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## Place-based Developmental Research: Conceptual and Methodological Advances in Studying Youth Development in Context

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The *Monograph* written by Witherspoon, White, et al. weaves together neighborhood effects scholarship and cultural-development neighborhood research by explicitly investigating how residential neighborhoods, cultural development, and geographic activity spaces interact to provide a better understanding of youth development in context for diverse groups. It is positioned within a social determinants of health perspective, defined as the “conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life” (World Health Organization, 2022). The novelty of this *Monograph* is that it seeks to gain a better understanding of neighborhood effect complexities by not assuming all residents experience the same neighborhood exposures, and indeed, unpacking how these experiences may differ, say, by racial, cultural, or ethnic social positions. For example, Witherspoon, White, et al. recognize that geographic distinctions between youth activity spaces and residential neighborhoods exist, and that these differ even more so when other sociodemographic characteristics are considered (e.g., lower-income families spending more time out of their residential neighborhoods than higher-income families). By recognizing that not everyone starts from the same place or experience, this paper provides ways to correct intentional and unintentional imbalances for a more just society, better understand the deep systems of oppression at play, and highlight unintended consequences.

This *Monograph* is timely as recent academic reviews and perspectives have urgently called for research focusing on identifying and investigating modifiable neighborhood factors likely to benefit children and youth (Clark et al., 2020; Minh et al., 2017; Putra et al., 2017; Villanueva et al., 2016). These calls build on major global agendas, such as United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Child Friendly Cities Initiative (UNICEF, 2018), and the United Nations (UN) New Urban Agenda (World Health Organization, 2016). The Child Friendly Cities Initiative was launched in 1996 and takes a rights-based approach to city planning based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child principles. The more recent New Urban Agenda aspires to create equitable and liveable cities by 2030 through the activities of the Sustainable Development Goals. The 2020 World Health Organization (WHO-UNICEF-Lancet Commission

into Child Health and Wellbeing) (Clark et al., 2020) has argued that children, while not explicitly mentioned in the New Urban Agenda, are central to realizing the Sustainable Development Goals.

This *Monograph* realizes the importance of lived experience as a methodology to capture the subjective neighborhood experience. By bringing a lived experience approach to conduct research with, rather than on, children and youth, this *Monograph* aligns with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child by advocating for children to have the right to be heard and express themselves (UN, 1990). While lived experience methods are not new, applying them to neighborhood effects research has had limited uptake so far. Witherspoon, White, et al. focus on lived experience perspectives that draw on racial and ethnic social positions, but there is substantial opportunity to extend this approach to understand a range of human conditions in a place-based context more deeply, such as by disability, gender, family structure, or urbanicity.

This *Monograph* touches on emerging technologies for objectively assessing neighborhood exposures, such as Global Positioning Systems, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software, and SoftGIS. For example, SoftGIS integrates GIS software with localized knowledge where participants specify the location of meaningful neighborhood destinations and reasons for using them (or not) (Kytta et al., 2016). These approaches allow bespoke activity spaces to be created at the individual level. While these tools are collectively helpful for better defining unique activity spaces and neighborhood exposures, the emerging opportunity is through advancements in big data and computational capabilities that enable spatial data to be linked with other administrative and routine datasets (e.g., census and survey data). While linked data are not necessarily able to capture “individual’s perceptions about the social dynamics and processes within that space or one’s own experiences when engaged with that space,” it does allow us to understand how neighbourhood effects are associated with outcomes of interest at scale (Badland et al., 2023).

Future research opportunities in this field beyond big data utilization include gaining a better understanding of pathways for how neighborhood social determinant exposures and interactions “get under the skin” to impact biological systems that regulate stress responses (Marini et al., 2020). Emerging evidence suggests there are likely different physical and social environmental pathways through which socioeconomic position indicators influence health and wellbeing. For example, exposure to higher neighborhood disadvantage may increase threatening experiences and decrease perceptions of safety, whereas low parental education might influence youth outcomes through lower quality parent-child interactions (Duncan & Magnuson, 2012). It is also likely that emerging (or emerged) virtual cultures, such as the formation of online networks through gaming or social media platforms, are dramatically shaping youth activity spaces and interactions (Jones & Osborne, 2021).

In summary, interest in the social determinants of health is accelerating, particularly within the neighborhood context. The arguments put forward in this *Monograph* add weight to the importance of major global initiatives targeting children and youth, while providing a helpful

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structure for considering the complexities of neighborhood effects and responding to future research opportunities.

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