed to participate both in the larger study and in the qualitative component. We were not able to recruit in equal numbers across the strata for the qualitative component, but we did obtain substantial variation by census tract and strata.

Participant characteristics

The average age of the qualitative sample was 72 years old and 16 of the participants were female. Four lived in the least adverse (best) neighborhood stratum, seven lived in the second best, and nine lived in the remaining lower neighborhood strata. Nineteen different census tracts (neighborhoods) were represented. Participants were all self-described life-long Detroiters, with the majority ($n = 12$) living 20 or more years in their neighborhood. Two participants lived in housing designated for seniors. Eight in the sample lived alone while the remainder lived with at least one other person. Twelve participants had some college education or technical school and, of the 17 participants who provided data about household income, 13 reported an income of 10K-39K per year.

Data collection: Participant photography and photo elicitation interview

We collected participant generated photographs and conducted photo elicitation interviews. Participants were already using an Android smartphone for 7 consecutive days to collect activity data as part of an ecological momentary assessment component of the larger study. They were instructed on the use of the smartphone's camera function and asked to take photographs during the same 7 day period. Participants were given the following prompt "For the next 7 days, while you are filling out the activity survey, we want you to carry the smartphone with you during your daily activities and take photographs while you are out doing your usual everyday activities. The photographs can be of anything about your neighborhood that you feel is important to your daily activities or stress." We did not attempt to define neighborhood for our participants. Instead, participants were free to interpret the concept of neighborhood on their own terms. After the 7 day data collection period, a research assistant returned to the participant's home to collect the phone and scheduled a return visit for the photo elicitation interview. We made efforts to schedule all photo elicitation interviews within 14 days of the photography data collection period to reduce the likelihood that participants would forget their reasons for taking the photographs. A total of 720 photographs were generated across the sample.

Photo elicitation interviews involve inserting photographic material (participant or researcher generated) into a research interview (Harper, 2002). The method has been shown to be an effective way to collect data on contexts, subjective experiences, and tacit processes across a variety of settings, populations, and problems (e.g., Collier, 1957; Harper, 2002), making it an effective tool for collecting data on participants' perceptions of their neighborhoods, daily occupations, and stress. For each participant, photographs were

uploaded to an iPad or laptop to view during photo elicitation interviews. The first author conducted the photo-elicitation interviews. During the interview, the researcher and participant reviewed every photo that the participant had taken. Participants were asked to explain the content and meaning of the photographs and to expand upon issues that were raised through those explanations. For example, one participant presented a photograph of an abandoned building and discussed a violent crime that had happen in the building 2 years earlier. In the process of explaining the photo, the participant commented on police responsiveness and was therefore asked to expand upon that comment and discuss the issue of police responsiveness in more depth. Because participants had taken photographs of places with particular salience and importance to them, they were primed to discuss those issues, which led to higher-quality interviews than with-out the photographs. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. The average interview length was 50 minutes with a range from 27 to 120 minutes.

Data analysis

A total of 566 transcribed pages were used for analysis. We employed a thematic analysis approach using a constant comparative method (Boyatzis, 1998; Charmaz, 2006). Three investigators coded the transcripts. Data analysis began with open coding (line-by-line coding) followed by focused coding, which involved taking initial analytical directions developed from the line-by-line coding and applying them more selectively to larger chunks of text. Data analysis was an iterative process as cases were constantly compared throughout data analysis as new cases were added and earlier cases were revisited. In total, 740 fragments of text were extracted with between one and three applicable codes applied to each. The researchers wrote and discussed memos during the process of developing broader categories that subsumed earlier codes. Differing viewpoints about the data were also discussed and resolved by the team, which contributed to the trustworthiness of the data. The analysis resulted in four themes that depict the primary types of changes that older African-Americans in our sample experienced in participating in their daily occupations in response to changes in their neighborhood environments. In the following section, we describe the four themes and include participant quotes to illustrate main points. Pseudonyms are used to protect participants' identity.

Findings

Neighborhood change in Detroit

Detroit, the study context, had been in slow economic decline for decades before the 'Great Recession' began in 2008. The economic recession and subsequent housing crisis further accelerated the decline, ultimately resulting in Detroit's unprecedented bankruptcy filing. Detroit residents were faced with high rates of un- and under-employment, inadequately staffed police and fire services, increased crime, the loss of facilities and amenities (e.g., closing of schools and recreation centers), unrepaired or poorly maintained infrastructure (e.g., streetlights and water pipes), and increasing numbers of vacant and abandoned properties. The property issues in many neighborhoods generated residential turnover and changes to residential composition. In addition, abandoned properties generated the context for new forms of criminal activity as "scrappers" came into neighborhoods to steal copper

and other valuables out of abandoned properties and stories of criminal activity became increasingly common in local media and among residents' social networks. Despite this situation, many older adults remained in place and experienced the change in their neighborhoods. Their narratives suggest a story of change, often for the worse, in both the built and social environments; change that became central to how the older African-Americans in our sample reshaped their daily occupations.

Spatio-temporal changes to participation in occupation

Participants frequently discussed examples of how the distribution of occupations across time and space changed in response to perceived risks in their neighborhoods. The most prominent feature was changing daily routines to restrict or eliminate night-time outings. Only one of the 20 participants said they continued to purposely attend musical events or visit friends in the evening. The following quote from Danny (82-year-old male) illustrates the sentiment expressed by all but one of the participants: "*Well, once the sun goes down I'm inside. Don't go out after the sun goes down.*" Darcia, a 70-year-old female stated, "*I don't care where I'm at. I try to come in before it gets dark because there's too much happening in the city and on the outskirts.*"

Changing neighborhood conditions also led some participants to shift occupations to new places and spaces as they became unable to be active in their usual territory. One reason for that shift was that communities lost services and amenities as population and businesses moved out of neighborhoods. In those cases, participants had little choice but to extend the territory through which they conducted daily occupations. For example, Jim (87-year-old male), who had photographed derelict businesses in his neighborhood explained, "*There is no place right in my vicinity, like right around me, that I can do any business with.*" Other participants reported that they still had some services and amenities nearby but that these were insufficient to meet their needs.

The grocery stores I usually go to are out, like in Roseville area past there, Harper Woods area. Um, it's a couple of corner grocery stores around here that I can go to for small things. But most of the time I'm stretching out, driving to other parts of the city. (Damara, 57-year-old female)

Fear of crime was another cause for shifting occupation spaces. Taken-for-granted activities such as pumping gas, using a bank machine, or carrying purchases from a store, were now perceived as risky if done in certain spaces. Jim (82-year-old male), who had nearly been robbed in front of the grocery store, provided examples of the potential threats that residents in his neighborhood faced in the course of conducting business there.

They have people that do drugs. They have young people hanging around there waiting, seeing who they get money from. When you get inside, there are a lot of young people around, watching you every time you go to an ATM, or watching you every time you make a purchase.

In response to such risks, some participants chose to frequent businesses outside of their neighborhoods. An example of this was when Terrance (a 66-year-old male) explained, while discussing a photograph taken of the gas/petrol station across the street from his home.

[Interviewer: Is this where you would stop for gas?] Oh, no. I go all the way over to Colonial Gardens. It's on the other side of town. That's where my mother lives. I could go over there and visit her and I don't have to worry about what would happen when we go to the gas station.

Participants perceived that they generally had no choice but to shift some types of necessary daily occupations to new spaces (e.g., banking, or grocery shopping).

For less essential occupations, however, perceived hazards in their own neighborhood sometimes led a participant to cease engagement in the occupation altogether. Leisure-time walking was a frequently noted activity that was initiated or terminated in relation to changing neighborhood conditions. Lucy (67-year-old female) discussed how she initiated walking in response to more positive neighborhood conditions, "*Since a lot of people have gone [criminals have died or are in prison], I walk. You know. But before, you know, no. I wouldn't. I wouldn't walk in my neighborhood. Because they [young men] had a lot of things going on.*" More typical, however, was the story related by Alena (83-year-old female).

They closed the shopping mall. That's so depressing, because I used to go there and walk. ... I was going there, like Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday to walk, because I was walking three miles a day. And they closed it. So we don't have anywhere to walk. It was a nice safe place.

Changes to social participation

Changes in neighborhood conditions also led to changes in social participation. For many participants, social participation within their neighborhoods had become notably difficult. Participants discussed positive relationships with their long-time neighbors in the past, but they did so in the context of noting that there were few of those long-time residents left. Many trusted neighbors had moved away because of school systems closing or loss of employment opportunities; others had died. New neighbors, who were often younger and renters, were generally viewed with suspicion as neighborhood gossip, the local media, and residents' own experiences served to fuel participants' apprehension about newcomers. As trust in the social environment eroded, participants modified their social interactions. Rather than engaging in social occupations as in the past, such as inviting a neighbor to sit and talk on the porch, most of our participants forwent social interactions with neighbors.

Some participants avoided social engagement with their new neighbors because they had evidence of their illegal activities. Social engagement risked becoming associated with criminal activity or police matters. Of greater concern to some participants was the possibility of reprisal if they, or their neighbors, were believed to be reporting criminal behavior to authorities. For these reasons, many participants preferred to take the approach described by Terrance (66-year-old male): "*Watch out for my own property, you know, more or less, and mind my business.*" Jim (82-year-old male) elaborated on this issue when he was asked whether he or the other long-term residents in the neighborhood ever confronted new neighbors about the illegal drug activity that he witnessed in his neighborhood, "*No. Because that's a no-no. A big no-no. You don't do such a thing. Especially if they know where you live because that would be a risky thing.*"

Neighborhood conditions further shaped social participation in another important way. Participants related that as their neighborhoods changed, they visited less frequently with friends and family; visitors became more reluctant to spend time in what they perceived as a dangerous neighborhood. Valerie (58-year-old female) presented an example of this when she described how her daughter was afraid to be in Valerie's home alone: "*She would not come here and be in the house by herself unless I'm here. And, you know, when she pulls up in the drive, she'll call and have me to open the door for her. She's afraid.*" Other participants reported that family and friends visited less frequently, for briefer periods of time, or left earlier—for the same reason.

In addition, social and leisure participation was sometimes constrained because participants feared being away from their homes for too long. This was because homes that lacked signs of resident presence were believed to be prime targets for burglars. With fewer long-time residents to watch each other's property and increased criminal activity in the neighborhoods, some participants felt a tension between wanting to engage in valued occupations outside of the home (e.g., church related trips, vacations, or overnight visits with family) and the need to be home to protect their property. Lucy (67-year-old female) gave an example of this when she explained her dilemma regarding a recent invitation to go on vacation for 2 weeks and not wanting to leave her home vacant for that long.

My daughter wanted to take me out of town, you know. She's talking about leaving for 2 weeks. I said, No, it's too long. I can't for 2 weeks. I'd maybe do a week.' And then I'm just kind of skeptical about even a week. You know. [Interviewer: Because you're worried about what might happen while you're gone?] Um-hum, yes.

Heightened vigilance during daily occupations

Changes in neighborhood conditions and the increasing perception of risk led many participants to include extra acts of vigilance in the stream of daily occupations. Though these acts may not be considered occupations in and of themselves, they constitute a change in the overall pattern of human doing that is intended to reduce risk to one's person and property. One act of vigilance included extra 'watching and listening' intended to reduce the likelihood of being taken by surprise when in the neighborhood. As Damara (57-year-old female) explained, some watching and listening took the form of simply being more aware of their surroundings: "*You just have to be careful, and you have to just keep a listening ear to make sure that, um, no one is coming in on you and things like that.*" For others, watching and listening were more formal elements of their daily routine and they used surveillance cameras or other security technologies to monitor their surroundings for potential threats.

Along with watching and listening, participants also obscured or altered occupational patterns (e.g., varying routes taken home or covering windows so that indoor occupations were not visible). Just as residents monitored their neighborhoods, some participants believed that criminals also observed neighborhood behaviors and looked for opportunities to burgle properties or take advantage of vulnerable residents. James (56-year-old male) noted how he thinks about this issue, while Lydia (87-year-old female) provided an example

of how she altered her daily routine to obscure her occupational pattern from potential criminals.

It's to the point now where people see you move out, they are watching. You know, maybe down the street or the next block over, you know [referring to previously burgled property]. And I believe that's what it was. They [thieves] were watching the house. (James)

They say people watch your patterns. Well I usually have my [interior] lights out at night. But a few nights, the week before coming up to it, I left the light on all night. For not like consecutive nights, but a few, so I thought, well, if they're watching lately, I'm going to confuse them a little bit. (Lydia)

Heightened vigilance was also evident in the ways that participants modified their approach to certain occupations. For example, Danny (82-year-old male) used a bicycle as his primary mode of transport but made alternative arrangements when he would be traveling to areas where it was likely that the bike would be stolen. Some female participants discussed minimizing what they carried with them when traveling on foot through their neighborhood. As Debra (70-year-old female) stated, "*sometimes I walk down to Wyoming Street and come back around. But I don't carry a purse, you know. I may just have my phone or a stick.*"

More dramatically, some participants revealed that they had begun to carry a firearm with them when outside of the home. While carrying a firearm may increase one's sense of safety, the decision to do so was complicated and fraught with tension. Grace (84-year-old female) provided an example of this while reflecting on an incident involving two strangers unexpectedly visiting her home to inquire about work. Grace, caught off-guard while doing yard work, panicked as the strangers approached her home; she retreated inside to retrieve her firearm. She explained her feelings about the event this way.

I got pissed, you know. I got mad that I had to be scared. I panicked and came in the house and put my gun on my hip and went back there and start working in the yard, and I thought ... That's just anger, but it's frustration, because you see the stuff on the TV [media images about criminal threats]. Suppose they were decent and wanted to help you?

Actions to preserve and protect the neighborhood

Although many of the changes that participants made to their everyday occupations were to increase their sense of safety, residents also did things aimed at preserving the quality of their neighborhood, resisting further neighborhood decay, and creating a culture of accountability with city services and non-public institutions (e.g., banks or property management companies). One form of activism was participants and their neighbors using their time and resources to engage in property maintenance occupations. Abandoned homes and lots were the principal targets of many neighborhood criminal activities. Thus, maintaining a certain 'lived in' appearance was important for the safety and security of the neighborhood. Charlene (67-year-old female) explained, "*We cut the grass. The lady across the street, she goes and cuts the grass, and the one next-door. We do try to cut the grass and*

keep it where it kind of looks like it s ... [lived in]." Tamara (78-year-old female) related a similar case, emphasizing the protective potential of engaging in such actions.

My husband would always go and keep that [house] up you know, mow the lawn or shovel the snow, and plant flowers He plants flowers and does, you know, and pick up the papers and whatever. He says this would keep people away from it, so he does that to protect us as well as, you know.

Another form of activism involved information-gathering. Participants often required additional information or resources to address issues in their neighborhoods, for instance, what to do or who to contact about broken water lines in vacant homes or about illegally dumped garbage in vacant lots. City agencies were often deemed incapable of efficiently addressing issues, and landlords were notoriously difficult to contact. In the face of these challenges, participants and their neighbors worked together to gather and disseminate pertinent neighborhood information and to propel city agencies and absentee landlords to action. An example of this was when Carla (74-year-old female) discussed her affiliation with the block club (a resident organization created to address neighborhood issues). She described how she and her neighbors worked together to address the abandoned properties in their neighborhood.

We do have a block [club] here on this block that goes down to 7 Mile [Road]. And we try to, um, find out who owns these places [abandoned properties] and try to get them to, you know, at least keep the grass cut. Make it look like, um, somebody staying there.

Participants also wrote letters, called city officials, sent photographs of neighborhood issues to the local government representatives, and called local news stations to publicize issues. In many instances, participants coordinated efforts with their neighbors to contact agencies. The following story illustrates participants' actions to effect changes in the neighborhood.

This house was burnt out and water ran in that house for a year and a half, and we continued to report it. They did nothing about it. ... We had to stay on Edison [electric company] to even come out and cut off the electricity. And this and the water, it was over a year before they even came out. And we had gotten to the point we were calling them, we were rotating the calls [among neighbors]. (Sherrie, 72-year-old female)

In circumstances where participants still had positive social relationships with other neighborhood residents, information gathering and dissemination activities were also directed toward making neighbors aware of threats. As Shannon (74-year-old female) stated about relaying news stories and police reports, "*If he hears anything, you know, we're calling each other. I mean, anything*".

While such activities could be viewed as taking time and focus away from other occupations, they did appear to increase participants' sense of well-being and sense of control over their neighborhood situations. In addition, participants reported that 'checking in' with each other or observing each other's daily routines could help. Lucy (67-year-old female) shared a relevant story about how engaging in these occupations could benefit neighbors and increase the perceived safety of residents.

Just to show you how we are all connected. You know, he [neighbor] fell in his house. We knew something was wrong, because the newspaper was still on the porch later in the afternoon. I went to banging on the windows, 'Are you here? Are you okay?' And that's when we found him. ... And then the neighbors, we went to breaking the windows. They were going in there to get him out.

Discussion

In this report we presented how daily occupations of older African-Americans living in Detroit have changed in relation to their experience of changing neighborhoods. Findings contribute to occupational science in several ways. First, the findings contribute to scholarship about the transactional nature of person-neighborhood relationships and the centrality of occupation as a means of negotiating those relationships (Cutchin, 2013; Dickie et al., 2006; Shank & Cutchin, 2010). The relational connection of participants and their neighborhoods, the creative responses to emerging problematic aspects of the neighborhood, and actions taken to improve the situation by older residents, provide empirical examples of how occupational changes were part of participants' efforts to coordinate and re-coordinate themselves with their changing neighborhood situations.

Findings also support the need to examine how transactions unfold over time (Rosenberg & Johansson, 2013) and suggest why the link between occupation and health is often difficult to fully explicate. The coordination and re-coordination that occurs as part of person-neighborhood transactions are imperfect processes. Modifying occupations may resolve some aspects of problematic situations (e.g., feeling threatened) while generating other types of potentially problematic situations. For example, it is possible that occupational changes could benefit the health of some participants in this study through reducing the emotional distress that they experienced as part of living in changing neighborhood conditions. Equally plausible, however, is the possibility that such benefits are attenuated when reshaping occupations results in the elimination or restriction of opportunities for health promoting social participation, leisure pursuits, or physical activity levels; all of which have been connected to higher levels of physical and emotional health in later life (Fallahpour, Borell, Luborsky, & Nygard, 2016; Phillipson, 2007; Walker & Hiller, 2007; WHO, 1998).

The findings also have relevance to occupational justice including how failed or inequitable social and economic policies, structural racism, and inadequate governance (Durocher, Gibson, & Rappolt, 2014; Townsend & Wilcock, 2004) manifest themselves in individual lives and communities. Those lives and communities happen in particular places that are essential to understanding problems and solutions. Our findings have indicated that neighborhoods are a worthy unit of analysis for future occupational justice research focusing on how occupational justice issues play out at the local level.

Moreover, neighborhood-level issues of occupational injustice are amplified in the context of vulnerable groups, such as aging African-Americans, who constitute a large portion of the US population (10%) and often live in neighborhoods that are more geographically and economically restricted from the types of economic opportunities, services, and supports enjoyed by their more affluent, Caucasian counterparts (Jarosz & Mather, 2014). Such

neighborhood situations are problematic because they can unjustly limit the opportunities of some groups for diverse participation in valued and necessary occupations (Townsend & Wilcock, 2004).

To date, however, occupational justice research has primarily focused on marginalized populations in extenuating circumstances, such as immigrants, refugees, and prison inmates (Bailliard, 2013; Crawford, Turpin, Nayar, Steel, & Durand, 2016; Whiteford, 1997, 2005). Occupational scientists have much to offer through turning their analytical gaze to the problem of urban neighborhood environments and the many challenges those environments pose to creating an occupationally just society for the people who live there. Although urban neighborhoods may not negatively affect occupations of all urban residents, there are substantial numbers of people living in cities not unlike Detroit who face unjust circumstances affecting everyday occupation. Such occupational injustices have, by and large, remained under the radar of occupational science. Situating our study findings in this larger context of widespread socio-demographic disadvantage raises questions about how occupational science and therapy might be able to address such widespread issues, perhaps involving advocacy aimed at policy change.

Limitations

This study's limitations include its relatively small sample and geographically limited urban context. In addition, our qualitative sample was composed mostly of females, who, research suggests, differ from males in threat perception (May, Rader, & Goodrum, 2010). Research examining the relationship between neighborhood change and occupational engagement in other contexts, using different samples, or including a greater number of male participants may yield different inferences. In addition, our analysis drew from only 20 sets of resident-generated photos and photo-elicitation interviews. Nonetheless, the sample was reflective of many different types of personal and neighborhood situations. The threads through those situations were consistent enough to infer the themes that defined the process of neighborhood and occupational change. In addition, while our sample was more heavily weighted toward the top two neighborhood strata, the findings of significant issues even among less degraded neighborhood conditions suggests that occupational change is sensitive to relatively lower levels of neighborhood change.

Conclusion

We have presented findings that demonstrate that neighborhood conditions and change affect occupation in multiple ways for older African-Americans in Detroit. Additional research is needed, however, to address the many questions that remain about exactly how neighborhood environments affect occupation for different groups in different places. Examining the neighborhood-occupation relationship may require occupational scientists to draw on interdisciplinary collaborations, for example with colleagues from public health or urban planning. Nonetheless, we see tremendous opportunity for occupational science to contribute to knowledge of neighborhoods and health vis-à-vis the role of occupation. Societies cannot have healthy populations without healthy neighborhoods. This should compel occupational scientists to further address neighborhoods and occupation.

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