

CUSS Newsletter

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Editor's Note	2
In Memorial	3
Marshall Berman	
2014 CUSS Panels & Roundtables	4
News & Notes	6
2013 CUSS Awards Presentations	7
New Books	8
Announcements	11

Concentrated Poverty & Concentrated Affluence: Notes for a Comparative Analysis

Herbert Gans
Columbia University

The concept that poverty-related social problems are caused in part by the spatial concentration of the poor was introduced by urban sociologists and antipoverty researchers during a period of increasing poverty at the start of the 1990s.

Since then, the country has seen an immense increase in the number of affluent people, but sociologists have not considered the possible existence of similar spatial concentration effects among this population.

Despite massive wealth and income differences between concentrated poor and affluent areas, presumably the same peer and conformity pressures, social capi-

tal transactions and critical mass processes take place in both. Likewise, so do good and bad social and individual effects.

The most dramatic - and disturbing - findings of concentrated poverty research are associated with high poverty neighborhoods, areas in which 40 percent or more of the population is poor. Low poverty neighborhoods, where 20 or 10 percent of the residents are poor have fewer socially and individually destructive neighborhood effects.

The basic question: does the same pattern apply to concentrated affluence? Poverty and affluence have very different effects on people but how about concentration? Do neighborhoods in which 40 percent or more are affluent display



The debates over concentrated poverty and wealth intensified after the 2008 Great Recession.

problems parallel to those found in the highly concentrated areas of the poor?

High poverty areas are typically marked by family-related problems, children's school performance issues, physical and mental health issues, high rates of joblessness

Concentrated, page 9

Chair's Message

Philip Kasinitz, City University of New York

Greetings fellow Cussniks! I hope you all enjoyed this year's meeting in New York as much as I did. In my own, completely biased view the section's program was

huge success. The sessions were extremely interesting and well attended, and the reception was a blast.

The only unfortunate part of the whole affair

for me was that the ASA schedule meant that almost as soon as I had recovered from the 2013 ASA, we needed to produce a schedule of ses-

Chair, page 2

Concentrated *from page 1*

as well as of crime and delinquency.

It seems hard to imagine that the rich suffer from such problems, but before accepting such a seemingly obvious conclusion, one must remember that in a class society, parallel behaviors may be framed differently and labeled with different terms.

Thus, begging is associated only with poor neighborhoods, but residents of high affluence areas who seek to increase their status beg for donations to charities and political campaigns. Similarly, hustlers operate in both areas, although they may call themselves entrepreneurs or investment advisers in affluent areas. The numbers and related rackets of the poor bear comparison with Ponzi and other stock swindles among affluents.

Family structure and kinship systems clearly differ in some respects, affluence being more often associated with multi-parent and step-parent families. The statistical and social normality of single parent families in high poverty areas is matched by the normality of abortion in high affluence areas.

Father absence is present in both, although for occupational travel reasons among the rich. Ironically, poverty and affluence areas may be similar in the amount and intensity of family conflict over money.

Parental neglect of children could be present in areas of high affluence, notably among youngsters raised by governesses or sent to boarding schools. Poor academic performance takes place among young people guaranteed post graduate employment in family firms.

The biggest difference among the two kinds of areas is likely to be in areas of health; affluents are physically and mentally healthier. However, the rich may suffer from normally untreated problems, such as greed and conspicuous consumption. Inheritance dependency and welfare dependency might share common elements, aside from the drastically different economic payoffs.

Alcoholism and drug addiction are present in both areas, but rates are hard to compare because in areas of concentrated affluence, alcohol and hard drugs are consumed in private spaces. Conversely, the poor more often consume addictive goods in publicly visible places.

Street crime is absent in concentrated affluence areas; their residents traffic in financial and other forms of white collar crime, again mostly in private spaces.

Teenage gangs can be found in areas of high affluence as in areas of high poverty, although among affluents, gangs are known as secret clubs, fraternities and

sororities. Some of the gangs of both engage in money making pursuits, those in poverty areas frequently concentrating on drug selling, those in affluent areas, making future business contacts. Some poor gangs engage in high degrees of interpersonal violence and even murder, while their rich equivalents limit themselves to verbal violence, social rejection, date rape and occasional hazing.

Comparative analysis of concentrated poverty and affluence entails special problems. Poverty is hard to measure because of poor people's income is often irregular. Determining the income of the rich is compromised by "top coding:" the practice of data gathering agencies to cap income classes well below levels of high affluence. For example, the U.S. Census's top class is "\$250,000 and above."

Qualitative researchers will have to find ways of obtaining access to the rich living in gated and protected neighborhoods, or in apartment houses guarded by doormen. The identification of neighborhood effects could be complicated further by the fact that many affluents have dwellings in several neighborhoods, some of them overseas.

Concentrated poverty research has paid little attention to the income levels among the concentrated poor, but researchers studying the concen-

trated rich must correct this omission. If neighborhood effects are greater in high affluence areas than in low affluence ones, the differential might be caused by variations in the levels of affluence rather than or as well as by the degree of concentration. The extremely affluent could behave differently than the affluent.

If the former turn out to be more problem ridden than the latter, researchers need to consider possible policy implications. Concentration effects suggest dispersal policies, but income level effects would have to be dealt with by redistributive and other economic policies.

I am grateful for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this memo by Merlin Chowkwanyun, Bill Domhoff and Harvey Molotch.

Herbert Gans is the Robert S. Lynd Professor Emeritus of Sociology, Columbia Univ. His most recent book is *Imagining America in 2033*, 2008. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 2008.