

MAPPING AND PLACEMAKING TO UNDERSTAND SCHOOL SEGREGATION AND INTEGRATION

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Abstract

School and neighborhood segregation represent spatial circumstances. Yet, literature on school and neighborhood segregation tends to focus on outcomes associated with space, but not centrally linked to it: Educational scores, income inequality, healthcare access, and so forth. While these outcomes help explain features of space and (in)justice, our study expands on past research because it explores a key spatial question related to school segregation: How do segregation and integration shape individual placemaking of a community? Our study explores this question through interviews and mapping activities with adults who lived during different school segregation circumstances in one southern city, including legal segregation, forced integration, and re-segregation. Initial findings reveal that while housing segregation and isolation tended not to change over time in the city we studied, individuals placed different meaning to their home circumstances based on their relationships with in-neighborhood and out-of-neighborhood educational organizations. For some, school segregation exacerbated a sense of confinement that came with neighborhood segregation. For others, integration and increased educational options led to a more expansive sense of community space and place.

Introduction

This study examines personal experiences related to school racial integration and segregation. While previous research tends to explore this topic in positivist and legal frameworks, this study uses the concept of placemaking, defined as the intentional ways people demarcate, communicate, and inhabit space (Dudek 2019). We argue that individuals experience school segregation through spatial dynamics that range from physical to conceptual and from explicit to implied. In turn, individuals practice, habituate, and feel school enrollment boundaries while developing their sense of place in the broader community.

Scholars explain placemaking as an affirming, bottom-up, and organic process (Markusen and Gadwa 2010). In contested and politically charged spaces, questions arise around occupation and exclusion (Toolis 2017; Benson and Jackson 2013). Segregation not only is imposed through political and legal decisions, but also embeds itself in personal placemaking. Therefore, we ask: How do changes to school zones and enrollment patterns influence personal placemaking in one community?

The United States has seen various trends related to school enrollment. Prior to *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), southern states enforced legal school segregation, while northern states maintained segregation through residential trends. After *Brown*, through the 1970s and 1980s, many communities in southern states achieved diverse school enrollments. These trends eventually reversed (Orfield and Eaton 1996; Reardon and Owens 2014). Our study examines a southern community that experienced this ebb and flow of school segregation patterns. We use a participant mapmaking activity to explain how these differential school enrollment patterns relate to placemaking.

Methods

We conducted an interview and mapping activity with six adults who were former students in the city's schools. These adults experienced various enrollment conditions. The first set attended school at the beginning of the integration movement (n=2, one African American student and one white student). The second set attended during the height of integration, which included bussing the district's children to various schools and the creation of a high-enrollment high school that pulled from across the city (n=2, one African American student and one white student). The third attended after the dissolution of the high-enrollment school and redistribution of students across three new high schools (n=1, one African American student). The fourth was one white teacher present across different locations and stages of policy implementation.

Using maps as an elicitation tool, we investigate how segregated and integrated schools serve as placemaking mechanisms. We asked participants to share where they attended school, with whom, their general experience, and how their school helped them make sense of the community space around them.

Participant maps were created in one of three ways: By the participants themselves, by a researcher creating a more legible version of a participant's original map, and by a researcher note-mapping the interview during a session. The series of maps help identify how placemaking is expressed alongside of varying enrollment experiences. Personal mapping adds a critical lens to traditional cartography. It provides insights into how school segregation, as practiced and inhabited, becomes both an instrument and outcome of people's placemaking, including how boundaries carry different meanings at different historical time points (Kelly 2019).

We approach mapping as a kind of storying, or a way to communicate and make sense of complicated patterns and lived experiences. There is no one way to read a map because it has multiple points of entry and interpretation (Guattari and Deleuze 2000). In the context studied here, the interpretive differences relate to the spatial and social repercussions of school segregation.

A spatial approach to school segregation elucidates structures and patterns of behavior around race and schools not frequently captured by most current educational research strategies. Placemaking allows us to examine and map the deeply held perceptions, daily routines, and connections individuals have with community institutions such as schools. Such insight is

important, as the United States has experienced a rising school re-segregation trend during the last two decades (Orfield and Eaton 1996; Reardon and Owens 2014).

Initial Findings

The interviews and mapping activities provided insights through various patterns of spatialized narratives. Three maps were chosen to illustrate placemaking patterns that we describe as *bounding*, *bridging*, and *scatter*. Participant names and schools are pseudonyms to protect privacy. We use the pseudonym ‘Riverville’ for the city and ‘Southwood’ for one neighborhood described across many interviews.

Place Bounding: Neighborhood and School as Restriction and Confinement

Sarge’s interview describes patterns of bounding, or what we designate as placemaking that reflects restriction and confinement. Sarge, whose pseudonym reflects his enrollment in the Army after high school, is an African American male in his early twenties. He lived around the country during his training and enlistment and recently returned to Southwood, which is an isolated part of Riverville with high proportions of low-income and minority residents.

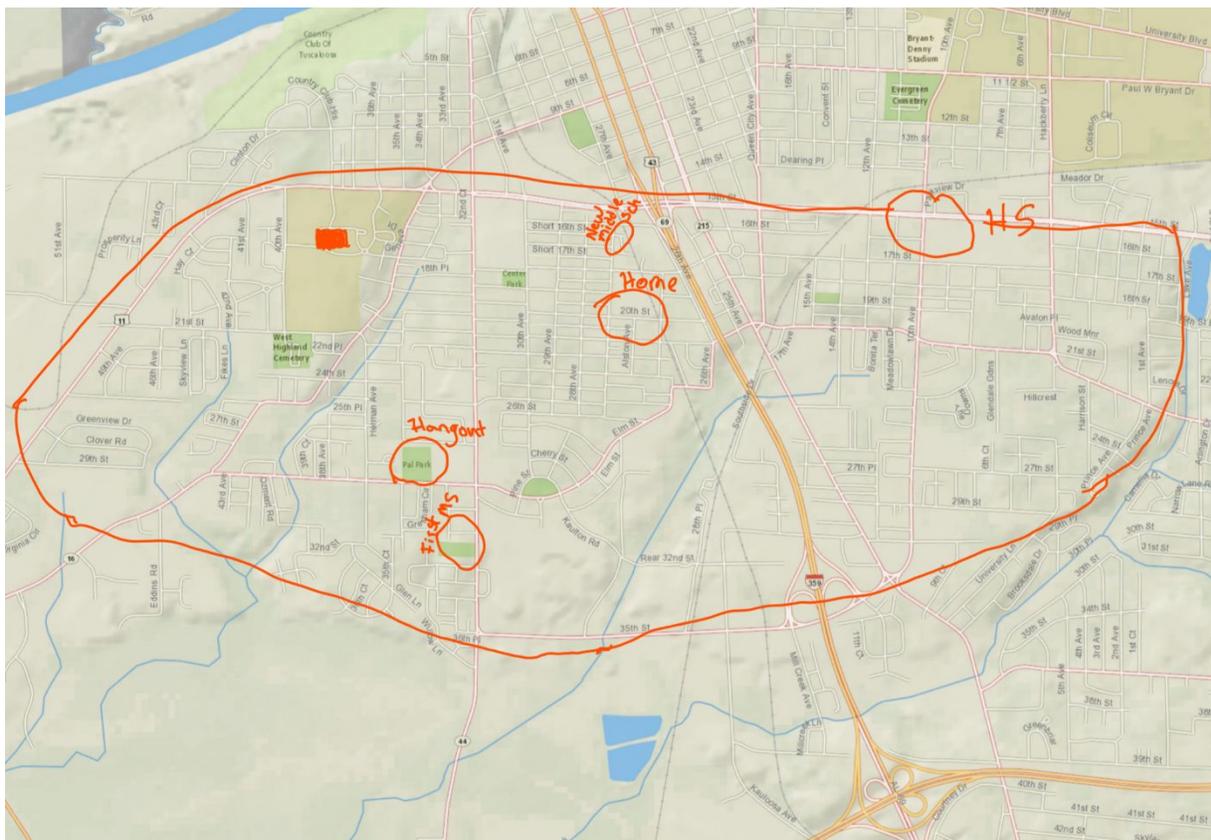


Figure 1. *Sarge’s Map Indicating the Confinement of Southwood.* Sarge drew this map during the interview with researchers.

Sarge attended Midtown High School on the edge of Southwood. Riverville leaders originally created Midtown to comply with desegregation orders and to integrate the school system. Riverville's schools maintained racially diverse enrollments from the late 1970s until the early 2000s. The city schools re-segregated by the time Sarge attended and 99% of his graduating classmates were African American.

Sarge described his experiences of place using terms linked with feelings of confinement and restriction. For example, he described how he learned to cope with his neighborhood's struggles through the cultivation of a mindset of "getting out." However, even the quotidian act of getting out of the neighborhood was sometimes difficult or problematic. Lack of access to cars or rides limited one's mobility to get around the city, so one would have to find someone in the neighborhood journeying in their same direction if they wanted to travel. When asked how to improve the community, especially in terms of school-aged children, Sarge answered that children needed more resources and to have their own spaces.

The landmarks of Sarge's lived experience in Riverville reflect place-bounding. During the interview, Sarge drew a border around Southwood (Figure 1), indicating a sense of enclosure. His schools were in this confined space, as were his home and places of recreation. Sarge consistently alluded to his peers as being trapped with no sense of the greater outside world. Part of this sense of enclosure, articulated by what Sarge saw, was a lack of investment in Southwood despite Riverville's continued economic expansion. He used words like overlooked, forgotten, and passed over.

Place Bridging: New Opportunities and Connections

Other interviewees pointed to moments in their childhoods that allowed them to explore beyond their neighborhoods. These experiences came through schooling and enrichment opportunities and served as a bridge to partake in the larger community. We even heard stories of families exploring beyond the boundaries of their segregated neighborhoods and schools during the legally mandated segregation period.

One example of place bridging emerged in the interview with Ms. Wells, an African American entrepreneur and mother of three. Ms. Wells graduated in 1970 during the earliest stages of integration. Ms. Wells lived in the Southwood area like Sarge. She is active in the community and considering running for office, especially because she has an interest in local school and education policies.

Ms. Wells talked about her schooling experience that spanned periods of legal segregation and the beginning of integration. She recounted how she travelled to a local university's campus where she received extra tutoring and enrichment in math and public speaking (Figure 2). These activities were facilitated by connections, such as her mother who was employed at the university and her favorite teacher, who was white. Unlike Sarge, Ms. Wells had a broader view

of the community and displayed an ease in talking and discussing the larger context of Riverville.

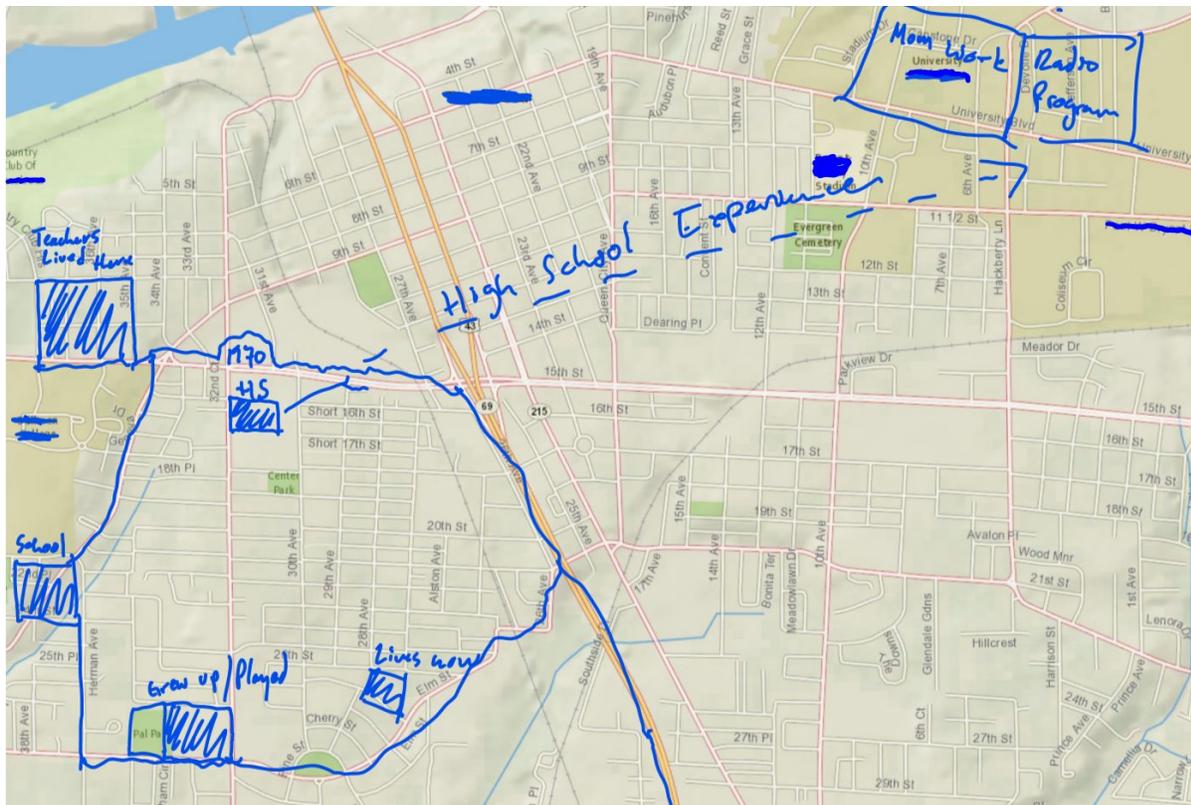


Figure 2. Ms. Wells' Map on how School Opportunities Created Bridges Outside of Southwood. This is the researcher's original drawing of Ms. Wells' experience. The map was made during the interview.

Place as Scatter: A Variety of Diverse and Loose Connections

Hannah, a white professional at the university, was the daughter of a professor and attended school with Ms. Wells' children in the early 1990s. Hannah attended Riverville's schools at the height of the integration movement, which entailed being bussed to three different schools during her middle school years and culminated with attending Midtown. Hannah expressed frustration in the re-segregation trends of student enrollment since leaving Midtown.

Hannah's experiences reflect place as scattered across the city. Due to Hannah's time spent in different schools, she had friends and favorite locations across Riverville. While Hannah never described confinement or bridging, it was clear she had a childhood where she experienced many places. Integration served as one tool that expanded her experiences across Riverville.

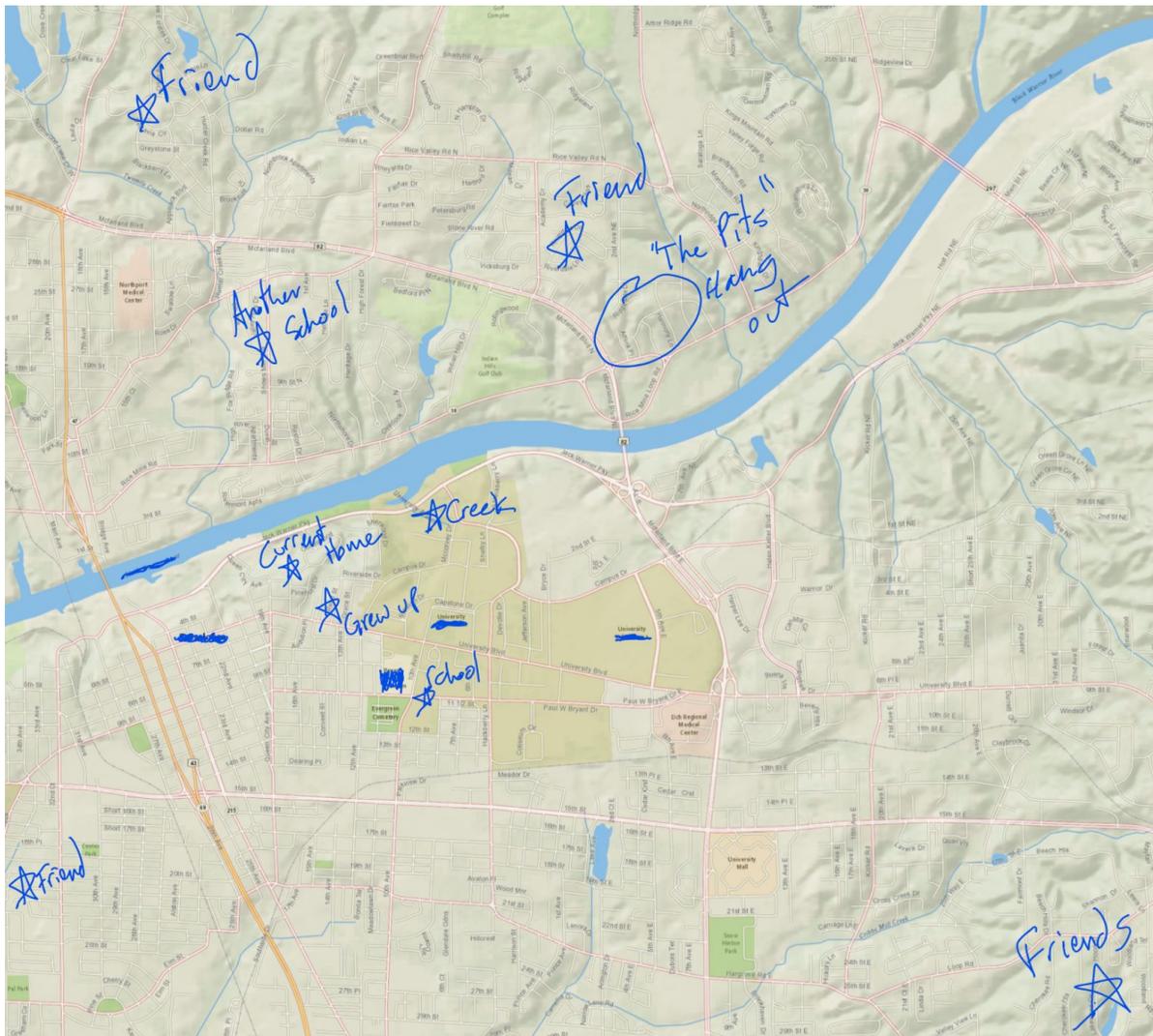


Figure 3. *Hannah's Experience Scattered across the City*. This is the researcher's re-drawing of Hannah's map. The redrawing was for legibility. The annotations on the map show that Hannah's friends lived across the city and that she associated with a variety of spaces.

Discussion

This study provides insight into the lived experience of segregation and integration through a spatial lens rather than academic outcomes or other indicators of equity. Our most significant finding was that participants' placemaking differed while patterns of residential segregation in neighborhoods remained relatively constant. The maps and interviews show placemaking strategies of bounding, bridging, and scatter.

One aspect of school segregation research focuses on how school integration has the power to realign housing patterns, while continued school segregation has the power to ossify these patterns (e.g. Siegel-Hawley 2013). In this study, the racial and economic dynamics of

neighborhoods hardly changed for generations, and individuals who remained in the city lived as adults near where they grew up. However, according to the few subjects we interviewed, different patterns of schooling altered community placemaking, both in neighborhoods and across Riverville. For example, Sarge's interview demonstrated how his entire lived experience was bounded by a single geographic area, Southwood. This area also was steeped in deficit narratives in the media and public discourse with messages of failing schools, poverty, and violence. Sarge did not have many educational experiences outside of this area, and his place-based discourse tended to reflect interpretations of being trapped and aspirations of finding release, or as he described, "getting out."

Meanwhile, Ms. Wells, who attended school at the beginning of the integration period and had experiences outside of Southwood, never mentioned feelings of being trapped despite growing up amongst explicit and enforced segregated practices. She, like Sarge, shared a physical emplacement that was rooted in Southwood. And, like Sarge, she lived in Southwood as an adult. However, Ms. Wells' interview and map reflect a broader understanding, awareness, and desire to participate in community experiences outside of Southwood.

Hannah also did not express a sense of confinement and restriction. Her experiences as a white student who went to several schools during the integration movement reflected a sense of expanded opportunity. Her map reflected a scattering of experiences, and her placemaking of favored locations in Riverville seemingly expanded with every new school she attended.

While these findings reflect the beginning stages of our research, they suggest that school desegregation and integration may create an effect that tends not to be discussed in conversations about integration policy. This effect is that physically moving children to different parts of their community and giving them opportunities outside of their neighborhoods, many of which are bounded (inscribed and then characterized) in deficit narratives, may allow a release from perceived confinement. People then may not desire to "get out" because they have access to bridges and path-making mechanisms, or they may not perceive their community to be barricaded at all.

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