

Boredom, Drugs, and Schools: Protecting Children in Gentrifying Communities

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Gentrification brings a host of economic and social changes. Changes in community culture do not directly impact residents' livelihoods or homes, but these differences in lifestyles shape peoples' experiences of their homes. I examine rhetoric in three gentrifying neighborhoods in Atlanta, GA to see how it expresses both the uncertainty that new and long-time residents feel about their communities, and how it is indicative of boundary-work residents engage in to distinguish their group from the "others." Residents express concern about the safety and happiness of children in demographically changing communities. I find that residents focus on threats to children as a socially acceptable way to object to the different class, and sometimes race, background of their neighbors. This boundary maintenance activity serves to calcify divisions between groups of residents, and obscures the underlying schisms between the privileged and less-privileged residents in gentrifying neighborhoods.

INTRODUCTION

Communities undergoing gentrification, a process in which middle-class households move into working-class neighborhoods, experience a host of material and social changes. The cost and condition of the housing stock changes, the demographic composition of the neighborhood shifts in terms of class and often in terms of race, and other amenities and services may become more or less available, to serve the new arrivals (Chernoff, 1980; Smith, 1996; Kennedy and Leonard, 2001; Fraser, 2004). Among the social changes accompanying gentrification is resident uncertainty about the future of the community, and about their continued welcome in the changing neighborhood (Patillo, 2003). Long-time residents, typically working class or poor, often worry about their ability to afford to stay in the neighborhood, or express concern about changes in the culture of the neighborhood (Chernoff, 1980; Slater, Curran, and Lees, 2004). The "pioneer" mentality that may have encouraged some new residents, middle class and often white, to move into gentrifying neighborhoods was predicated on change following their arrival into the community (Smith, 1996). New residents frequently express concern about the slow pace of change in their new communities.

Uncertainty and the mixture of diverse race and class-based groups can trigger conflict between groups of residents, whether overt or covert. On occasion this leads to public

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controversy about neighborhood changes or differences of lifestyle, as noted in neighborhoods in New York City, Chicago, and Atlanta (see Abu-Lughod, 1994; Campos and Shrader, 1998; Betancur, 2002). Geography scholars have suggested that “locational conflict is symbolic conflict, in that the conflict is waged through the deployment of highly symbolic action” (Mitchell, 2003:81; see also Soja, 1980). I focus here not on explosive symbolic actions through which residents attempt to claim space, such as riots, rallies, or pickets, but rather on everyday, subtle, interpersonal boundary-work that residents in changing neighborhoods engage in to declare themselves as legitimate occupants of the neighborhood. Boundary-work refers to “the strategies group members employ, and the criteria that they draw upon, to construct a symbolic divide between their group and out-group members” (Lacy, 2002, p. 43). As in other instances of changing neighborhoods, such as white flight, or the movement of ethnic minorities into suburban communities, gentrification motivates both new and long-time residents to express the differences between themselves and race- or class-differentiated “others.” Significant neighborhood change inspires residents to draw symbolic boundaries to determine who belongs in the neighborhood, who is an appropriate neighbor, and who is not (Pattillo, 2003; Berrey, 2005).

By focusing on symbolic action at the interpersonal scale, this article is able to examine, as Fraser (2004) suggests, “how power is constituted from the everyday practices of citizens and the intersection of these practices with the existing political-institutional milieu” (448). Thus, the boundary-work that residents of gentrifying communities engage in serves a function in the larger political environment, by helping residents make claims about their legitimacy to a wider audience, including local government officials, nonprofit entities, public safety officials, and planning bodies. To garner institutional support for their boundary work, residents call on culturally resonant frames, making claims about children that are nearly indisputable in their rhetorical power.

In this article I examine rhetoric about threats to children from three gentrifying neighborhoods in Atlanta, GA, to see how it expresses distinctions between two different types of residents: appropriate or legitimate neighbors, and others. I focus on the subtle, everyday aspects of boundary-work to highlight how residents’ responses to the social changes in gentrifying neighborhoods reflect uncertainty about belonging and about the future. Residents use coded language to express their fears and to emphasize distinctions between new and long-time residents. They do not directly address race or class differences between neighbors, but rather draw on an available cultural strategy and stress the threats that living in a changing neighborhood pose to children (Best, 1990). I find that residents focus on threats to children as a socially acceptable and highly compelling way to object to the different class, and sometimes race, background of their neighbors. I draw from the boundary literature to highlight how distinctions can be created and maintained in diverse and changing neighborhoods, especially gentrifying neighborhoods.

GENTRIFICATION AND UNCERTAINTY

Gentrification brings many changes in the physical environment of a neighborhood, the composition of its residents, and the economic value of the area, and sometimes changes the culture of the community (Hamnett, 1984, 1991). Such shifts introduce uncertainty into residents’ lives. This is the case both for many long-time residents wondering if they

will continue being comfortable in the neighborhood and for new residents anticipating the completed revitalization of the neighborhood.

Gentrifying neighborhoods, by definition, have experienced a period of disinvestment or decline prior to experiencing a change in any of a number of socioeconomic or sociodemographic indicators (Hamnett, 1991; Smith, Duncan, and Reid, 1994). Changes in these indicators are also harbingers of social uncertainty. Such factors include: increases in population, average income, average level of educational attainment, house values and rents, home ownership rates, rehabilitation activity, new mortgages, and in professional or managerial occupations in the geographic area (Hamnett, 1991; Smith, Duncan, and Reid, 1994; Wyly and Hammel, 1998). Gentrification is primarily a process of class change in the composition of a neighborhood, but it also frequently occurs with racial, ethnic, and cultural changes in the population as well (Hamnett, 1984).

The U.S. population is both highly mobile, likely to move several times in the course of a life, and also demonstrates a strong attachment to place (Hayden, 1995). The tension between these characteristics is apparent in gentrifying neighborhoods, home to both newly arrived upper middle class householders willing to view real estate as an investment, and also older, less privileged residents who do not always wish to relocate based on changing property values (Betancur, 2002; Slater, Curran, and Lees, 2004). This tension is particularly evident in a city like Atlanta that experienced complete upheaval during the years of urban renewal and white flight in the 1950s and 1960s (Keating, 2001). Long-time residents in gentrifying neighborhoods had often already been moved due to these forces, and did not intend to be displaced from their homes again. Watching the gentrification process unfold around them heightened long-time residents' sense of uncertainty about the future of their neighborhood and their inclusion in the neighborhoods' future (Vigdor, 2002; Newman and Wyly, 2006). Such uncertainty exists both for extremely vulnerable renters, as well as for some long-time homeowners who may be unable to afford to keep pace with escalating property taxes.

New residents are similarly uncertain about their comfort and future in the community. Although most new residents are aware of neighborhood conditions prior to moving in, many anticipate revitalization of housing stock, of local retail, and of other amenities (Laska and Spain, 1980). If change does not materialize, or comes at a pace they find too slow, new residents may come to question their decision to gentrify. Concerns commonly expressed by new residents in this regard include financial stability of their investment and physical security in the community (Slater, Curran, and Lees, 2004).

BOUNDARIES AND COMMUNITIES

Symbolic boundaries serve to demarcate membership in groups and to determine who belongs and who does not (Lamont and Molnár, 2002). Bourdieu and others have noted that boundary-work, efforts to create and maintain symbolic boundaries, is often done by the privileged to heighten the distinction between themselves and all others (Bourdieu, 1989). However, we also have many examples of symbolic boundaries being employed to "contest and reframe the meaning of social boundaries" (Lamont and Molnár, 2002), as when disadvantaged groups employ boundary-work to distinguish themselves from those still more disadvantaged than they, or when such boundary-work serves to redefine "success" (as in Lamont, 2000). The creation of these intersubjective boundaries has also been

significant for discourse on racial, class, and gender distinctions (Lacy, 2002; Lamont and Molnár, 2002).

Symbolic boundary research indicates that uncertainty intensifies the need for distinctions. The experiences of blue collar workers in times of deindustrialization, jazz musicians in times of high migration and immigration, and welfare recipients in times of program reform all demonstrate that turbulent times create a need for definition of identity and reaffirmation of belonging (Gray, 1989; Lamont, 2000; Hays, 2003). Boundary-work within geographic communities, like neighborhoods, serves to enhance categorization of people as appropriate presences in the space, or as outsiders or interlopers (Mitchell, 2003). Neighborhood transitions, whether racial or class-based, enhance the need to recreate definitions of who belongs and who does not (Anderson, 1990; Pattillo, 2003; Berrey, 2005). The neighborhood transformations accompanying gentrification often entail conflicting definitions of who belongs and who does not (Fraser, 2004). Thus, new and long-time residents compete to provide the most compelling justification for their presence and activity in neighborhood social life. To do so, residents in this study called upon one of the most resonant themes in U.S. culture, appealing to concerns for the well-being of children, and painting the “other” in their neighborhood as hostile to child welfare.

The issue of boundary-work matters not only from a rhetorical standpoint, but also because boundaries drawn between groups serve as a way of shaping or shoring up distribution of social and material resources (Bourdieu, 1989; Lamont and Molnár, 2002). When one group is successfully defined as good, pure, legitimate, or worthy, justification is provided for channeling resources and support to this group. This process of boundary maintenance also legitimates depriving resources and support to groups seen as unworthy. Boundary-work is political, because it is also about the distribution of power and other community resources (Pattillo, 2003; Fraser, 2004). For example, when groups successfully claim that an “other” in the neighborhood is illegitimate, it can erode support from the local government, the wider public, and other actors in the sociopolitical environment (Martin, 2007).

UNCERTAINTY, BOUNDARIES, AND THREATS TO CHILDREN

Although changes in neighborhood demographics are visible to most residents and observers, it is not socially acceptable to talk directly about class or racial shifts in policy circles, neighborhood meetings, or interviews with relative strangers (Berrey, 2005). Both new and long-time residents turn to expressions of concern for the well-being of children in this changing, unstable environment as a means of defining boundaries between self and other. Concern about children’s welfare has long been an effective strategy for mobilizing support (Best, 1990; Luker, 1996; Glassner, 1999; Low, 2003). Joel Best indicates one reason for the continuing resonance of concern about kids: “because children seem to embody the future, doubts about America’s future course translated into concerns about threats to children” (1990, p. 181).

Child danger is an effective strategic tool for boundary work also because children are seen as blameless and innocent (Glassner, 1999). Any danger that children face, then, is the responsibility of their parents or guardians (Cahill, 1990). Critiquing the environments in which children are raised is a means of indirectly passing judgment on parents

for placing children in these environments. Residents of gentrifying neighborhoods are able to indirectly question the appropriateness of neighbors and their behaviors through discussion of threats facing neighborhood children. Thus both new and long-time residents are able to use coded language not only to avoid discussing directly the class and race differences between themselves and their neighbors, but to do so while casting themselves as the true protectors of children, and the “other” as child endangerers. For example, one new resident suggested that many parents in the community were “bad role models” for not taking advantage of all of the new opportunities presented to them and showing their kids how to do the same. In this instance, the respondent refers to parents of a class background lower than her own middle-class position. She repeatedly invoked the harmful behaviors of long-time resident parents in opposition to her own positive actions and those of her new resident (white, middle class) friends.

METHODOLOGY

This work comes from a larger study of the impacts of gentrification on several neighborhoods in Atlanta, GA. Atlanta has many neighborhoods experiencing gentrification, yet for the present work I restrict attention to three neighborhoods within the city limits that share some political characteristics (such as city council district), but differ on several others, including demographic profiles of residents and their experiences of and responses to gentrification. Tables 1 and 2 provide a brief demographic comparison of the communities included in this article, Belleview, Tyler Hill, and High Point.¹ One study neighborhood did not experience racial change with gentrification, transitioning from a working-class white neighborhood to a middle-class white neighborhood. The other two neighborhoods studied for this article experienced both race and class transition with gentrification, changing from working-class Black to middle-class white communities.

I conducted semistructured interviews with 39 neighborhood activists, defined here as people engaged in neighborhood politics or organizations. This study did not focus on the experiences of “typical” residents, but rather on the experiences and insights of neighborhood “leaders,” broadly defined. Respondents included long-time and new residents, merchants, a community police officer, and a pastor of a local church. I also interviewed two former City Planning Bureau officials and the head of a citywide nonprofit organization. I identified potential respondents through: their positions of leadership in neighborhood organizations; newspaper articles discussing community figures; and referrals from other respondents. I created a purposive rather than representative sample of neighborhood activists in local organizations. Interviews were conducted in respondents’ homes and businesses, local coffee shops, pizza parlors, and parks. Interviews ranged from 20 minutes to two hours, and included questions about respondents’ history in the neighborhood, the history and current activities of their neighborhood organization(s), the effects of gentrification on the neighborhood, and responses of neighborhood organizations to gentrification. I supplemented interview data with nonparticipant observation at neighborhood meetings.

I was motivated by an interest in organizational responses to gentrification, but a theme that emerged from the data in all three neighborhoods was an emphasis on threats to children, articulated by both long-time and new residents. I returned to the data to conduct further coding about this theme of threats to kids. I employed the three-stage process

TABLE 1. Characteristics of Study Neighborhoods, 1980

	Bellevue	Tyler Hill	High Point
Area (square miles)	1.32	0.15	1.41
Population	7,784	1,156	7,628
Percent White	1.3%	81.9%	16.3%
Percent Black	98.5%	17.9%	83.3%
Median household income ^a	\$14,804	\$26,659	\$24,965
Median home value	\$41,976	\$22,260	\$46,216
As percent of city median	62%	33%	68%
Percent of units owner-occupied, of occupied units	58%	29.4%	66.7%
Percent of units renter occupied, of occupied units	42%	70.6%	33.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

^a All figures reported in constant 2000 dollars.

TABLE 2. Characteristics of Study Neighborhoods, 2000

	Bellevue	Tyler Hill	High Point
Population	6,028	1,070	6,057
Percent White	14.5%	77.1%	17.4%
Change in White population, 1980–2000	+776%	–12.9% ^a	–15%
Change in Black population, 1980–2000	–35.4%	–9.7%	–23.8%
Median household income ^b	\$31,497	\$32,987	\$35,600
Percent change in median household income, 1980–2000	+112.8%	+23.7%	+42.6%
Median home value	\$103,182	\$129,385	\$95,033
As percent of city median	79%	99%	73%
Percent change in median home value, 1980–2000 ^c	+145.8%	+481%	+51.37%
Percent of units owner-occupied, of occupied units	60.2%	30.2%	61.2%
Change in owner-occupied units, 1980–2000	–4%	+51.2%	–8.8%
Change in renter-occupied units, 1980–2000	–12.2%	+45.7% ^a	+16.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

^aThe conversion of a factory into loft space has increased the percentage of the population that is African American, renters, and at or below the poverty line, even as the number of owner-occupied units and the median household income have increased in the neighborhood.

^bAll figures reported in constant 2000 dollars.

^cPercent change in median home value for the City of Atlanta, 1980–2000 was 93.7 percent.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest for content analysis of interviews: open coding to allow for emergent themes, axial coding in which I compared and explored codes both within and across respondents and neighborhood cases, and selective coding in which I used specific patterns within core categories, such as activities for children, in order to tell “stories” with the data. This iterative process revealed threats to children as an indirect critique of neighbors as an important theme among residents. The categories of school, crime/drugs, and lack of activities arose most often in the analysis. I also noted whether the remark was made by a long-time resident or a new resident, and the gender and race of the respondent.

FINDINGS

According to residents of these communities, there are three primary dangers children face in changing neighborhoods: a lack of activities, the presence of drugs in the neighborhoods, and poor quality schools. I describe each of these in turn, illustrating how

different constituencies expressed the threat, and suggest how these themes both reflect uncertainty and serve to create or reinforce boundaries between new and long-time residents.

NO SERVICES, ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN IN THE COMMUNITY

Both new and long-time residents bemoaned the dearth of activities for children and youth. New residents in several communities mentioned this problem, especially new residents involved in providing activities for neighborhood kids, as several of them do. One new resident said:

“I talked to some of the kids, and they were really bored and didn’t have anything to do. Kids always say that in the summertime. But the fact is that in High Point the kids, particularly low-income kids, really don’t have much to do. There’s not a pool here. There’s no field where they could play basketball or soccer. There’s no organized activities. There’s certainly no free or low-cost activities they can do.”
(White female, 5 years in neighborhood)

However, this claim is most often and most strenuously made by long-time residents. Every long-time resident I spoke with expressed concern that there be something for the kids to do in the community; one even said she moved out of the community her family had been in since the early 1900s because there was nothing for her kids to do.

Despite agreement about the problem of inactivity, a key difference emerged over what neighborhood kids should be doing, or what opportunities should be provided for them. For example, the woman who moved her family out of the neighborhood to give her kids more options also said that in the old days kids would play in the street, with parental supervision from the porch, and that was fine. Now with the new people present—the gays, she was careful to point out—they couldn’t do this, because the gays don’t have kids, don’t care about kids, and call the police if the kids play in the street.²

In one neighborhood, Tyler Hill, this has become a heated issue because of an effort by new residents to turn an abandoned piece of property into a park. Hypothetically, all residents concerned about children could support this effort in an area with little green space. However, the abandoned property is the informal go-kart track in the community, providing kids a place off the street to ride their loud, polluting vehicles. The current design for the park contains walking trails, basketball or tennis courts, and a community garden, but no go-kart track.

Kids in several neighborhoods in this study are fond of go-karts, much to the chagrin of adults in the community. But while most agree that the carts are annoying, residents differ on what, if anything, should be done about them. One lifelong resident of Tyler Hill said:

“I know people hate the go-karts. . . But you have to then give them something to do. The designs for that new park they want, there’s nothing in there for the kids. You want them to stop doing the go-karts, you have to give them something else to do.”
(White, female, lifelong resident)

Another resident, who serves as something of a bridge between new and old residents in Tyler Hill suggests that:

“The kids have a right to the go-karts. . .when people get over themselves and see these kids as being kids who have a right, for God’s sake, at least they ain’t doing drugs. At least while they’re driving their carts they ain’t.” (White, male, 20 years in neighborhood)

When discussing the proposed park, the sense among the new residents is that this will be great for the community and their children, and should be a unifying issue for the neighborhood. The long-time residents, however, anticipate that this park will do nothing to give their kids a place to play. Several long-time residents referred to it as “their” park, meaning it will be for the new residents. Another said:

“It will just become a dog park. The kids can’t go to (a current pocket park) because people take their dogs there all the time. So then there are either dogs running around without any leashes, or they don’t pick up after their dogs. . .The people would just bring their dogs over to the new park too.” (White, female, lifelong resident)

Thus, even when there is agreement that kids suffer from lack of activities, and there is an effort to address the issue, there is still a clash between the new and old residents.

The disagreement arises in part from the average age of the kids in question. The new residents who have children have much younger kids, most still too young to be enrolled in school. Thus, activities like basketball courts, go-kart tracks, or other active pastimes in the park are not a priority. The conflict over appropriate activities also stems from class differences in “acceptable” activities, which make go-karts acceptable, if not desirable, pastimes in many low-income neighborhoods in the city, but anathema to many new middle-class neighbors (Cahill, 1990; Dorgan and Zeitlin, 1990; Lareau, 2002).

The conflict about park design and activities for children also reflects a deeper divide in these neighborhoods, especially Tyler Hill. New residents express concern about how to create a community they will feel comfortable raising their children in, and have set about making what they perceive as necessary changes. New residents’ planning efforts have unintentionally set about enforcing middle-class recreational norms on the neighborhood in Tyler Hill. In this neighborhood, residents are not only trying to provide new opportunities for kids, but are simultaneously removing extant recreation opportunities used by the older children of long-time residents, primarily the go-kart track (Dorgan and Zeitlin, 1990; Lareau, 2002).

Long-time residents, in contrast, experience and express a different type of uncertainty in these conversations. They bemoan the loss of a previous sense of community, of a previous ideal of how children should be raised. They reminisce about days without more recreation resources, but days in which their kids could safely play in the streets and throughout the neighborhood without fear of reprisal from the police, or neighbors intending to call the police. In so doing, they highlight concerns about their ongoing presence in the neighborhood, and the loss of an overarching sense of community in their old homes. In this way, they articulate the difficulty of claiming and maintaining their right to occupy space, and public space, in the neighborhood (Mitchell, 2003).

Long-time residents are more likely to disparage new residents as being uncaring about children, or uninterested in children's needs or activities, even though new residents in all study neighborhoods have spearheaded efforts to directly provide activities for neighborhood youth. The rhetoric of "they don't have kids" or "they don't care about kids" serves to distinguish long-time residents as caring protectors of youth, versus uncaring, childless, often gay new residents.

DRUGS AND CRIME

Another perceived threat to children in gentrifying neighborhoods is the presence of drugs and crime. This threat is articulated most frequently by new residents, concerned about the effects of these illegal activities on their own kids, and on other impressionable kids in the community. One new resident expressed frustration with her neighborhood:

"Like when I see crack bags in front of the schools. The community needs to get rid of the crap, especially for the kids." (White, female, 1 year in neighborhood)

She went on to locate the source of some of these problems:

"There are so many opportunities for these kids now, they need good examples, not to steal, not to loiter, they don't need negative things like parents saying 'you're no good,' they need positive influences." (White, female, 1 year in neighborhood)

This woman and other new residents who expressed concern about raising families in an environment with drugs and crime, call the police, police officials, and city council representatives when they become aware of particular "hot spots" of crime in the neighborhood, and have made significant inroads in decreasing this activity.

Sometimes new residents express confusion about why long-time residents have not taken action on this problem previously, stating that anyone could make the calls and bring attention and change. Long-time residents suggest they could not or would not have had the same impact on crime as new residents, citing the lack of city and police responsiveness when called. For example, one long-time resident said she did the best she could when raising her kids, but that often putting on burglar bars seemed her only option: she called the police back then, but to no avail. Now:

"And the police are going to listen to them and you can say that's the same thing I've been saying for all this time." (Black, female, 35-year resident)

Another possible barrier to earlier attempts to eradicate crime is that it is often local kids and youth who engage in criminal or delinquent activities.

"A good majority of the new residents don't have kids or their kids are very, very young—like infants—so there's lots of complaints about the neighborhood kids throwing trash, being loud, swearing, throwing things at their cars. . . They tend to think that the older residents are white trash, neglectful of their kids. The kids are delinquent drug users, sellers, and vandals." (White, male, 6-year resident)

Another new resident describes his next door neighbor's son, and his friends:

"He's my pet project. He's my favorite kid in the neighborhood. But he's also one of the worst kids in the neighborhood. He didn't pass school this year. And his cousin and sisters are writing foul language on the park benches. It's just the beginning of other things." (White, male, 2-year resident)

It is in discussion of these kids that long-time residents explain why they have not been as active in calling the police about drugs and other crime activities as their newer neighbors.

"The new folks are mean to the kids though. We have kids; some of them are bad and should be locked up, but not all of them." (White, female, Lifelong resident)

Another says that they never used to call the police in the neighborhood about kids, because:

"Prior to that time they never, things that were happening were happening or caused by the children in the community. And so I wouldn't say anything to a neighbor, for example, because my child was the person doing it. And yet, my neighbor would come to me rather than go to a city official. And we tried to handle it among ourselves. It was better for everybody involved." (Black, female, 30-year resident)

This sentiment was echoed by other long-time residents, a preference for handling crime, fights, and vandalism within the community, rather than involving third parties, like the police. This resonates with other findings on contemporary communities, that one of the barriers to smooth relations between diverse residents is the lack of direct communication between the groups (Baumgartner, 1988; Perin, 1988). New residents in gentrifying neighborhoods, whether because of fear or because of suburban upbringing, tend to take their concerns to external third parties, such as housing code enforcement or the local police department, rather than solving them with their neighbors directly (Baumgartner, 1988; Lacy, 2002). This may get action taken more quickly, but creates a feeling of distrust.

Both new and long-time residents identify crime as a problem in their communities, but they differ on the magnitude of the problem, and on the appropriate solution. Long-time residents distinguish themselves as people who talk to each other about problems, from new residents who call the police or code enforcement for a wide variety of issues. This distinction in how one responds to crime and disruption reflects the concern of long-time residents about losing a way of life.

While long-time residents did much boundary-work around issues of activities for kids and youth, new residents do far more boundary-work around the issues of crime and drugs. As new residents work to change the prevalence of drugs and crime in their community, they simultaneously demonstrate their status as good neighbors and strong defenders of the neighborhood. They define themselves as the ones most concerned with child safety and well-being, and as those most willing to do something to improve safety in the community. New residents' emphasis on activism as a sign of being a caring, appropriate neighbor resonates with Lacy's (2002) findings that white middle-class suburban

residents define neighborliness through activism, while Black middle-class suburbanites identify speaking to neighbors as sufficient evidence of good neighborly behavior. The success of new residents' efforts to reduce crime indicates the alignment between new residents' interests and those of political and economic actors outside of the neighborhood. This is manifest most clearly in responsive city bureaucracies and police officials.

SCHOOLS

A final threat to children is that posed by poor-quality neighborhood schools. New residents frequently express their concerns about the quality of the neighborhood schools, and how this will affect both their kids' educations and the stability of the neighborhood.

"And hopefully a lot of the new people moving here will want to stay here after they have children. I mean there's big problems with the public schools in the City of Atlanta, and we've had a lot. . . a handful of neighbors who after they have their children, they move away." (White, male, 3-year resident)

Another resident states:

"There's a baby boom going on in this neighborhood, so in the next five years either people are going to be moving or they're going to be changing the schools. Because right now the schools here are awful." (White, female, 2-year resident)

A third new resident was explicit about how new resident parents view the local schools, and how the demographic composition of the area shapes this view:

"Folks. . . are not going to send their kids to (neighborhood school) because they didn't want their kid to be the only white kid in the school. And their free lunch percentage is somewhere in the 99 percentile. So while people are willing to talk about things. . . people are not going to use their kids as guinea pigs. It's just not going to happen. You're never going to meet a parent that sends their kid to be the only (white) kid that's going to go." (White, male, 5-year resident)

There is a significant degree of consensus among the new residents about the poor quality of local schools. This view is bolstered by most media accounts of public school performance (Hagans, 1994; White, 1993).

Long-time residents, for the most part, do not disagree with this assessment of neighborhood schools. Rather, long-time residents suggest that blanket statements about the quality of the schools reflect poorly on them, their children, and their decisions as parents to send their children to these schools. To provide a contrasting view of local schools, long-time residents frequently mention success stories that have come out of the neighborhood and neighborhood schools, to show that they did not make decisions that disadvantage their children in sending them to the local schools. One long-time resident described changes in schools over time, while defending the education they provided:

"I knew it—the schools were—I mean we could look out the door and see the kids going up to the school. And it was good then. They weren't bussed, in the '60s. But

then again they were but it wasn't widespread. And then of course the schools, once they became less white in educators, there was I guess a drop in education. . . . But they had the same dedicated teachers. The same hard working individuals in the schools." (Black, female, 35-year resident)

This woman, like other long-time residents, expressed ambivalence about the schools. They both look back to a period when schools may have been better, and at the same time defend the students and teachers even in a time of significant decrease in school quality.

Several neighborhood organizations, composed mostly of new residents, have tried to address their concerns about school by forming education committees. The goals of these committees are not clearly defined, but they demonstrate a desire to help the schools.

"I guess I feel one of the drawbacks to moving in town to a neighborhood that's. . . like ours is that the school system is just awful. And one of our mission statements in the organization is that we're focused on revitalizing the neighborhood as a whole, so this year we set up an education committee." (White, male, 3-year resident)

Through these committees neighborhood organizations conduct school supply drives, attend school board meetings, and have met with principals of local schools to talk about how the community groups could support their work. These are promising activities, and may prove to build bridges between new and old residents, especially if more new residents begin sending their children to school with the children of the old residents. At present, however, observations at meetings show that when new residents talk about these efforts, they couch their activities in terms of how bad the schools currently are, thus reasserting a critique of parents who send their kids to school there.

This unintentional but implied critique fits with a larger concern voiced by long-time residents about their new neighbors—their willingness to come in and make judgments about the neighborhood and its institutions without first learning more about the community.

"Don't come here and try to force your ideas and your behavior without first coming to the table and finding out what you can learn from the group and what the group can learn from you." (Black, female, 25-year resident)

Long-time residents variously suggested that this attitude came from being white, well educated, professional, or from the suburbs. Long-time residents define new residents as arrogant in their approach to the existing community, a view supported in some other studies of gentrification (Smith, 1996). New residents use the discussion of schools to reassert class differences between themselves and their long-time resident neighbors, and echo middle-class sentiments about appropriate schools and educational environments (Biesel, 1992).

DISCUSSION

"Culture clashes," so named by neighborhood residents, are real, and reflect different preferences for lifestyles and habits. However, these repeated clashes tell us something

more than class or race differences in child rearing. The three key threats discussed by residents each contain an underlying note of concern about the class and race differences between selves and their neighbors, and also express claims about legitimate rights to space in the neighborhood (Mitchell, 2003). Gentrification in these neighborhoods brought conflict, and residents expressed their larger concerns about lack of control in the community through descriptions of threats posed to children by the new diversity within the community.

The repeated discussion of children's welfare reflects not only residents' actual concern about their children, or children in general, but an awareness of how resonant concerns about children are in our society. Neighbors discuss worries about schools or drugs, without needing to spell out concerns about the class and/or race differences in the communities that cause friction. Both long-time and new residents avoid talking about the roots of the problems they see, such as class differences in acceptable behavior, or social displacement, and at the same time, they are more likely to gain sympathy for their views than if they openly focused on class, race, or sexuality differences (Berrey, 2005).³

Alternative claims could be made by residents in these attempts to express their legitimacy. For example, some residents invoked threats to the elderly as a concern facing the changing neighborhood. But this concern, while also morally unimpeachable, was applied only when discussing the changing costs of living in the neighborhood (Heiner, 2005). Children, in contrast, are portrayed as threatened by a host of cultural changes in the community. The threat posed by gentrification thus is a wider, all-encompassing danger, and makes action more necessary.

Examination of rhetorical battles over child rearing in these Atlanta neighborhoods is important for understanding larger conflicts in gentrifying neighborhoods. Much of the gentrification literature focuses on material and economic consequences of the process and these are significant. However, another strand of the literature begins to address the social consequences of gentrification as well (Chernoff, 1980; Fraser, 2004; Freeman, 2006). This study addresses one aspect of these social changes: how do residents talk to each other and outsiders about changes in their neighborhoods? How do residents address the diversity, the changes, and the uncertainty of living in gentrifying neighborhoods? What do these diverse groups of neighbors see as appropriate use of neighborhood spaces, and who has the right or the legitimacy to make these decisions? One way residents cope with these changes is by engaging in interpersonal symbolic boundary-work to distinguish themselves from undesired others.

Residents invoke concerns about children when discussing the changes in their neighborhoods as a means of doing boundary-work. Both groups of residents seek to draw lines between their own group, the legitimate or appropriate neighbors, and the other group, who behaves in illegitimate and inappropriate ways. This boundary-work serves not to create a sense of unity among a residents' own group, but serves primarily to exclude the "other" (Lamont and Molnár, 2002). Class and race differences between the two groups of residents are thus effectively cloaked as differences in child-rearing, and are categorized as either good or bad.

Residents engaged in this boundary-work do not argue for the removal of neighbors they find less than desirable, but rather seek support for their perspective on activities in the neighborhood, and emphasize their own right to occupy space in the community. New residents express concern about specific conditions in the community, such as continuing crime or the presence of go-karts, seen as detrimental to the anticipated

revitalization of the neighborhood. They also often express concerns about perceived inappropriate use of public spaces and public amenities in the neighborhood (Mitchell, 2003). Finally, new residents emphasize the need for activism to be an effective neighbor, and to create the ideal neighborhood they seek (Lacy, 2002).

Long-time residents voice anxiety about their own social or physical displacement from the neighborhood when they describe what they see as the changing attitude toward children and youth. Long-time residents highlight the need for respect for the old ways of doing things in the neighborhood, and their concern that activism of new residents will lead to a greater feeling of isolation in the neighborhood, and greater restriction on their use of public spaces, like parks, streets, and abandoned properties.

New and long-time residents articulate threats differently, reflecting differences in the nature of the underlying uncertainty they experience while living in changing neighborhoods. Both groups suggest that their preferred activities and behaviors in the neighborhood are the legitimate and appropriate ones, and thus are the activities that should be allowed or encouraged. Analysis of this boundary-work is important not only for understanding the cultural and social changes that accompany gentrification, but also because the distinction-making is also about garnering resources and support for a particular view of space, of the neighborhood, and of "community."

This boundary-work serves to calcify divisions between two groups of people occupying the same neighborhood. Such divisiveness can create tension or loss of a sense of belonging in the neighborhood. Solidification of symbolic boundaries can also affect distribution of social resources, such as support from agencies and services both within and outside of the neighborhood (Mitchell, 2003; Fraser, 2004). In other words, as the argument is made repeatedly that one group cares more about children than another, or is more supportive of children than the other, this argument can have real, lived consequences for both groups. If the boundary is believed by other residents, by community police officers, and by leaders of neighborhood organizations, then one group of residents may become marginalized in the neighborhood. As these battles play out in gentrifying neighborhoods, the process of boundary creation and maintenance functions to solidify the established distribution of resources, advantages, and privileges (Lamont and Molnár, 2002). In a situation of political and economic inequality such as that seen in most gentrifying neighborhoods, this will consolidate advantages in the hands of new, white, middle-class residents, to the detriment of working-class long-time residents. Thus a potential consequence of these everyday, seemingly benign, boundary maintenance strategies may be the further disadvantaging of long-time residents in gentrifying neighborhoods, in the name of protecting children.

Notes

¹ Neighborhood and individual names have all been changed to protect the confidentiality of respondents.

² In this instance, as in many others, the respondents refer to "gays" interchangeably with "new people" or "whites" to describe gentrifiers. The one term rarely used is "middle class," or other class-identifiers of the new residents, despite this common characteristic. Certainly, homophobia is a real presence in some of these areas, as is racial bias. What is striking, however, is that the actual threat of gentrification is so rarely attributed to people of a higher income or class background. In our purportedly "classless" society, residents of changing neighborhoods either lack a vocabulary of class-consciousness, or actively choose to adopt language that locates more appropriate targets.

³ In fact, in two study neighborhoods there were widely publicized conflicts when long-time residents expressed their concerns about new residents through discourse focused on the supposed sexual orientation of new residents. Such efforts resulted in loss of external support for a subset of long-time residents, and strife within the neighborhood. My research occurred four years after one such event and 15 years after another, and respondents were perhaps more reluctant to use language about sexuality when describing their communities because of these experiences.

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