



Neighborhood effects on self-concept among Korean adolescents^{☆, ☆, ☆}



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1. Introduction

Self-concept can be defined as a perception of self that is based on subjective and objective evaluations of oneself and others (Molloy, Ram, & Gest, 2011). It is especially important in adolescence because adolescents form their identities and expand their social and interpersonal relationships while simultaneously experiencing rapid physical and psychological changes. Because of the fluctuating nature of self-concept over time and its continuous interactions with impinging environments in adolescence, previous studies (i.e., Chung, 2007; Cole et al., 2001; Dusek & Flaherty, 1981; Harter, 1998; Hong, Park, & Hong, 2006) note the importance of time in measuring self-concept in adolescents and the importance of their interactions with significant others, including parents, teachers, peers, and neighbors.

One of the macro systems in the ecological systems perspective is the neighborhood, with which adolescents have constant interactions on a daily basis (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Relying on social disorganization theory (Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002), previous studies have paid special attention to the influences of negative neighborhood characteristics such as poverty, socioeconomic disadvantages, and deprivation on individual well-being. For example, negative neighborhood variables are known to have associations with individual behavioral problems (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Schneiders et al., 2003), personality changes (Hart, Atkins, & Matsuba, 2008), self-esteem (Fagg, Curtis, Cummins, Stansfeld, & Quensnell-Vallée, 2013), physical and mental health (Aneshensel & Sucoff, 1996; Mair, Diez Roux, & Galea, 2008; Santiago, Wadsworth, & Stump, 2011), and academic achievement (Murry, Berkel, Gaylord-Harden, Copeland-Linder, & Nation, 2011).

There is, however, a scarcity of research on the more neutral or positive characteristics of neighborhood. Social capital theory, which emphasizes qualities of social process such as trust, solidarity, and continuity in which individuals have constant contacts with social systems, pays attention to adolescents' positive use of and interactions with significant others and neighborhoods. Positive neighborhood characteristics such as the number of community welfare centers in a neighborhood and the residents' frequency of participation in volunteer

activities may function to buffer negative neighborhood effects on individual outcomes and may provide social cohesion and social control (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Residents' participation in volunteer activities may also indicate their interests in neighborhood attachments and social solidarity and may serve as a mechanism of collective efficacy (Qasmi, 2013; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997).

Although numerous studies have addressed negative neighborhood effects on individual well-being, there is a paucity of empirical research on neighborhood effects on self-concept using longitudinal data, particularly among Korean adolescents. This study aims to examine neighborhood effects on changes in self-concept among Korean adolescents over a four-year period in order to draw implications for service providers and policy makers for adolescents. Specifically, we first examine changes both within and between individuals and then focus on the effects of social process variables (i.e., attachment to parents, peers, and teachers; structural and perceived attachment variables of neighborhood) on self-concept. Therefore, we take into consideration recommendations from previous systemic reviews of neighborhood effects (i.e., Hart et al., 2008; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Mair et al., 2008) that 1) use longitudinal data with multilevel growth model analysis, which makes it possible to test changes in self-concept over time; 2) use both official and administrative data on individual relational and perceptual variables and structural neighborhood variables as well as individual-level data to test within- and between-individual differences; and 3) examine neighborhood effects on self-concept after controlling for individual and familial factors.

2. Literature review

2.1. Self-concept and its changes in adolescence

Self-concept is an important psychological mechanism that allows for interpreting daily experiences and is a key determinant of behaviors based on cognitive perception. Two intrinsic attributes of self-concept in adolescence are critical for understanding how this concept develops: 1) self-concept as a product of social interaction and 2) the nature of continuous changes over a period of time, particularly in adolescence.

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That is, the changing nature of self-concept over a period of time may make it difficult to accurately measure self-concept and consequently result in different outcomes depending on the period of time over which self-concept is measured (Lee, Kwon, & Shin, 2013; Song, Kim, & Namgung, 2012). Its constant interactions with an impinging environment also affect self-concept in that feedback from others can function as a corrective mechanism (Chubb, Fertman, & Ross, 1997; Ji, 2012; Lee, 2000). Thus, self-concept as a social representation is a sociocultural niche that one finds in relationships with others through constant evaluation (Oyserman & Markus, 1998, chap. 7).

In contrast with global or general self-concept, specific self-concept domains are often used to measure different rates of change and stability depending on age and gender. These domains include academic (scholastic) competence, athletic competence, behavioral conduct, physical appearance, social competence (peer acceptance), and global self-worth (or self-esteem). Harter (2012) further suggests different numbers of self-concept domains at each period of the life span, adding morality and job competence in adolescence. In-depth discussion of the structural or hierarchical nature of self-concept, its multidimensionality, and its interchangeability with self-esteem is beyond the scope of this study, and we recommend that readers refer to related literature (cf. Harter, 2012). Contending that the use of global self-concept is erroneous and is responsible for inconsistencies in stabilizing the concept of self-concept, Young and Mroczek (2003) used growth curve modeling to measure the changes in eight specific domains as well as global self-concept and found that age and gender were important factors for individual differences in level of and changes in self-concept. Meanwhile, Molloy et al. (2011) discuss 'domain-specific self-concept lability' (p.1590) and its negative association with developmental outcomes.

Whereas positive self-concept in adolescence may have a positive influence on overall developmental tasks such as academic achievement (Prince & Nurius, 2014), career path, self-control, and adaptation (Jang & Ahn, 2013; Kim, 2008; Park, 2009), negative self-concept may cause negative outcomes such as low academic achievement, depression, juvenile delinquency, suicide, and drug abuse (Choi & Kim, 2011; Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, Moffitt, & Caspi, 2005; Hong & Kim, 2011; Lee, 2009). Longitudinal studies on changes in self-concept in Korea and in other countries show mixed results. For example, Chung (2007) and Hong et al. (2006) reported steady increases in self-concept among Korean adolescents over the three-year period from eighth to tenth grade, but Savin-Williams and Demo (1984) reported that self-concept did not show age-related changes between sixth and tenth grades. Some researchers, however, note that the transition to middle school, which may be accompanied by increased cognitive ability in adolescents, less teacher support, and a greater focus on performance goals rather than the mastery of primary school, marks a period of decrease in self-concept (Molloy et al., 2011).

Although the overall trends in changes in adolescents' self-concept remain steady, changes in the early period of adolescence, the rates of changes in self-concept, and the patterns of the changes may result in different outcomes depending on research participants, time period measured, and personal and environmental changes. Further, the appropriateness and use of either global or domain-specific self-concept needs to be considered.

2.2. Theoretical frameworks of neighborhood effects on individuals

Vagueness or inconsistency in defining the concept of neighborhood has been a problem in research on neighborhood effects on individual outcomes (Mair et al., 2008; Murry et al., 2011; Sharkey & Faber, 2014). Mair et al. (2008), in a systemic review, presented definitions of neighborhood that ranged from participant-defined areas to census-defined areas such as census blocks, tracts, and government-defined administrative areas. Sharkey and Faber (2014) also highlight difficulties in defining and operationalizing the concept of neighborhood

owing in part to discrepancies between definitions derived from theoretical arguments and individuals' perceptions of what constitutes their neighborhoods and their geographic boundaries. Defining the concept of neighborhood become more difficult in research when neighborhood dimensions (or characteristics such as crime rates, the number of single parents in the neighborhood, and the number of welfare recipients) have to be selected based on theoretical and analytical approaches and when they need to be identified and defined between neighborhood structure and social organizations (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). For this study, we operationalized the definition of neighborhood as administrative districts in Seoul Metropolitan City that coincide with census blocks in Korea, and neighborhood effects can be defined as the observed economic, social, and cultural characteristics within a geographic area and its influence on individual lives after individual factors are controlled for (Kwak, 2008; Kwak & Yoo, 2007).

Different theories explain the specific effects of neighborhoods. For example, Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000) provide five theoretical frameworks: a neighborhood institutional model, collective socialization models, a contagion (or epidemic) model, models of competition, and a relative deprivation model. In addition, there are social disorganization theory (Sampson & Groves, 1989; Sampson et al., 2002) and a norms/collective efficacy model (cf. Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Sampson & Raudenbush, 1999). Two of these models appear to be especially relevant for understanding neighborhood effects on adolescents: the contagion model and social disorganization theory.

The contagion model assumes that residents in a vulnerable neighborhood will spread their socioeconomic problem behaviors to others in their neighborhood (Boardman & Robert, 2000). This theory posits that adolescents in vulnerable neighborhoods have difficulty meeting positive role models and in fact have more contact with people with problematic behaviors, which lead to negative interactions, and this theory could apply to adolescents who might imitate their peers' delinquent behaviors. Social disorganization theory contends that the disorganization of a neighborhood, which is represented by neighborhood poverty, heterogeneous composition of residents, high mobility among residents, and low social solidarity and cohesion among residents, prevents formal and informal social institutions from functioning as buffering mechanisms to suppress adolescents' delinquent behaviors (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Sampson et al., 2002).

Social capital theory is relevant in linking neighborhood effects on self-concept. This theory puts emphasis on the social processes by which individuals make constant contact with various systems and states that not the quantity but the quality of social relations such as trust, solidarity, and continuity in neighborhoods will enhance individual well-being outcomes. That is, social ties nested in various systems (i.e., peers, family, school, community) of adolescents affect individual outcomes. In social capital theory, micro-individual social behaviors and macro-social structural factors can be linked to assess individual well-being because these factors can be contextualized within social interactions and relationships; at the same time, community and neighborhood factors can be incorporated in considering these outcomes (Morrow, 1999). Highlighting the problems in defining social capital, Morrow (1999) further discusses children's active roles in utilizing social capital under the theory that children are not simply recipients of family and community social capital that parents provide or assign them but actors who can generate and even negotiate their own social capital.

Empirical evidence in Korea shows both positive and negative neighborhood effects on various well-being outcomes among children. This evidence includes 1) indirect effects of neighborhood on school achievement through community and family social capital (Kim & Kim, 2010), 2) effects of academic achievement on academic self-concept at the community level (Jung, 2017), 3) negative effects of social and economic inequalities on children's health outcomes (Kim & Kim, 2012), effects of neighborhood deprivation on health inequalities (Kim & Choi, 2014) and contextual effects of community inequalities on

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