

The Neighborhood Story Project: Keeping More Than Our Homes

By

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## INTRODUCTION

The first time I met Larry, he walked me out of his neighborhood association meeting and into the crisp December evening to point out the street light at the edge of the parking lot. “I was born under that lamppost,” he told me. That was years before the cinderblock community center was built on this land; years before the highway displaced 1000 families and disconnected Cleveland Park from the surrounding neighborhood; years before white flight, city disinvestment, rising poverty, drugs and gangs hit the area; and years before the recent gentrification of this half-mile neighborhood conveniently located just minutes from downtown Nashville. And though the home where Larry was born is no longer standing, this 60-year-old African American man has lived within five blocks of this lamppost his entire life.

A few months later, as Larry and his neighbors began working on the Neighborhood Story Project, he reflected on the changing ways people in Cleveland Park relate to their homes, neighbors and neighborhood:

when you hear people much older than me speak of home, home was **home**, home wasn't an investment...It's like roots gripped into the ground, and a tornado could not move them. Speed didn't matter to them, only home did. So, I don't know why this is mousing around in my head, but people communicate differently now because - (snapping his fingers six quick times) - they can't, they can't **slow** down enough to absorb, and when you can't absorb, you can't appreciate...When, these neighborhoods...people used to have funerals in these houses, as well as weddings. There were births, and there were deaths in these neighborhoods. Now, psheww...

Larry is concerned. He may be concerned, in part, with being able to afford to keep his home. Between 2002 and 2016, property values increased 110% in Cleveland Park (compared to a 54% increase in housing values county wide), and large numbers of low-income renters and fixed-income homeowners have already been priced out by rising rents and property taxes. But he is also concerned about the relationships he and his neighbors have to their homes, to their neighborhood, and to one another. He is concerned about an atrophied sense of care and community, the loss of historic knowledge, and a depleted investment in the collective future of the neighborhood.

Having spent the last few years listening to residents of Nashville's gentrifying neighborhoods, I know Larry is not alone. In June of 2013, my family and I packed up a life we loved in Missoula, Montana, and drove to Nashville, Tennessee so that I could begin doctoral study at Vanderbilt University. Trading hiking trails for highways, crisp mountain air for sweltering summer heat, a mountain-ridged horizon for a skyline dotted with cranes, the transition was stark and disjuncting. Grieving the loss of a beloved place and cherished people I had willingly removed us from, I tried to get my bearings in the place we had landed. And as I rode my bike through my new neighborhood, attended community meetings, and talked to people about their city, I found that many Nashvillians were grieving the loss of a place and people too, only they hadn't moved. Nashville was changing, adding people and jobs at a record setting pace. Entire neighborhoods were being rebranded and rebuilt to attract a wealthier, younger, and whiter market; and businesses were moving in to serve these new residents. More times than I can count, people waved their hands desperately at the ever-encroaching new construction and asked, "who is this

being built *for?*” And while many people laud the development for functioning as an economic engine, others are suffering its consequences.

Over the last four years, I have immersed myself in the study of gentrification, grappling with theoretical perspectives on social and spatial inequities in the classroom while working alongside residents, city-wide organizing groups, and policy-makers addressing gentrification on the ground. Concurrently, having moved my white family into one of Nashville’s rapidly changing neighborhoods, I have wrestled with my own complicity in gentrification, and sought ways to ethically engage in my neighborhood and with my neighbors. Through this study, research, professional and personal engagement, I became increasingly troubled that those who were most directly affected by the rapid economic and demographic changes in Nashville have been the least systematically involved both in defining the problems they were experiencing and imagining possible solutions. Further, as I listened to residents who were concerned about the rapid changes in their neighborhoods, it seemed that existing *theories* of gentrification fell short of speaking to the fullness of their lived experience, and that current *responses* to gentrification were failing to address their worries. Overwhelmingly, the research, policy, and community development conversations seemed to restrict spaces of agency to policymakers and power brokers at the city, state, and federal levels, while discourse concerning the consequences of gentrification is reduced to a loss of affordable housing.

There is no doubt that many people want to keep their homes. But what else might we learn from residents of gentrifying neighborhoods? How do they experience the transformation of their communities? What do they want to see happening in their neighborhoods? What kinds of changes are within their spheres of influence? And, for those

of us studying and working in gentrifying neighborhoods, how might we reimagine research as a process for residents to co-produce knowledge about, and take action in, the places they call home?

I designed the Neighborhood Story Project to answer these questions. Between February and November, 2016, I worked with small groups of residents in three gentrifying Nashville neighborhoods. Meeting together over 12-weeks, residents in each group identified guiding research questions about their neighborhood, collected and analyzed data, and shared what they learned through culminating community-wide events. Studying our work together, I wanted to understand what the Neighborhood Story Project did to, for, and with project participants, and how insights from this project might be beneficial to other communities grappling with similar social/spatial transformations.

It is my hope that this text may help people working in neighborhoods facilitate and/or amplify residents' abilities to affect desired change in their communities. As someone working in community practice—the division of social work focused on changing conditions of inequality, often at the neighborhood level—I am particularly interested in contributing to a theory of practice for intervening in gentrifying neighborhoods. However, findings from this study may be relevant more broadly to people working in community psychology, community development, and community organizing, as well as for neighbors serving as formal and informal leaders in their communities.

Although my most urgent interest is in leveraging community practice to improve neighborhood level well-being, practice is deeply entangled with theory, research, and policy. As such, this project is both shaped by and speaks back to how gentrification has been theorized, researched, and responded to with policy. Ultimately, this work has two

goals: first, to offer a conceptual framework that considers the *more than material* dimensions of gentrification (Thurber, in press), that is, consequences of gentrification that include, but are not limited to, a loss of housing; and second, to provide a practice model that might support people like Larry in places like Cleveland Park to keep more than just their homes.

Chapter 1 situates this study, making the case for a broadened conceptual space to theorize gentrification's causes and consequences, and then exploring the need for publicly engaged scholarship and action that is grounded in residents' lived experiences. Chapter 1 closes with a description of the Neighborhood Story Project as an alternative intervention in gentrifying neighborhoods. Chapter 2 describes the design of the study, and situates the study geographically within the City of Nashville. Chapter 3 introduces the neighborhood settings where the Neighborhood Story Project occurred, and traces each project's trajectory. Chapters 4 and 5 present study findings related to participant outcomes, and the design elements that supported and constrained those outcomes, respectively. The final chapters consider the implications of this study, with Chapter 6 exploring implications for community development practice, policymaking, and continued research, and Chapter 7 considering contributions to gentrification theorizing. On the whole, this text hopes to reimagine what engaged scholarship can do for and with communities undergoing rapid demographic change, and how it might help all of us live into more just ways of being in community together.

## CHAPTER 1. SITUATING THE NEIGHBORHOOD STORY PROJECT

How society responds to social problems is intimately tied to how its members understand the causes and consequences of those problems, and where members see themselves positioned to make change. As such, this chapter situates The Neighborhood Story Project theoretically and disciplinarily. First, tracing some of the prominent strands of gentrification theorizing, the chapter explores the lineage of the material focus of gentrification, and the need for a *more than material* framework that more fully accounts for gentrification's harms. Second, the chapter examines the need for expanded publicly-engaged scholarship in gentrifying neighborhoods, and the distinct contributions community practitioners are positioned to make in these settings. Third, the chapter maps the core elements of one possible community practice intervention in gentrifying neighborhoods: The Neighborhood Story Project.

### **The Case for a More Than Material Framework**

Gentrification is commonly understood as the transformation of areas with relatively high levels of affordable housing into areas targeting middle and upper income uses (Hackworth, 2002; Lees, Slater & Wyly, 2013). These changes provoke a range of losses, as people may lose their homes, neighbors, and sites of historical significance, along with their *sense* of place, belonging, and history. Yet, policy makers and community practitioners often restrict interventions in gentrifying neighborhoods to the material effects, such as trying to reduce displacement through the creation and preservation of affordable housing. While such approaches are critical, they fail to recognize and respond to other harms residents may be experiencing concurrent with or independent from a loss of housing. This begs the question: why has gentrification been framed largely in material terms?

Part of the answer is disciplinary. Of the nearly 2500 academic articles published on gentrification since 2000, the majority (68%) were published in urban studies/planning journals, which tend to emphasize the built environment, demographic changes and the political economy.<sup>1</sup> Although definitions have evolved over time, Davidson and Lees suggest that gentrification is distinguished by four key characteristics: (1) the reinvestment of capital, (2) an increase in high-income demographics, (3) landscape change, and (4) direct or indirect displacement of low-income groups (2005, p. 1187).<sup>2</sup> In their review of the state of gentrification scholarship, Lees, Slater, and Wyly (2013) note there is widespread agreement that gentrification is the product of a constellation of political, economic, cultural and social factors. At the same time, they find a broad recognition among scholars that the political economy, and in particular capitalism—as manifest in the current area of neoliberalism<sup>3</sup>—has a fundamental role in creating geographies of gentrification (Smith, 2002).

Political economists argue that under neoliberalism, geographies of all scales (including global regions, nation-states, cities, and neighborhoods) are constructed through processes of *uneven development*, wherein some places are systematically less developed while others are more so (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). This serves a variety of functions for economic elites: people and places within underdeveloped areas can more easily be

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<sup>1</sup> A Prosearch query for peer reviewed articles of gentrification returned 2438 pieces published since January 1, 2000. Although the majority were published in urban studies or planning journals, geography journals carried 13% of the articles, political science and sociology journals carried 11%, 7% were published in anthropology/cultural studies journals, and 1% were published in social work/community psychology/community practice journals.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this paper, I draw on this definition of gentrification as a starting point. These four characteristics offer a useful rubric, for example, to distinguish increased land values in affluent areas from similar rates of increase in areas where poor and working-class people live. Though the two settings may be experiencing related types of change, using the above definition, only the latter constitutes gentrification.

<sup>3</sup> Neoliberalism refers to a specific ideology and associated practices of governance which frequently involve the rollback of regulations intended to protect people and the land from exploitation, and the reduction of state provided social welfare (Harvey, 2005).

exploited for land, resources, and labor; the existence of ‘undesirable’ areas create a market for high-cost alternatives; and—following the logic of ‘buy low, sell high’—deferring development in some regions insures the possibility of a high return on investment if the region is later strategically developed. Further, under the logic of uneven development, regions may be invested in and divested from—time and again—in order to provide new opportunities for wealth production (Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Smith, 1996).

Each of these functions of uneven development can be seen in the context of gentrifying urban areas: many neighborhoods home to low-income and poor residents have experienced systemic disinvestment from the state. When targeted with intense state and private investment, these areas experience rapidly rising land values, depleting the affordable housing stock (Smith, 2002). At the same time, cities and states are increasingly passing preemptive legislation prohibiting rent control mechanisms or banning policies that require developers to build affordable housing; such prohibitions are currently in place in 42 U.S. states ([www.nmhc.org](http://www.nmhc.org)). U.S. urban neighborhoods are now gentrifying at twice the rate of the 1990s, with 1 in 5 low-income neighborhoods experiencing rapid increases in median home values (Maciag, 2015). And, as swelling numbers of residents lose their homes due to rent hikes and rising property taxes, geographer David Harvey’s (2005) notion of “accumulation by dispossession” offers an apt rendering of gentrification’s consequence.

Indeed, tracing dispossession and displacement has been a core focus of gentrification literature since geographer Ruth Glass first coined the term in 1964 to describe the transformation of modest London homes into high-end residences serving the gentry. Following her pioneering work, a steady stream of scholarship has critiqued the negative effects of urban revitalization on poor and working-class residents, chiefly, the physical



displacement of people no longer able to afford rising housing costs (Marcuse, 1985; Newman & Wyly, 2006; Zuk, Bierbaum, Chapple, Gorska, Loukaitou-Sideris et al, 2015). Displacement-focused research has informed policy and community development responses to gentrification in many important ways, spurring a wide range of interventions related to regulating, incentivizing, and shaping the housing market in order to increase the stock of affordable housing. Albeit with mixed results, an increasing number of cities are adopting at least some of these strategies to advance equitable forms of development in revitalizing areas. For example, inclusionary housing policies have been adopted by more than 500 jurisdictions. Such policies target multi-unit housing developments, and incentivize or require the construction of a certain proportion of affordable housing units relative to the number of market-rate units (Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2014).

These efforts to mitigate gentrification's displacement effects have not been uncontested. Influenced by neoliberal ideologies, a second wave of gentrification scholars laud the economic benefit of increasing housing values (and the corresponding tax base), dismiss calls for housing market regulations, and shrug concerns of widespread residential displacements—questioning if and how such changes could be measured (Vigdor, Massey & Rivlin, 2002; Freeman, 2005).<sup>4</sup> Instead, these scholars emphasize the need for improved housing, infrastructure, and commercial development in declining areas. In doing so, this wave of scholarship equates gentrification with revitalization (Lees, 2007). The 'eviction' of critical attention to who exactly is helped and who is harmed by gentrification has been interrogated by many scholars of urban change (Slater, 2006; Lees, 2007), who suggests the

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<sup>4</sup> I am drawing here on the three generations of gentrification scholarship introduced by Stabrowski (2014), who argued a first wave focused on physical residential displacement, a second wave championed neoliberal urbanism, and a third wave has returned to a critical scholarship of gentrification that expands notions of displacement.

need to double down efforts to document the negative consequences of gentrification and investigate models of revitalization that improve well-being for current, as well as future, residents.

Although the political economists' accounts of gentrification are illuminating and have been helpful in shaping policy platforms to advance equity in cities, this framework is not without vulnerabilities. In recent years, a third wave of gentrification scholarship has begun to examine and address these vulnerabilities, several of which are introduced below.<sup>5</sup>

### **Pays Insufficient Attention to Racial Struggle**

One of the strongest critiques of first and second generation gentrification scholarship is inadequate attention to the particular vulnerabilities and losses experienced by communities of color. This absence of a racial analysis is evident in the proclamation from Lees, Slater, and Wyly: "Gentrification is nothing more and nothing less than the neighborhood expression of class inequality" (2013, p. 80). Such statements ignore the entangled relationship between neoliberalism and the racialization of space that informs where and how gentrification manifests, and fail to account for the particular risks born by people of color in gentrifying neighborhoods. This is not to suggest that gentrifying neighborhoods are only and always predominantly inhabited by people of color, and that incomers are always predominantly white. As Lees observes, "the racial/ ethnic issues associated with the gentrification process take on a different guise according to the communities involved" (2000, p. 404), and these complexities matter. However, given the

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<sup>5</sup> There is a diverse field of scholars in this third wave. That said, many are influenced by LeFebvre's philosophy of space and the social-spatial dialectic, which can be understood as they ways the social shapes the spatial and vice versa (see Davidson, 2009, and Soja, 1980). For a robust accounting of current debates within gentrification scholarship, see Brown-Saracino, 2010.

racialization of space—which can be understood as the spatial ideologies, policies and practices that have functioned to contain, segregate, and/or remove people of color (Lipsitz, 2007)—people of color are more likely to live in neighborhoods vulnerable to gentrification and thus are disproportionately harmed (Brookings Institution, 2001).

In response, a number of gentrification scholars are mapping the intersections of race, class, and place to document the displacement effects of gentrification on communities of color. As examples, a study of a historically black neighborhood in Portland, OR, demonstrated that home values tripled between 1990 and 2000, and white homeownership increased 43% in the same period (Gibson, 2007). Similar trends have been documented elsewhere; Li, Leong, Vitiello & Acoca find that as a result of the accelerated rate of gentrification in Chinatowns in Boston, New York and Philadelphia, these neighborhoods are on “the verge of disappearing” (2013, p.2).

Concurrent with these efforts to make visible the racialized effects of gentrification, other scholars are working to contextualize and historicize these effects (Blomley, 2015). Since colonization, white supremacy—whether explicitly stated or operating de facto—has functioned to create protected spaces for white bodies, while simultaneously containing, if not eliminating, the spaces of racialized others (Harris, 1993). Given this legacy, urban scholar Anaya Roy describes contemporary housing evictions as a form of *racial banishment*, noting that the legacy of racial violence tied up in and expressed through evictions “cannot be encapsulated within sanitized notions of gentrification and displacement” (2017, A3). Importantly, attending to gentrifying neighborhoods as sites of racial struggle illuminates both violence and resilience, and makes evident that *homes* are not the only things being lost.

Alongside and in between efforts to contain and/or annihilate people of color—black people and other people of color have also built neighborhoods within which they have generated meaningful economic, cultural, and social place-based networks; created webs of caring relationships between people and places; and nurtured legacies of—and visions for—resistance to injustice (Collins, 1990; Lipsitz, 2007). Increasingly, third wave gentrification scholars are attending to the residents’ particular histories with and meanings of place, as well as attachments to neighborhood sites of significance, which include, but are not limited to, homes (as examples, see Chidester & Gadsby, 2016; Nam, 2012; Somdahl-Sands, 2008).<sup>6</sup>

### **Perpetuates Damage-Centered Views of Places and People**

Relatedly, the language of uneven development lends itself to viewing some places through a damage-based lens. In her critical essay, *Suspending Damage*, Indigenous scholar Eve Tuck describes the dangers of damage-centered research, in which “pain and loss are documented in order to obtain particular political or material gains” (2009, p. 413). Tuck argues that damage-centered research has failed on at least two accounts; not only has it been largely unsuccessful in improving conditions on the ground, it has also functioned to excise agency and hope. Too often, she finds, “After the research team leaves, after the town meeting, after the news cameras have gone away, all we are left with is the damage” (2009, p. 415). In a similar vein, geographer Katherine McKittrick cautions against the reliance of narratives “wherein, particular communities and their geographies are condemned to death over and over again” noting that such “analyses of racial violence leave little room to attend to human life” (2011, p. 954).

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<sup>6</sup> I discuss this body of work more fully in Chapter 6.

Case studies of gentrifying areas often follow a familiar, damage-centered narrative arc: *after generations of systemic disinvestment, white flight, and government neglect, an urban neighborhood—often home to communities of color—is ‘revitalized’, driving up property values and displacing poor and low-income residents.* Yet, casting pre-gentrified low-income neighborhoods only as places of disinvestment and displacement masks generations of *investment* made by residents themselves (with or without government support), and ignores aspects of neighborhoods that residents are committed to preserving. Furthermore, studies that focus attention *only* on the consequences of gentrification ignore the ways residents resist displacements and continue to create community alongside and within harmful processes of spatial transformation.

As feminist scholars have long argued (Rose, 1993), all geographies must be explored as contested sites. This call is echoed by Tuck (2009), who urges scholars to make an epistemological shift away from damage toward desire, and McKittrick, who contends that “our racial pasts can uncover a collective history of encounter—a difficult interrelatedness—that promises an ethical analysis of race based not on suffering, but on human life” (2011, 948). For McKittrick, the concept of ‘encounter’ recognizes the relational and unfinished nature of racist violence, and offers “an analytical pathway that pays attention to geographies of relationality and human life without dismissing the brutalities of isolation and marginalization” (2011, p. 955). In the context of researching gentrifying neighborhoods, such an analysis recognizes that neighborhoods gentrify over time (and often incompletely), and processes of gentrification are also affected by the resistances, desires, and agency of long-time residents (Feldman & Stall, 2004).

## Obscures other Losses

Finally, just as any bright light both reveals and shades, political economy accounts of gentrification illuminate the workings of external forces shaping urban neighborhoods and their direct consequences on housing markets, while obscuring the distinct histories and contexts that *also* shape those neighborhoods, as well as the other sorts of consequences produced by gentrification. As observed by Smith more than twenty years ago, “The dramatic shifts affecting gentrifying neighborhoods are experienced as intensely local” (1996, p. 91). These local transformations do not only impact where people live, they may also affect where people work, study, socialize, shop, congregate, agitate, worship, and bury their dead. As such, an increasing number of scholars note the ways that gentrification may negatively affect well-being through political, social and cultural displacements (Davidson, 2008; Fraser, 2004; Hyra, 2013).

Davidson (2009) considers this attention to the range of ways residents inhabit and experience their neighborhood as their *lived experience of place*, which extends beyond the materiality of a home. As noted by Betancur:

There is an aspect of gentrification that mainstream definitions ignore...The most traumatic aspect ... is perhaps the destruction of the elaborate and complex community fabric that is crucial for low-income, immigrant, and minority communities - without any compensation (2002, p. 807).

Such losses of community fabric are significant. And importantly, residents of gentrifying neighborhoods may suffer social, cultural and/or political displacements even when they remain in place (Twigge-Molecey, 2013). Indeed, the negative effects of gentrification on

residents who are not (or not yet) physically displaced has been well documented (Hodkinson & Essin, 2015; Marcuse, 1985; Shaw 2015; Stabrowski, 2014).

When those of us concerned with gentrification look at gentrification only through a political economy lens, we are likely to hone our attention to changes in land and home values, and thus reduce our understanding of gentrification's harms to a loss of affordable housing. Despite the efforts of third generation gentrification scholars to illuminate the limitations of such an approach—insufficient attention to racial struggle, perpetuating damage-based views of poor people and neighborhoods, and ignoring other losses, as outlined above—these insights have been slow to affect public policy recommendations. In recent years there have been at least five national policy reports on gentrification and equitable development that focus almost exclusively on strategies to create or preserve affordable housing.<sup>7</sup> These reports provide only passing (if any) acknowledgement of the more than material<sup>8</sup> harms of gentrification—such as loss of social ties, spaces of cultural gathering, or shared place-histories—nor do these documents detail strategies for addressing more than material harms as ends in themselves (for a summary of these reports, see Appendix A). As such, there appears to be a lag between third-wave gentrification theory and policy recommendations.

That is not to say that innovative responses to the more than material effects of gentrification are not underway. A simple internet search reveals numerous grassroots

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<sup>7</sup> Equitable development refers to development policies and practices designed to improve the quality of life for residents of all incomes, in contrast to gentrification, which privileges upper-income residents (Brookings Institution, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> As is explored more fully in Chapter 7, I am using 'material' to refer to materiality of losing a home, as well as lost opportunities for wealth production (for homeowners forced out by rising property taxes, for example), and other kinds of material losses, such as lost access to amenities like stores carrying products that long-time residents like and can afford.

efforts led by artists, community organizers, and scholar-activists designed to affect changes beyond the built environment. As examples:

- In the Mission district of San Francisco, California, a choreographer engaged themes of displacement and home in an outdoor, aerialist dance piece at a historic location (Somdahl-Sands, 2008).
- In Portland, Oregon, long-time residents of gentrifying neighborhoods led story-sharing sessions with new neighbors (Drew, 2012).
- In New York City, young women of color in a gentrifying neighborhood made a zine, posters, and website to confront the stereotypes affecting their lives (Cahill, 2006).
- In Chicago, Illinois, Puerto Rican youth developed a leadership pipeline to resist political and cultural displacements (Nam, 2012).

Though engaging different tactics, each of these four initiatives fall under the rubric of what I consider ‘more than material interventions’ by responding to some aspect of gentrification’s harms in addition to the material loss of housing. And while more than material interventions will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 6, two observations are worth underscoring here.

First, despite the proliferation of grassroots projects responding to gentrification, there is a dearth of studies—numbering just over a dozen—of these interventions. Thus, in addition to the gap between third-wave theorizing and recommended policy, there is also a gap between practice and research: more than material interventions are taking place, but such initiatives are either not being studied, or the studies are not being published. As such,



there is a very thin knowledge base from which practitioners can understand the contributions—and limitations—of more than material interventions in gentrifying neighborhoods.

Second, although more than material interventions are taking place in some gentrifying neighborhoods, these have not been systematically or strategically encouraged by city policymakers. This may be related to the previous observation—without a body of scholarship purporting the benefits of more than material interventions, policymakers may be reticent to invest resources in supporting these efforts. In any event, cities are doing little to address residents' desire to preserve important aspects of their neighborhood beyond housing. Certainly, residents can and do take action to improve their neighborhoods without government support. That said, city governments have critical resources—monetary, material, and human—that could be leveraged to encourage, amplify, and extend these efforts.

The gaps—between third wave gentrification scholarship and policy responses to gentrification, and between grassroots interventions in gentrifying neighborhoods and systematic inquiry—reflect an empirical as well as a conceptual challenge. Empirically, there is a need for an extended body of publicly-engaged scholarship that can broaden and ground contemporary understandings of residents' lived experiences of, and resistance to, gentrification. This echoes the call within community practice to expand the empirical foundation of practice-based research, and to engage in well-designed systematic inquiry aimed at improving the practices of building more equitable communities (Garvin, Gutierrez & Galinsky, 2006). Conceptually, although a number of scholars have called for an expanded understanding of gentrification's effects beyond residential displacement, these

arguments have yet to be integrated in a way that policymakers and practitioners can easily apply in community development.

### **The Need for Expanded Publicly-Engaged Scholarship in Gentrifying Neighborhoods**

Publicly engaged scholarship can be understood as knowledge generated with and for ‘the public.’ The movement towards publicly engaged scholarship is rooted in a number of critiques of ‘expert driven’ scholarship that locate expertise exclusively within the academe. Too often, such scholarship ignores the grounded expertise of everyday people in everyday places, and produces work that is irrelevant and/or illegible to the people it purports to be *about* or even *for*. Reflecting on the legacy of research conducted on indigenous peoples, indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith concludes, “It told us things already known, suggested things that would not work, and made careers for people who already had jobs” (1999, p. 3). Such ‘disengaged’ scholarship often takes final form as journal articles intended to be read by and influence others in academia, and are, in the words of bell hooks, “...highly abstract, jargonistic, difficult to read, and containing obscure references” (1994, p. 64). In contrast, in publicly engaged scholarship, academics leverage their particular tools and resources in partnership with community members to understand and address issues of mutual concern, and produce research products that are meaningful and relevant to the community.

In the social sciences, publicly-engaged scholarship often manifests as Participatory Action Research (PAR). An epistemological approach to inquiry and action, PAR is informed by international, cross-generational, and trans-disciplinary influences, from Kurt Lewin to Paulo Freire (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Early action researchers were committed to leveraging science for social justice, and engaging non-academic community partners in

data collection and analysis. The tradition of community self-surveys is a prime example, wherein community members collaborated with researchers to conduct city-wide audits of community conditions (Torre, Fine, Stoudt, & Fox, 2012).

While there are a variety of strands of PAR today—with varied degree of emphasis on social justice and on public participation—action researchers share a foundational belief that those directly affected by social problems ought to play a central role in framing, investigating, and intervening in those problems (Greenwood, 2002). As such, PAR projects shift the role of the research *subject* to one of *co-investigator*, and the role of *principal investigator* to that of *research facilitator*. Together, a PAR team generates questions about the nature of a problem, collects and analyzes data, and uses what has been learned to plan for, implement, and evaluate change (Stringer, 1999). It is the insistence on action (Fine and Torre, 2004) that often most distinguishes PAR, charging scholars to not only document the contours of social problems, but to bring friends, picks and shovels to chip away at those problems, along with dump trucks of clay to mold alternative pathways of living. Grounded in particular contexts, PAR projects are pragmatic by nature, recognizing that we cannot make a difference *everywhere*, but we might make a difference in one another's lives *here*.

Participatory modes of research have gained traction in many settings (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998; Reason & Bradbury, 2008; Speer & Christians, 2013), including in the study of land justice, broadly defined. For example, Uniting Detroiters brought together residents, scholar, and activists to study and respond to a city-wide development agenda, which produced, among other things, a video documentary and People's Atlas conceived as tools for movement-building (Newman & Safransky, 2014). Working on a national scale, The Right to the City Alliance's "We Call These Projects Home" study engaged public

housing residents as research collaborators in documenting the housing needs of low-income people (Sinha & Kasdan, 2013). A five-year action research project in India engaged members of the Katkari—a politically and economically vulnerable indigenous group—in making land claims and protecting their communities from eviction (Buckles, Khedkar & Ghevde, 2015). Despite these robust examples, participatory methods are notably *underused* in studies of gentrification.

The paucity of PAR studies related to gentrification include a small body of work that involves residents of public or socialized housing in conducting research intended to impact public policy (Darcy, 2013; Hodkinson & Essen, 2015; Thurber, Collins, Greer, McKnight, & Thompson, in press), a research project launched by a local Homeless Action Committee (Kline, Dolgon, Dressler, 2000), and a project mobilizing young women of color in a gentrifying neighborhood to study and respond to stereotypes that affect their lives (Cahill, 2006, 2007). In addition to having beneficial effects on those involved (such as improved confidence, leadership development skills, and strengthened relationships), these studies suggest that participatory research offers the potential to advance systemic change by creating organizing networks and producing scholarship that can be used to organize for better neighborhood conditions (material or otherwise).

To the extent that PAR projects truly engage residents of gentrifying neighborhoods as research partners, PAR approaches are well-suited to contribute to a base of gentrification scholarship that is rooted in lived experiences, documents the more than material harms of neighborhood change, and explores the more than material possibilities for intervening in gentrifying neighborhoods. Further, such engagement methodologically guards against some of the vulnerabilities of traditional political economy views of gentrification.

- *Vulnerability 1: Pays insufficient attention to racial struggle.* As co-investigators, long-time residents can bring distinct insight regarding contemporary experiences of racism in the neighborhood (for example, by drawing on their own and others' experiences of stigma, marginalization and discrimination), and may have contextual knowledge about how racial struggle has manifested in their community over time.
- *Vulnerability 2: Perpetuates damage-centered views of places and people.* The engagement of resident experts in conducting systematic inquiry and action in their own communities reflects a desire-based framework that values residents' knowledge, hopes, and agency to affect change. Furthermore, residents are distinctly positioned to have knowledge of community strengths and assets.
- *Vulnerability 3: Obscures other losses.* Residents are likely to be attuned to a range of consequences of gentrification in their neighborhood. This is not to say that all residents will have the *same* perspectives, but that the perspectives brought—convergent or otherwise—will be contextually grounded, which may sharpen a collective analysis of how gentrification is manifesting in a particular time and place.

To be clear, PAR is not a panacea. Participatory modes of inquiry are complicated by inherent differences in power and privilege among research team members and academic researchers may still differentially benefit from the research (Thurber, Collins, Greer, McKnight, & Thompson, in press). Like other forms of research, PAR projects can reproduce difference/othering of communities, mask heterogeneity within groups, and

preserve the epistemic authority of academic researchers (Janes, 2016). Further, although action research “insists on action” (Fine and Torre, 2004, p.29), there are no guarantees that such actions will be effective or sustained. Nonetheless, given the need to better account for the lived experiences of residents in gentrifying neighborhoods, and the importance of engaging residents as change agents in their own communities, PAR approaches offer an important complement to other forms of expert-driven research on gentrification. One field that emphasizes participatory research, and seems to be well situated to contribute to gentrification scholarship, is also notably underrepresented in the literature: social work (see footnote 1).

### **A Role for Community Practice**

Social work’s underrepresentation in gentrification scholarship is surprising, given that neighborhood-based community development has roots within the branch of social work known as community (or macro) practice. Whereas clinical social work uses a service-delivery approach to meet *individual needs* and help people living in poverty develop their inherent capacities, community practice focuses on addressing *collective needs* and in changing the conditions of inequality, often at the neighborhood level.

In the United States, community practice is often traced to the Settlement House movement of the late 1800s, in which practitioners lived and worked in disenfranchised neighborhoods and developed context-specific initiatives to address community needs (Finn and Jacobson, 2008). The Hull House, in Chicago, IL, is among the most well-known Settlement Houses. A partial list of Hull House activities in 1895 reflects the breadth of community practice: residents undertook a comprehensive mapping of neighborhood

conditions, offered college extension courses to hundreds of neighbors, coordinated a 500-member working-people's chorus, organized two unions, helped plan several strikes, facilitated the working-people's social science club, and provided free kindergarten (Schultz, 2007). Though the practitioner-residents of Hull House were working some thirty years before Lewin coined the term 'Action Research,' they were embodying many of its core principles: working in partnership with people affected by social problems to study harmful conditions and take action to improve well-being. And, as reflected by the activities listed above, these early social workers were concerned about the *more than material* aspects of community from the start.

Although community practice has evolved since the days of the Hull House, the field remains particularly well suited for theorizing, implementing, and studying more than material interventions in gentrifying neighborhoods. First, social work's code of ethics places "particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty" (NASW, 2008).<sup>9</sup> This ethical orientation is critical to investigating who is helped and harmed by processes of gentrification, and engaging and mobilizing those directly affected by gentrification in the process. Second, the field of social work adopts a holistic perspective, recognizing that there are biological, social, cultural, psychological and spiritual dimensions to well-being, and that human behavior is always shaped by, and adaptive to, the environment (van Wormer, 2007). As such, the field is

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<sup>9</sup> Explicit claims of social justice do not always translate into just practice. Indeed, social work has often been pulled between advancing social justice and being used as a tool for social control. While the Settlement House movement was flourishing, so were the Charity Organization Societies, another precursor to social work, which diagnosed poverty as a consequence of individual failings (Finn & Jacobson, 2008). During Urban Renewal, some social workers helped organize resident resistance to neighborhood demolition, and others diffused dissent and persuaded resident compliance with displacement policies (Bowen, 2015). Thus, it is important to consider social work's orientation toward social justice as aspirational.

accustomed to thinking in more than material terms. Third, students of community practice are introduced to a wide range of interventions relevant to neighborhood-level change, including community development (i.e. economic development, housing development, and social development), community organizing (i.e. neighborhood, labor, cultural, and rights-based organizing), planning (i.e. the design of effective interventions at a variety of scales), and systems change (i.e. legislative and media advocacy, political and social action, and action research) (Brueggemann, 2014; Weil, 1996). Finally, community practice has a distinct responsibility to engage in sites of neighborhood inequality. The Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare recently launched a call to action, explicating twelve ‘grand challenges’ for social work (<http://aaswsw.org/>). Many of these challenges— such as to end homelessness, to reduce extreme economic inequality, to achieve equal opportunity and justice, to eradicate social isolation, and to close the health gap—are deeply tied to, and felt in, neighborhoods.

Given these distinct contributions and responsibilities, social work is uniquely suited to bridge the current disconnects between third-wave gentrification scholarship, grassroots practice, and policy responses to gentrification. And yet, since 2000, less than 1% of the more than 2400 academic articles on gentrification were published in community practice journals (see footnote 1 for search protocol). Although community practice is well positioned to shift policy and practice in changing neighborhoods to more fully account for the lived experiences of residents, the field is not fully leveraging that position.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that social workers are necessary to effectively intervene in gentrifying neighborhoods. Just as residents do not need government support to take action to improve their neighborhoods, residents may not require social workers to help



them organize and mobilize. However, just as city governments have resources that can be brought to bear to amplify residents' efforts, community practitioners have resources that may be of service. And as a community practitioner new to Nashville, I wondered how I might best leverage my expertise to assist residents grappling with gentrification. Developing the Neighborhood Story Project was one way I have answered that question.

### **Intervention Design**

I designed the Neighborhood Story Project as a facilitated three-month action research project wherein a group of neighbors identify a set of research questions about their geographic community, conduct place-based inquiry, and use what they learn to take collective action. The project is intended to engage a self-selected group of members by virtue of their mutual connection to a particular neighborhood. Broadly defined, neighborhoods are geographic areas contained within a larger city, town, or suburb. Federal, state, local agencies, as well as resident groups, all use the neighborhood unit for research, planning, and the delivery of programs and services. However, these varied actors frequently use divergent boundaries to delineate a given neighborhood. Furthermore, residents may have a mental map of their neighborhood, or, in the words of Rob Nixon, “a vernacular landscape” that does not align with “official landscape[s]” as determined by various agencies (2011, p.17). Given these complexities, the boundaries of any neighborhood are in flux and contested, rather than fixed over time or even commonly understood by all residents. Furthermore, residents of neighborhoods differ from one another; given their varied social locations and self-interests, residents of the same neighborhood may experience the neighborhood in vastly different ways (Hughey & Speer, 2002). Yet, despite their contested boundaries and the heterogeneity within them,

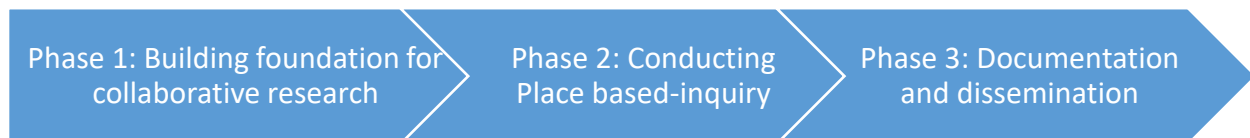
neighborhoods can constitute a collective unit within which residents have some power to affect change in plans, policies, and resource distribution. And with or without government involvement, neighborhoods can become social units that also work to meet collective needs. The Neighborhood Story Project is deliberately scaled as a small group intervention within a neighborhood. The following sections describe the core elements of the project, the anchoring theoretical frameworks, design roots, and guiding values.

### **Core Elements**

The Neighborhood Story Project begins with the formation of a leadership team, with the goal of recruiting a group of 8-12 team members. These are current or former residents of a specific neighborhood who are interested in learning more about the significant people, places, and moments in their neighborhood's past and present; in thinking critically about the spatial processes shaping their community; and in being part of shaping their neighborhood's future. The group is designed to be small enough to foster mutual aid, which can be understood as member-to-member helping relationships (Steinberg, 2014). At the same time, the group is intended to be large enough for members to share the load of conducting community-based research. All team members received a stipend (averaging \$200) in recognition of their contributions.

The Neighborhood Story Project occurs over the course of 12 weeks, with the team meeting weekly for two-hour sessions. The fixed time frame is designed to provide sufficient time for a group to complete a meaningful project, recognizing that some people may not be able to make a longer-term commitment. Although there is no expectation of continued work beyond the length of the program, after 12 weeks, members may decide to continue to work together or to join other existing community initiatives.

As each project is directed by the interests of team members, no two projects are exactly alike. However, each project follows three phases of work. Phase 1 builds a foundation for collaborative research by establishing relationships among team members, cultivating understanding of one another's interests and concerns. Activities during Phase 1 may include creating a timeline of the neighborhood based on members' historic knowledge, and contrasting media representations of the neighborhood with members' lived experience. These activities are designed to surface residents' curiosities and concerns, which will be synthesized into a guiding research question.



*Figure 1.* Three phases of the Neighborhood Story Project

During Phase 2, members work together to answer their question(s). They develop a research plan, and then collect and analyze data. Activities in Phase 2 may include developing a survey instrument or interview protocol, interviewing one another and neighbors, reviewing changes in demographic data in the neighborhood, and collecting artifacts and images of the neighborhood over time.

In Phase 3, members decide how best to share what they have learned with others, and plan a culminating community event to disseminate their work and engage the broader community. Culminating projects may take a wide range of forms, such as a pod cast, community mural, interactive exhibit, historical marker, memorial garden, video, report, children's book, website, or some other mode of documentation/dissemination. For the three pilot projects, each Neighborhood Story Project had a budget of approximately \$5000.

Half of the funds were reserved for the final project, and the remaining funds were used for member stipends, project supplies, and snacks for weekly meetings.

### **Intervention as unfinished alternative**

Unlike the medicalized use of the term ‘intervention’—which conjures a rigidly proscribed set of activities or treatment plan—the Neighborhood Story Project is characterized by dynamicity and emergent design, following the tradition of the ‘unfinished alternative’ first theorized by Scandinavian abolitionist Thomas Mathiesen.<sup>10</sup> Mathiesen was concerned about social policies that reproduce the harms they intend to mitigate. He conceptualized the unfinished alternative as a response to social problem that satisfies two conditions: First, the alternative must contradict core elements of the existing societal response to be sufficiently disruptive to the status quo, and second, it must compete with the current model enough to be considered plausible (Mathiesen, 1974).

The Neighborhood Story Project attempts to contradict current responses to gentrification first and foremost by centering residents as experts in their communities, and also by encouraging residents to explore and respond to a range of gentrification’s effects, including, but not limited to the loss of housing. Although the facilitator plays a critical guiding role, the project is driven by residents’ preexisting knowledge and curiosities, shaped by data they collect and interpret, and concludes with a culminating event of their

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<sup>10</sup> Mathiesen conceptualized the unfinished alternative in 1974 as part of action research with prison abolition movements in Norway, Denmark and Sweden, countries which were incarcerating people at dramatically accelerated rates (Mathiesen, 2014). Through facilitated convenings among prisoners, prison administrators and criminal justice scholars, these movements produced radical experimentations in the prison system. For example, at Bastoy Prison Island, a Norwegian equivalent of a maximum-security prison, the prison head is now a trained psychologist, all guards receive three years of training, and inmates grow their own food and live in quarters with sun decks (McLeod, 2013). The results are staggering; the 16% recidivism rate is well below any in Europe or the United States (McLeod, 2013).

design and implementation. By keeping the costs and time commitments of residents contained, The Neighborhood Story Project attempts to remain competitive as a plausible intervention that can be implemented alongside of much needed efforts to build and preserve affordable housing.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework supporting the Neighborhood Story Project is broadly situated in the *sense of community* literature, and in particular, to conceptualizations of the relationship between place attachments, social ties, and civic action. Since community psychologist Seymour Sarason first posited the significance of “the sense that one belongs in and is meaningfully part of a larger collectivity” (1974, p.41), scholars have been exploring the cognitive, affective, and behavioral factors that contribute to a sense of community, and how such feelings of belonging relate to individual and collective well-being (Long & Perkins, 2003; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Mannarini & Fedi, 2009; Prezza, Pacilli, Barbaranelli & Zampatti, 2009). Although the language of ‘sense of community’ has been broadly embraced across disciplines and within the popular culture, debates continue about how best to conceptualize, operationalize and measure this construct (see Mannarini & Fedi, 2009). That said, there is greater clarity regarding the relationship between three components of sense of community—place attachment, social ties, and civic action—and it is this relationship that theoretically grounds the Neighborhood Story Project (see Figure 1). In the figure below, *place attachment* refers to one’s tie to place, *social ties* refer to feelings of connection to people, and *civic action* refers to how one engages in improving the community.



*Figure 2.* Theoretical foundation of the Neighborhood Story Project

**Place Attachment.** In a comprehensive review of place attachment literature over the last 40 years, Lewicka (2011) notes that a proliferation of studies of place attachments have drawn on different theoretical and disciplinary traditions, explored the phenomenon at a wide range of scales (from attachment to home to attachment to country), and used differing methods of inquiry. While acknowledging that such diversity within the field “make the accumulation of knowledge difficult” (2011, p. 208), Lewicka nonetheless concludes that “place attachments continue to be an important part of human existence” (2011, p. 226). That is, humans form emotional bonds to places of dwelling, and do so at a variety of scales.<sup>11</sup> Manzo and Perkins (2006) suggest that a resident’s relationship to place spans cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions; it is related to what we know about our neighborhood, how we feel about our neighborhood, and how we participate in our

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<sup>11</sup> Place attachment is generally understood to be pro-social; that is, people with stronger bonds to place are more likely to be connected to others and have higher levels of life-satisfaction. However, Lewicka (2011) also notes a number of vulnerabilities of strong place attachments, such as resident resistance to relocating in the face of limited opportunities or environmental risks. Others have noted the risks of communitarianism that may result when an individual or sub group enforce their particular view of a place in ways that deny existing heterogeneity and privilege an exclusionary normative ideal of who belongs (Young, 1990).

neighborhood. As a psychological construct, place attachment is conceptualized at an individual level, recognizing that there are wide variations in the degree to which people form bonds to place. Length of tenure is among the factors known to mediate one's degree of place attachment (Lewicka, 2011).

**Social ties.** Positive social ties (also referred to as bonding social capital) are characterized by relationships of trust and reciprocity (Perkins, Hughey, & Speer, 2002). The importance of social ties to wellness is well-evidenced. Wide-ranging research has demonstrated how strong social connections function as a protective factor, for example by promoting recovery from complex trauma (van der kolk, 2001), preventing the transmission of disease (Compare et al, 2013), and preventing interpersonal violence (Mazerolle, Wickes & McBroom, 2010). Although many people access social ties outside of their immediate neighborhoods, the less financial resource, transportation, or technology access one has, the more important proximal relations are to well-being.

Determining the impact, force, and consequence of social ties within one's neighborhood can be difficult to empirically investigate (Mannarini & Fedi, 2009). Nonetheless, scholars agree that neighborhood relations can provide a critical source of emotional support and other forms of mutual aid (Perkins, Hughey & Speer, 2002). Both place attachments and social ties, which can also be described as rootedness and bondedness (Riger & Lavrakas, 1981), are positively related to health and well-being (Prezza, Amici, Roberti, & Tedeschi, 2001; Renzaho, Richardson & Strugnell, 2012; Riger & Lavrakas, 1981). Indeed, the concepts are related. Although social ties are often investigated independently from place attachment, scholars of place attachment recognize physical and social dimensions of the construct; that it, residents may be attached to the place itself, as

well as to the people and interactions that occur within the place (Lewicka, 2011). Further, the stronger the social ties among members of a geographical community, the stronger the place attachments (Lewicka, 2011).

**Civic action.** Civic action (also referred to as civic engagement) can manifest as individual or collective actions. While both are important, given that achieving broad social changes requires collectivized action, social scientists are particularly interested in the mechanisms that support collective action. Both place attachment and social ties are related to civic action: people are more likely to take action in their communities the stronger their ties to people (Collins, Walting Neal, & Neal, 2014; Foster-Fishman, Pierce; & Van Egeren, 2009; Mannarini & Fedi, 2009; Mihaylov and Perkins, 2014) and to place, particularly when they perceive a threat to their community (Mihaylov and Perkins, 2014; Lewicka, 2011). Thus, we can think of rootedness to place and bondedness to people as protective factors that support individual and collective well-being, and also as necessary conditions for collective action.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, the ability to leverage rootedness and bondedness for collective action can be undermined by neighborhood conditions. In her review of place attachment research, Lewicka (2011) finds that increased racial and socioeconomic diversity within neighborhoods is consistently correlated with lower levels of interpersonal trust among residents. As an important exception to this trend, Lewicka notes that “Stolle et al. (2008) found that the negative relationship between neighborhood diversity and interpersonal trust disappeared in those who regularly talked to their neighbors” (2011, p.211).

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<sup>12</sup> Importantly, place attachment and social ties are not the *only* conditions necessary for collective action. Participation is also predicted by collective efficacy—a collective sense of optimism regarding the possibility of making a difference, and the knowledge and capacities to make a difference (Foster-Fishman, Pierce, & Van Egeren, 2009).



These insights regarding heterogenous neighborhoods suggest both the vulnerability of, and possibilities for intervening within, gentrifying areas. As neighborhoods undergo rapid demographic transformation, long-time residents are likely to experience a diminished sense of place attachments and social ties, which may also undermine residents' ability to mobilize for change. That said, the body literature in this field suggests that social ties and place attachments can also be (re)generated, though Lewicka (2011) notes that the *processes* through which these attachments to people and place are formed remain under researched.

The Neighborhood Story Project is theoretically grounded in an understanding of the relationship between place attachment, social ties and civic action. The project is designed to foster connections among people, and between people and the place they live, while concurrently facilitating an opportunity for people to gain experience taking action in their communities.

### **Design Roots**

The Neighborhood Story Project is rooted in several practice traditions: group work, popular education, critical participatory action research, and public humanities. Although some of these traditions have similar lineages (see Breton 2004; Finn, Jacobson, and Campana, 2004) each provides key contributions to the project design.

**Group work.** As social work scholar Lee Staples has observed, “The group setting is an ideal access point for most community members to engage in social action” (2004, p. 346). With roots in social psychology and social work, group work is essentially the process of creating contexts for people to help one another lead more fulfilling lives. There are different models and types of group work, from bereavement support to parent teacher organizations, from AA to neighborhood associations. The basis of all group work is a

recognition that interdependence is central to well-being, and that experiences in groups can nurture individual development and a sense of belonging, while helping people to accomplish together that which they may be unable to do alone (Garvin, Gutierrez & Galinsky, 2004).

Given social work's disciplinary commitment to social justice, group work models in social work are often rooted in an empowerment perspective, in which empowerment is understood as both an internal sense of agency and the embodied expression of that agency in action (Rappaport, 1985). The purpose of groupwork, as social work scholar Margaret Breton describes, "is to change oppressive cognitive, behavioral, social, and political structures...that thwart the control people have over their own lives..." (2004, p. 59). In practice, this can take the form of a group coming together regarding a shared set of personal concerns; learning together how those concerns are linked to broader social, economic, and political conditions; and engaging in collective action to advance their goals (Breton, 2004).

Although groups can and do emerge spontaneously, many groups benefit from a skilled facilitator who understands group dynamics and the stages of group development, can foster interpersonal communication among members, models effective group leadership, and can help create an environment of mutual aid among members (Toseland, Jones, & Gellis, 2004). Key group work contributions to the Neighborhood Story Project are the empowerment perspective of groups, as well as theories and practices related to fostering nurturing relationships within groups, including: considerations of group pragmatics (such as group size, composition, and longevity), group engagement (such as

extrinsic and intrinsic motivations to participate), group cohesion and climate, and group norms (Glisson, Dulmas & Sowers, 2012).

**Popular Education.** Popular education (also referred to as critical education, or critical pedagogy) is often traced back to two famous educators: Brazilian educator and theorist Paulo Freire, and Highlander Folk School founder Myles Horton. Working in different geographies and contexts, both Freire and Horton reimaged the educational process from one that indoctrinates people into an existing social order to one that mobilizes people toward liberation from systemic inequality. In contrast to traditional educational methods, which encourage students to pursue learning in order to achieve individual goals, popular education engages people in learning *in, with, and on behalf of* the community (Freire, 2000). Popular education intentionally brings together people who have been marginalized, and, with the help of a facilitator, creates conditions for people to teach and learn from one another; to critically reflect on their lived experiences; to imagine alternatives; and to take action to affect change.

Brookfield and Holst (2011) offer a number of criteria for evaluating popular education: Does our work begin with the pressing demands of the oppressed? Does our work allow people to understand the interconnectedness of their local situation and the broader context? Does our work build organization through which the dispossessed can build power? Does our work develop the skills and knowledge that allow people to lead? These criteria reflect the critical linkage between processes of learning and doing. Reflective dialogue that is grounded in participants' lived experience fosters what Freire termed *conscientization*, the development of a critical consciousness. *Conscientization* in turn spurs reflective action, which Freire termed *praxis* (Freire, 2000). The key contributions of popular

education to the Neighborhood Story Project are theories and practices of collective learning, which include an understanding of education as the practice of freedom, the use of dialogue as method of teaching and learning, and the linked process of learning and taking action.<sup>13</sup>

**Critical Participatory Action Research.** At nearly the same time as Freire, Horton and others began challenging traditional notions of education, Kurt Lewin was transforming research practices in the United States with the development of ‘Action Research.’ As noted previously, although early action research projects were distinguished by a strong commitment to civic action and the participatory processes of data collection and analysis, in subsequent iterations of action research the emphasis on social justice and democratic engagement has varied widely (Torre, Fine, Stoudt, & Fox, 2012). The most robust application of these principles arises in projects that explicitly adopt a critical race, feminist and queer analysis, often referred to as ‘critical Participatory Action Research’ (critical PAR) (Torre, Fine, Stoudt, & Fox, 2012).

Torre and Fine argue that a set of six core commitments distinguish this “critical, engaged scholarship” (2011, p. 117) from other approaches to systematic inquiry. First, critical PAR commits to collaborative and democratic knowledge production among people

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<sup>13</sup> There are many similarities in strategy between popular education, PAR and community organizing. As Speer & Roberts (in press) note, community organizing—like popular education—leverages existing knowledge in communities, and—like CPAR—engages the tools of research to inform social action. Some scholars, including Freire, see education, research, and organizing as one and the same (Horton and Freire, 1990). In contrast, Horton distinguishes education from organizing, noting that while education might lead to organizing, the goal is distinct, as organizing is often problem-driven (Horton and Freire, 1990). As he reflects, “If the goal is to solve the problem, there are a lot of ways to solve the problem that are so much simpler than going through this educational process. Solving the problem can’t be the goal of education...But if education is to be part of the process, then you may not actually got the problem solved, but you’ve educated a lot of people. You have got to make that choice” (1990, p. 119). As a short-term intervention, the Neighborhood Story Project is not designed as a community organizing initiative. That said, it can be used to build capacity among residents for community organizing, or to produce products that may be useful to existing organizing efforts.

traditionally seen as *researchers* and those traditionally seen as *researched*, forming research collaboratives that include members of communities affected by social problems working alongside people trained as researchers. Second, critical PAR commits to reorienting views of expertise and then broadening the distribution of expertise, so that differently situated members of the research collaborative are actively engaged in the processes of inquiring and interpreting. The third and fourth commitments are related, as Torre and Fine call for the “complex wrestling with researcher objectivity, subjectivity, and positionality” and also for an “acute analyses of power, domination, oppression, and resistance” (2011, p. 117).

Although the former can be thought of as inward looking, and the latter as outward looking, social inequality is not something that exists *out there* to be studied; researchers, research practices, and research institutions are also bound up in relationships of oppression, and must be interrogated. Fifth, critical PAR commits to centering marginalized knowledges. This reflects an anchoring belief in the ability of people to assess their own conditions and derive their own solutions, and a dedication to ensuring that those who have been most marginalized from knowledge production move toward the center of these practices. And sixth, critical PAR commits to ongoing analysis of the nature and uses of science. This involves examining how research often fails to help—and even harms—the people and places that comprise the subjects of study; and, in contrast, developing products of inquiry that are directly relevant, accessible, and useful to community partners. In the words of scholar-activists Michael Kline, Corey Dolgon and Laura Dressler, this represents the shift “from the study of social transformation to study for social transformation” (2000, p. 35). The Neighborhood Story Project draws on these core commitments as an epistemological approach to producing collaborative knowledge.

**Public Humanities.** The interdisciplinary field of public humanities is concerned with engaging diverse publics in conversation, learning and reflection about art, history, heritage and culture. Broadly, the objective of public humanities is to promote multicultural, civic, and/or community literacy (Quay & Veninga, 1990). This is accomplished by building bridges: between academic humanities scholarship and public audiences, between grassroots artists/scholars and campus audiences, and more recently, two-way campus-community partnerships to leverage the humanities to effect positive social change (Jay, 2010). As a field, public humanities is characterized by a multitude of modes of public engagement, including (though not limited to) film, soundscapes, guest lectures, poetry readings, historical exhibitions, interactive workshops, and digital mapping.

Although not all public humanities projects are explicitly designed to confront injustice, the humanities can and do play critical roles in advancing social justice movements. As educational scholar Lee Anne Bell notes, “The creative dimensions opened up by aesthetic engagement help us envision new possibilities for challenging and changing oppressive circumstances” (2010, p. 17). More specifically, Brookfield and Holst suggest five functions of the arts: to sound warnings, build solidarity, empower, present alternative epistemologies, affirm pride, and teach history (2011, p. 152). Each of these is potentially relevant to the Neighborhood Story Project. Though the precise design and function of each team’s culminating project is to be determined by the team, one role of the facilitator is to encourage consideration of a range of products beyond the prototypical research report, and to introduce other possible forms of expression and communication such as photography, video, and/or performance. The primary contributions from public humanities to the

Neighborhood Story Project are the recognition of the importance of aesthetic engagement in social change, and innovations in documentation and dissemination.

**Shared commitments across traditions.** Two particular commitments link group work, popular education, participatory action research, and public humanities within the Neighborhood Story Project: the significance of stories, and the role of the facilitator. ‘Story’ can be broadly understood as narrative; story is descriptive, in that it offers an account of the past, present and or future; and also generative, in that people use stories to make sense of ourselves and the world around us (McKenzie-Mohr & Lafrance, 2017). Stories may be shared orally, in print form, or through other forms of ceremony, media and expression, such as visual and performing arts. They also may not be shared at all, held only in the minds of the story-teller. Although bookstores often separate stories into the categories of fiction and non-fiction, social constructivists argue that all stories—even those asserting the highest levels of objectivity—are incomplete and subjective to the perspective of the storyteller (Walsh, 2010). Stories carry legacies of sedimented ways of knowing—often referred to as master narratives—as well as imaginative possibilities for knowing differently—which can be considered counter narratives (McKenzie-Mohr & Lafrance, 2017). As such, stories have the power to reproduce relationships of inequality and also to facilitate understanding and justice.

Each of the four traditions that undergird the Neighborhood Story Project appreciate the significance of stories. In social work, narrative theory recognizes the ways that one’s personal narrative—the stories we tell about ourselves—can activate and/or inhibit a positive self-concept, the formation of generative interpersonal relationships, and goal achievement (Walsh, 2010). Narrative approaches to social work practice recognize the

therapeutic value for those who have been marginalized and oppressed to deconstruct denigrating narratives and re-author stories of self that recognize one's inherent dignity, worth, and resilience. Similarly, as described above, both popular education and critical PAR recognize the importance for people who have been marginalized to author their own stories, rather than accepting the stories that have been told about them, through collectivizing existing knowledge and conducting systematic inquiry. Story also plays a critical role in public humanities, particularly in confronting injustice. As Bell notes, "The aesthetic experience of stories told through visual arts, theater, spoken word and poetry, can help us think more deeply about racism and other challenging social justice issues" (2010, p. 17). Drawing on these traditions, The Neighborhood Story Project recognizes the multiple roles story can play—as therapeutic, educational, a mode of research, and artistic expression—and the potential significance for residents of gentrifying neighborhoods to author their own stories of what their community has been, is, and might be.

In addition to appreciating the role of stories, practitioners in social work, popular education, CPAR and public humanities recognize the critical convening and animating role played by the facilitator. Social work offers the framework of accompaniment to understand this role. Unlike a medical model of treatment wherein a distant professional prescribes and monitors treatment, accompaniment can be understood as the process of joining in solidarity and collaboration with others (Finn & Jacobson, 2008). Similarly, popular education and critical PAR challenge scholars to break binaries between teacher/learner and researcher/researched, and to reconstruct relationships in which all members are actively engaged in the processes of teaching, learning, inquiring, and interpreting (Fine, 1994). This does not suggest an abdication of responsibility on the part of



facilitators. As Freire explains “...although teachers and students are not the same, the person in charge of education is being formed or reformed as he/she teaches, and the person who is being taught forms him/herself in this process” (1998, p.31).

Negotiating the role of facilitator requires being ‘in charge’ while seeking to build mutual trust, egalitarianism, and collaboration (Toseland, Jones & Rivas, 2004). Managing this balance requires a high degree of self-reflection and interpersonal skill, particularly with regard to how positionality and power—including the facilitator’s— shape group relationships, interactions, and overall group process. Our positionality can be understood as the place from which and toward which we engage our practice, and is shaped by social location, disciplinary training, political commitments, and personal experiences. The facilitator must be prepared to grapple with intergroup tensions regarding power and privilege, including the differential risks and responsibilities of team members who occupy distinct social locations (Cahill, 2007).

Although the four disciplinary traditions explored above informed the overall design of The Neighborhood Story Project, their contributions are most salient in some phases of the project implementation (see Figure 3).

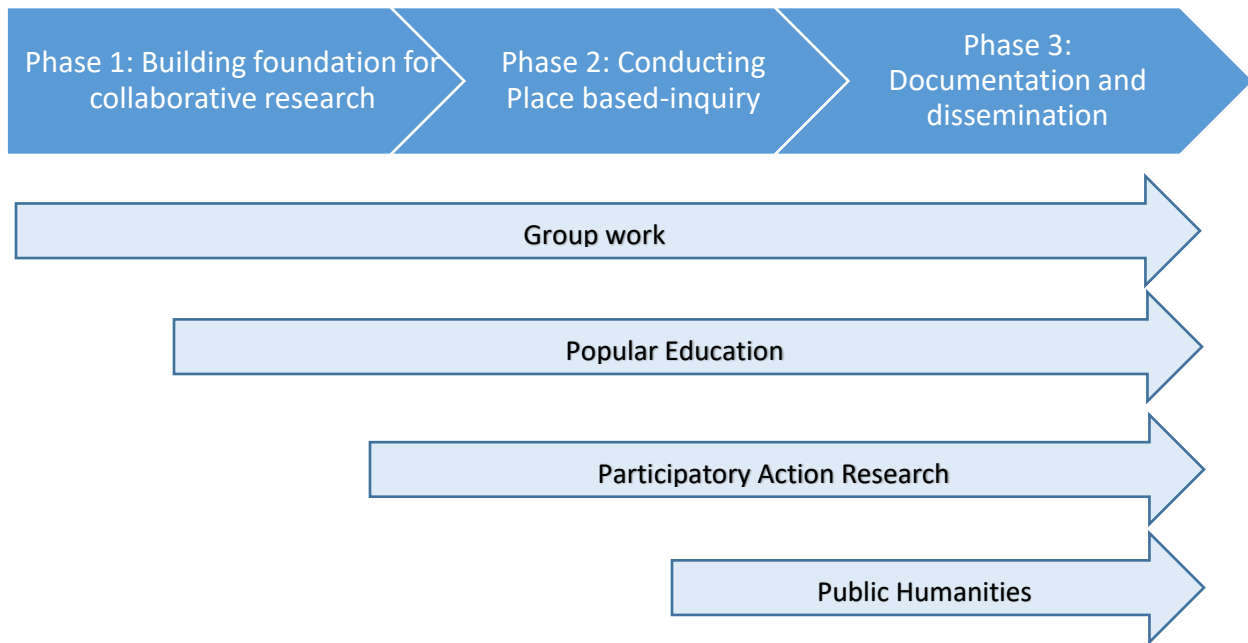


Figure 3. Design roots by phase of project

For example, given group work’s attention to group dynamics (from the beginning stages of group formation through the conclusion of the group’s work together), theories and practices of group work are critical throughout the project. In contrast, practices from the public humanities appear most significantly in Phase 3, when members consider how best to document and disseminate research findings to the broader community.

### Guiding values

Although the design of the Neighborhood Story includes a week-by-week curriculum (for a summary, see Appendix B), in order to be adaptable to the needs, skills, and resources of particular people and places, the project is guided more by values than a predetermined set of activities or practices. This chapter began by making the case for a *more than material* framework for conceptualizing gentrification, and then articulated the need for expanded publicly-engaged scholarship in gentrifying neighborhoods. In many ways, the first two sections of this chapter—along with the contributions from group work, popular education,

Critical PAR and public humanities—can be synthesized into to five guiding values which scaffold the Neighborhood Story Project:

**1) Multiple dimensions of neighborhoods matter.** Neighborhoods are often reduced to the materiality of the built environment, with policy discussions focusing on things such as roads, streetlights, and housing. And while these things matter greatly, they are not all that matters to residents. The Neighborhood Story Project encourages team members to take seriously the multiple dimensions of their neighborhoods, including, but not limited to the built environment.

**2) Power and positionality matter.** Power and positionality are intimately connected: that is our perceived or self-identified social status affects the degree to which we can affect change in our lives and the lives of others. The Neighborhood Story Project is designed to cultivate a critical consciousness regarding issues of power and positionality. This consciousness can be thought of as an “equity lens” through which members filter their work as they look outward—questioning how power shapes their communities—and also as they look inward—considering how power and positionality shape members work with one another. The Neighborhood Story Project is also designed to build power, as members come together to study and take action in their communities.

**3) Who gathers and shares neighborhood stories matters.** Traditional modes of neighborhood policy-making and research have highly constrained, if not altogether blocked, opportunities for many residents to represent their own experiences. This is particularly the case for low-income people, people of color, young people, and elders. In building a team of researchers comprised largely of members from within the community,

the Neighborhood Story Project reorients views of expertise (Torre & Fine, 2011). This team may include people who have formal training as researchers, either as team members or as facilitators, however, the assumption is that all interested team members have valuable resources, skills, and experiences that will aid in the group's work together.

**4) What we do with research matters.** A primary goal of the Neighborhood Story Project is for community members to produce knowledge that is valuable, actionable, and has local benefit (Nagar, 2002). Unlike research created to generate knowledge that will primarily inform other academics or policy makers, the Neighborhood Story Project aims to generate information that is of use to participants, produce products that may be useful to ongoing neighborhood efforts, and provide skill-building and experience in collective action that can be transferred to other initiatives.

**5) Caring for people and places matters.** Finally, the design of the Neighborhood Story Project is built on the recognition that people protect, nurture, and invest in what we value. As such, the project works to cultivate and amplify bondedness—the sense of connection people have to one another—and rootedness—the sense of connection people have to a place itself. By taking seriously the stories, experiences, histories, and perspectives of residents, the Neighborhood Story Project helps people come to more deeply know and care for one another and the place they live.

Having situated the project theoretically and disciplinarily, and introduced the Neighborhood Story Project as an intervention, Chapter 2 grounds this research methodologically and geographically, describing how I studied the project as well as the research setting.

## CHAPTER 2. METHODOLOGY AND CONTEXT

By engaging residents of gentrifying neighborhoods in the Neighborhood Story Project, my hope, first and foremost, was that the project would be beneficial to the people and places involved. In addition, by paying close attention to how the project unfolded in three neighborhood contexts, with three different groups of residents, I sought to understand the effects of participation on the ways residents saw themselves as neighbors, how they relate to others in their neighborhood, and how they understand and enact their capacity for collective action. In essence, this is a nested project, with three neighborhood-based action research projects within a larger study (see Figure 4). This chapter describes the methodology of the larger study and introduces readers to Nashville, broadly, as well as the three Neighborhood Story Project neighborhoods: Cleveland Park, Edgehill, and Stratford.



*Figure 4.* Three neighborhood projects nested within study

## Methodology

Drawing from the theoretical model introduced and operationalized in Chapter 1, I approached the study with the following outcome-oriented questions:

- How does participation in the Neighborhood Story Project affect residents' place attachment?
- How does participation affect social relationships among participants and/or broader feelings of social cohesion within the neighborhood?
- Does participation lead to continued civic action, and if so, what does this look like?
- What are the unintended effects of participation?

In addition to tracing what participants gained from the Neighborhood Story Project, I wanted to understand how those outcomes occurred. Accordingly, I had the following process-oriented questions:

- What types of group processes engage residents in critically reflecting on their neighborhood?
- What types of processes deepen social ties?
- What types of processes inform civic action?

One can rightly infer from these questions that I intended a number of intended effects of the Neighborhood Story Project: to positively affect participants in terms of place attachment, social ties, and civic action. However, I did not approach these as hypotheses that ultimately reduce to the question 'does this intervention work?' Rather, in the spirit of

realistic evaluation traditions (Pawson & Tilly, 1997), I used the above questions to explore how this intervention works (and does not work), for whom, and in what circumstances. I was interested in potential changes at both the individual and group level, as well as assessing whether (and which) outcomes carried across settings.

To investigate the process and outcomes of the Neighborhood Story Project, I drew on constructivist design principles (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Constructivist inquiry explores the multiple ways in which social processes, interactions and meanings are constructed and experienced, often through close observation of naturalistic processes (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Constructivist research has long been recognized as a key approach to studying group work, which is—by design—dynamic, unpredictable, and multisystemic, in that it reflects interactions between individual, intergroup, and community levels (Papell & Rothman, 1996; Rubel & Okech, 2017).

Constructivist design is particularly applicable given the exploratory, emergent nature of the Neighborhood Story Project, and the nature of my research questions. Although the preponderance of research on place attachment, social ties and civic action has used quantitative methods designed to measure the degree to which residents are rooted, bonded, and/or civically engaged (often through use of surveys and scaled instruments), given my interest is understanding processes of change, a qualitative approach to inquiry is appropriate (Lewicka, 2011). A constructivist approach is also fitting given the multiple roles I played in the project: intervention designer, facilitator, and investigator. Although there are arguably always interactions between the *knower* and the *known*, this is particularly the case in this undertaking, which is simultaneously a study of the Neighborhood Story Project as an intervention, a study of group process and outcomes, and a study of my own

practice. Given these overlapping roles, it was critical that I engage collaborating researchers. In each setting, I recruited a graduate student who participated as a full team member in the Neighborhood Story Project, and assisted in data collection and preliminary analysis.

I studied the Neighborhood Story Project using a multi-case study model. While case studies can be focused on a single individual, they are particularly appropriate for studying dynamic and interactional activities (Creswell, 2007) and have a long tradition as an approach to studying group work (Brower, Arndy, & Ketterhagen, 2004). To the extent that case studies provide rich descriptions of the group setting, interactions, and facilitation (Brower, Arndy, & Ketterhagen, 2004) along with attention to researcher subjectivity (Morrow, 2005), case study research allows readers to assess both the quality of the group being described and the transferability of the findings.

I piloted the Neighborhood Story Project in three different neighborhoods to explore how residents might use the project differently in different contexts, to understand how the distinct settings shape the project outcomes, and to consider what (if any) outcomes carry across settings. Replicating the intervention in a multi-case design can assist in evaluating the study's transferability (Yin, 2011), as insights gleaned across project sites may point toward broader patterns and trends. At the same time, the use of a multi-case study design intentionally serves to complicate conclusions drawn from any one site by offering comparison contexts and group demographics.

## **Site Selection**



In choosing neighborhoods to pilot the Neighborhood Story Project, I sought sites that shared three basic criteria:

1) The neighborhood is experiencing gentrification (as per the defining characteristics proposed by Davidson and Lees (2005), introduced in Chapter 1).

2) There is at least one member-driven neighborhood-based organization (such as a school PTO, a neighborhood association, and/or a faith group) that can serve as an organizational partner (and assist in recruitment, providing meeting space, and publicizing the culminating event).

3) There are neighbors interested in participating in the project.

Practically, it was also important that I had some initial connections in the neighborhoods, in order to vet interest and launch the projects within the time constraints of my academic program.

I also sought neighborhoods that were contextually different. In particular, I was interested in how engaging with different types of organizational partners might affect the project. Further, although all three projects were open to people of all ages, I was interested in including a school to examine a project that was multigenerational by design.

Ultimately, I piloted the project in three Nashville neighborhoods—Cleveland Park, Edgehill, and Stratford—collaborating with a different type of organization partner in each setting (a neighborhood association, church, and school). Site selection for projects was reciprocal. In all three neighborhoods, I had a number of meetings with local leaders to consider the goals of the Neighborhood Story Project, the possible benefits and unintended consequences, and the relationship of this project to my dissertation research. In each case,

neighborhood leaders expressed enthusiasm about the project, and suggested a number of possible participants with whom I followed up individually. I also attended area neighborhood association meetings to talk about the project, and publicized the project through social media. Thus, in addition to me choosing a potential neighborhood, the viability of a site required a neighborhood organization and a core group of residents to also choose the project.

### **Participant Demographics**

In total, 28 people—excluding myself and collaborating researchers—participated in one of the three Neighborhood Story Projects.<sup>14</sup> All participants consented to participate in the study, and all but four completed the project (these four reported unexpected health, work, and/or family conflicts). Participant demographics are summarized in Tables 1 and 2 below. Across the three projects, participants were predominantly black women who had lived most of their lives in the neighborhood, representing a range of ages, and who were both homeowners and renters. There are also noticeable distinctions between the three groups. Whereas Cleveland Park participants were primarily homeowners, Edgehill participants were primarily renters. With the exception of one college student member of the Edgehill project, the only youth involved were in the Stratford project. Although half of the Cleveland Park residents identified as newer to the neighborhood, this was true for only two of the Edgehill participants, and none of the Stratford participants. Twenty percent of

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<sup>14</sup> These community members were ‘participants’ in two senses of the word. Here, I am describing the characteristics of those who participated as subjects of the study of the Neighborhood Story Project. Yet these same community members were also participants in their respective Neighborhood Story Project, where they acted as members of a research team. In the following chapters, I use the term “team members” to reflect members’ active engagement in the projects.

participants joined the Neighborhood Story Project though they no longer lived in the neighborhood.

Project:	Racial/Ethnic identity				Gender		Age group		
	black	white	latina	asian	women	men	elder	mid age	youth
Cleveland Park	5	1	2	0	6	2	5	3	0
Edgehill	7	1	0	0	7	1	4	3	1
Stratford	8	3	0	1	7	5	2	3	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Percent</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>29%</b>

Table 1. Summary of participant demographics by race, gender and age

Project:	Housing Type		Housing tenure		
	renter/former renter	homeowner	longtime resident	newer resident	no longer resident
Cleveland Park	2	6	3	5	2
Edgehill	6	2	6	2	2
Stratford	6	6	12	0	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Percent</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>25%</b>

Table 2. Summary of participant demographics by housing type and tenure

Those absent as participants are also noteworthy: newer white residents. This was a surprise to me, for a number of reasons. Given that I am a newer, white resident of Nashville, I had been concerned that my social status might detract long-time residents of color from participating, while at the same time making the project more attractive for people who saw themselves as more like me. Further, although my collaborating researchers and I recruited through one-on-one outreach and at neighborhood meetings, I also used social media to promote the project, which disproportionately reaches a younger crowd. Ultimately, my concern was unfounded. And though I later learned (as will be discussed in

Chapter 5) that some long-time residents did wonder what this white girl was doing in their neighborhood, those who joined came in spite of their concern.

### **Data Collection**

Over the course each 12-week Neighborhood Story Project, collaborating researchers and I collected data through participant observation. This was later followed by focus group and interviews. Within 24 hours of each session, researchers completed field notes. These included *observational notes* from each project event or meeting documenting actions and interactions (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995); *facilitation notes* addressing concerns, ideas, and/or best practices related to the intervention design (for example, suggested modifications to activity design); and *personal notes* recording our awareness of any personal biases which may have surfaced, or other reflections regarding our affective experience of the people and the process. Beginning during the second or third week, we also collected audio recordings, occasional video and/or photographic data, and artifacts produced by and/or related to the group itself (including curriculum notes, handouts or other products created by members, group text messages, and other social media related to the project).

Within a few weeks of each Story Project's concluding event, I planned a dinner for members to celebrate and reflect on our work together. This served as a follow up focus group, and included a facilitated discussion regarding member's reflections of the project as a whole, including what they found most valuable from the experience, what they would have liked more or less of, and anything they would recommend doing differently in the future. I also invited discussion of what, if any, future action members might want to take, separately or together.

Finally, to assess if and how the Neighborhood Story Project had effects over time, I conducted audio-taped semi-structured interviews with participants 3-12 m. after the conclusion of the project. Questions explored participant’s preliminary expectations, hopes, and concerns about the project; their personal and interpersonal experiences as a participant; and how they thought participation affected their sense of self, their neighbors, and their neighborhood. I also inquired as to what, if any, relationships and/or activities have continued since the conclusion of the project (see Appendix C and D for focus group and interview guides). A transcriptionist transcribed all audio recording, which included a total of 30 Neighborhood Story Project sessions, two follow up focus groups (one was not recorded), and 17 post-interviews.

	<b># of sessions</b>	<b>Audio recording</b>	<b>Video recording (partial)</b>	<b>Primary Investigator field notes</b>	<b>Co-researcher field notes</b>	<b>Images/artifacts</b>
<b>Neighborhood Story Project weekly sessions</b>	36	31	14	35	26	502
<b>Follow-up Focus group</b>	3	2		3		
<b>Post-interviews</b>	17	17		17		
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>502</b>

*Table 3.* Data collected

As summarized in Table 3, collecting a plethora and variety of data related to the Neighborhood Story Project provided a robust corpus of material for analysis and interpretation (Morrow, 2005).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> As will be described in Chapter 3, within each Neighborhood Story Project, team members also collected data: interviewing neighbors, gathering images, and analyzing demographic data. In traditional social science research,

## **Analysis**

My research collaborators and I began analysis as the projects unfolded, discussing observations and emergent interpretations in weekly team meetings. Following the conclusion of the projects (but prior to follow-up interviews in two sites), I reviewed the data corpus in full, including listening to all recordings while reviewing the transcripts. I then uploaded all data in the qualitative software, MaxQDA, for coding. While my initial research questions provided an entry point into themes for coding and analysis, other themes gained salience as they emerged inductively from the data. After coding a portion of data from each of the three projects, I met with the collaborating researchers to review initial code categories and corresponding text segments. Together, we checked for conceptual clarity, duplicative codes, as well as phenomenon I may have missed in my initial pass. After this meeting, I created an initial code book that included four major code categories: what members brought (including the strengths, limitations, and concerns members brought into the project), project design and facilitation (including the design and facilitation strengths and challenges), member outcomes (including shifts within and among members over the course of, or following, the project), and community outcomes (including shifts in the broader community over the course of, or following, the project). Every text segment was also coded by the project name, speaker, and the corresponding week of the project (i.e. Stratford Story Project, Gicola, week 6).

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the stories and images that researchers gather often become the property of the researcher. Given the guiding values of the Neighborhood Story Project, we sought to maximize community member's control over how their personal stories were used and stored, and to democratize access to that data. When conducting interviews, the three Neighborhood Story Project teams provided interviewees with the opportunity to copywrite their interview under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License. With this license, the interviewee maintains ownership over their own interview while setting the terms under which others can access and use the interview. All data collected by the Neighborhood Story Project teams are now archived at the Nashville Public Library.

After completing the first-round coding, I completed follow-up interviews with available participants. In addition to asking questions about the project, I shared some of my initial observations and interpretations of the project outcomes, asked for their impressions, and sought alternative explanations. After transcribing and coding these follow-up interviews, I completed two additional rounds of focused coding (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). First, given my interest in the affective dimensions of group interactions and member's experiences, I employed emotion coding, explicitly coding the affective dimensions of the data (Saldaña, 2016). At this time I added a fifth code category for affective codes (including expressions of excitement, joy, sadness, and indignation). Finally, I reviewed all previously coded excerpts by person and completed longitudinal coding. In this round of analysis, I attended to changes (including to identity, relationships, affective states, and agency) by recording: increases/emergences, cumulations, surges/epiphanies/turning points, decreases/stoppages, constants, and idiosyncrasies (Saldaña, 2016). Though I had already captured many of these changes when coding for member outcomes, analyzing these changes at the individual level over time helped me notice different trajectories among team members, distinguishing for example, members who came into the group with a strong sense of responsibility to their community, which remained *constant* over time, from those whose sense of agency and responsibility *increased* over the project's duration. This also helped me distinguish outcomes that were broadly distributed across participants from those that were frequently coded for only a subset of participants.

Throughout the coding process, I evaluated codes using the constant comparative method to ensure they were consistently applied, and did not mask significant differences between similarly-coded text segments (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; Strauss & Corbin,

1998). Once coding was complete, I analyzed the data for areas of salience and inconsistency, looking both at high frequency codes as well as the distribution of codes across members. A complete codebook with code frequencies is included in Appendix E.

### **Trustworthiness and Credibility**

This study incorporates a number of best practices for establishing trustworthiness and credibility in constructivist research. As described below, these practices included prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the research setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), attending to researcher subjectivity (Morrow, 2005), and triangulating researchers, data and methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

While there is no standard measure of what constitutes ‘prolonged engagement,’ given that the study was continuous over the length of the Neighborhood Story Project, I undertook the maximum possible engagement in the research setting. This allowed me to orient to the members and environment, challenge my preconceptions of participants, and attempt to build trust (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Relatedly, my research collaborators and I made persistent, ongoing observations, observing and recording sessions in full, rather than selecting only a portion of the meetings for data collection and subsequent analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As I turned to analysis, this approach allowed me to identify overarching areas of thematic salience, and increased the trustworthiness of my interpretations.

As a researcher and facilitator, I assume that my practice, scholarly, and personal experiences always inform my interactions, interpretations, and decisions, whether I am



cognizant of them or not.<sup>16</sup> I sought a high degree of reflexivity throughout the research process by incorporating reflective notes into the research teams' field noting practices (as described above), and explicitly attending to assumptions I was making about team members and our interactions. In addition, I intentionally recruited collaborating researchers with distinct experience and expertise from my own. We met weekly throughout the course of the project to discuss our observations and nascent interpretations, and my collaborators were critical in helping foreground my assumptions.

In addition to triangulating researchers, this study triangulated data and methods through the combination of naturalistic observation, focus groups and interviews, along

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<sup>16</sup> In designing the Neighborhood Story Project intervention, I drew on practice learnings gleaned over fifteen years working as the executive director of a non-profit social justice training organization in Montana. In this capacity, I worked to assess needs, develop interventions, facilitate programming, and evaluate results in dozens of educational, organizational and community settings. These years provided powerful practice-based evidence regarding the potential of group-level interventions to reduce bias, build inter-group relationships and understanding, and foster collective action.

In designing the study, I drew on my academic training in qualitative research as well as locally grounded research experience in Nashville. This included conducting 18 months of site-based research along-side residents of a public housing development slated for redevelopment (Thurber, Collins, Greer, McKnight, & Thompson, in press ; Thurber & Fraser, 2016), and preparing a report for the city of Nashville on Equitable Development (Thurber, Fraser, Gupta and Perkins, 2014), both of which provided practice experience in research methodology as well as important local context for this study.

My interests in this work are also deeply personal. I am now, if only briefly, a resident of Nashville, and moved my white family into one of Nashville's rapidly changing neighborhoods. I pushed through my anxiety related to being a 'gentrifier' (when the black family next to us put up a for sale sign in their yard days after we moved in, I had a sinking—and ridiculously self-absorbed—suspicion it was because of us) and build friendships with my black neighbors. I also reached out to my white neighbors, and noticed the contrasting ease with which I make those acquaintances. Together, my neighbors and I have watched as in all directions modest workforce housing of the 1960s is demolished and replaced by much larger homes few of us could afford. Through stories of long-time residents, I have learned how, after school desegregation was finally enforced in the 1970s, white families pulled their children from public schools; how deindustrialization particularly hurt black workers; and how, not long ago, taxis would not drive down our now-quiet street out of fear of crime and violence. I have at times spoken out against decisions made by my nearly all-white neighborhood association that adversely affect the predominantly black children in our neighborhood schools, and I have also chosen not to send my own daughters to those same schools. I am in this mix, wrestling with how best to address the complicated legacy of systemic racism, neighborhood disinvestment, underfunded schools, intergroup tensions, and now gentrification.

with the collection of field notes, audio-recordings and meeting artifacts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To enhance the credibility of our findings, I preserved all artifacts, including audio and video recording. Finally, I used the follow-up focus groups and interviews as an opportunity for member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) my early observations and interpretations. In addition, I gave all participants the opportunity to review either the dissertation in full, or excerpts related to their contributions; 18 participants accepted this invitation.<sup>17</sup> I solicited their feedback on the text, encouraging them to challenge interpretations they disagreed with or add additional insight. Importantly, while this dissertation is a study of three PAR projects, the dissertation study itself is not a PAR project. Though I employed a number of collaborative strategies throughout, and endeavored to be accountable first and foremost to the Neighborhood Story Project participants, this dissertation—and its inherent shortcomings, blind-spots, and weaknesses—are my own.

Though findings of constructivist research may be transferable to similar contexts, the driving purpose of constructivist inquiry is to provide a depth of understanding of complex phenomenon rather than generalizability (Creswell, 2007). Yet, though this study is particular—investigating the effects of a single kind of intervention, on small groups of neighbors, in a trio of Nashville neighborhoods—I am also interested in what learnings might travel, in terms of theory and practice. As Lincoln and Guba note, the trustworthiness of qualitative research is determined by the degree to which sufficient contextual description is made available for readers "to make transferability judgements possible" (1985, p. 316). So

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<sup>17</sup> At this time, I also gave all participants the opportunity to choose how they would be named in this document. As per their requests, some are referred to using their given names and others by pseudonyms.

that readers may begin to discern the relevance of the study's findings to other settings, I turn now to a brief description of the city of Nashville.

### **Context: Welcome to the 'It City'**

With its growing diversity, rapid growth, and affordable housing crisis, Nashville is an apt place to study alternative interventions in gentrifying neighborhoods. Currently home to an estimated 626,600 residents, Nashville is an ethnically and racially diverse city, and becoming more so. As of 2010, the Census estimated that Davidson County, in which Nashville is located, was 53% white, 21% black, and 3% latino, with the latter being the fastest growing ethnic group in the area (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Since the 1970s, Nashville has been an attractive resettlement area for immigrants and refugees, making the city home to the largest Kurdish population outside of the Middle East, and one of the largest Somali populations outside of Africa. During the 2015-2016 school year, Metro Nashville Public Schools reported 120 different first languages among its students (Gonzales, 2015).

Nashville is also growing at an unprecedented rate. It currently ranks among the fastest growing cities in the nation both by population (Nelson, 2013) and jobs (Kotkin & Schill, 2015). Indeed, the "It City" moniker, first professed by the New York Times (Severson, 2013), has stuck, and the growth does not appear to be abating. Middle Tennessee is expected to grow by one million people by 2040 (Nelson, 2013), and as the anchor city of the region, the Nashville area is expected to accommodate much of that growth. Unsurprisingly, the city's housing market is also booming. In 2017, Zillow—the leading online real estate marketplace—named Nashville the hottest real estate market in

the country (<https://www.zillow.com/blog/hottest-housing-markets-2017-209986/>), providing good news for Nashville developers and real estate agents.

Yet the “It City” is not benefitting everyone. A recent report by the Brookings Institution (2016) ranked Nashville 5<sup>th</sup> out of 100 in measures of growth (based on changes in the number of jobs, the value of gross metropolitan product and aggregate wages). Yet the same report ranked Nashville 73<sup>rd</sup> in measures of inclusion (based on changes in median wage, the number of people in poverty, and percent unemployment). In the midst of unprecedented growth, the benefits and burdens of development are not being equitably shared. The rising cost of housing is among the greatest threats to low-income residents.

The Nashville Mayor’s office recently released a comprehensive report on the state of housing countywide (Office of the Mayor, 2017). In it, the office notes that 30% of county residents cannot afford the cost of housing. It also reports that since 2000, Nashville has lost more than 20% of its affordable housing stock, and has current shortage of 18,000 affordable homes. Given the expected growth in the region, Nashville is on track for that shortage to increase to 31,000 units by 2025. At the same time, the number of people living in poverty is rapidly increasing. In 2016, Nashville experienced a 10% increase in homelessness within a single year (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2016).

Racial disparities in income make black and latino residents particularly vulnerable to dramatic shifts in the housing market. Nashville’s black and latino residents are twice as likely to live below the poverty level as their white counterparts (Metropolitan Social Services, 2016). Shockingly, the per capita income for black residents countywide is only \$19,920, nearly half that of the white population (Metropolitan Social Services, 2016). Yet,

many of these residents live in neighborhoods where housing costs are rising the fastest and demographics are rapidly changing (as will be explored in Chapter 3).

A certain level of resident mobility is to be expected, but overall, U.S. neighborhoods tend to be demographically stable, making such significant and rapid demographic changes noteworthy. In a cluster analysis of census data collected between 1990 and 2010 of every metropolitan areas in the United States, Wei and Knox note “the most striking finding...is that metropolitan America is dominated by neighborhoods that are relatively stable in their socioeconomic attributes” (2014, p. 472). The authors found a distinct typology of neighborhoods—differentiated by race and ethnicity, household/family income, educational attainment, unemployment, immigrant status—that have persisted over 30 years across 70% of census tracts (Wei and Knox, 2014).

In Nashville, this stability can be understood, in part, by the persistence of the color line. This is illustrated in the following two maps, one created nearly a century ago by the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC), and a racial dot map of the city created from 2010 census data (see Figure 5). The HOLC was a New Deal program charged with determining locations to refinance loans or approve mortgages within many U.S. cities. The assessor’s objective was to determine “quality of neighborhood” and the risk each area posed for mortgage default. Such assessments were based on a number of factors, including the quality of housing stock, sales and rental rates, physical attributes of the terrain, and, significantly, ‘threat of infiltration of foreign-born, negro, or lower grade population’ (Greer, 2013). As indicated in red and yellow, the HOLC map of Nashville declared nearly the entire urban core—then home to all Nashville’s black neighborhoods, as well as other poor

residents, people of color, and ‘lower grade’ ethnic immigrants—to be ‘hazardous’ or ‘definitely declining.’

There is debate concerning the degree to which HOLC maps *drove* decisions (such as where loans would be approved, and where investments in infrastructure would take place), and the degree to which the maps merely reflect the *results* of decisions already made (see Greer, 2013; Coates, 2014). In either case, the HOLC maps clearly represent a white supremacist ideology that differentially values people and places along racial and ethnic lines. Juxtaposing this historic map with the racial dot map for Nashville makes evident the long-term effects of this ideology and associated practices.

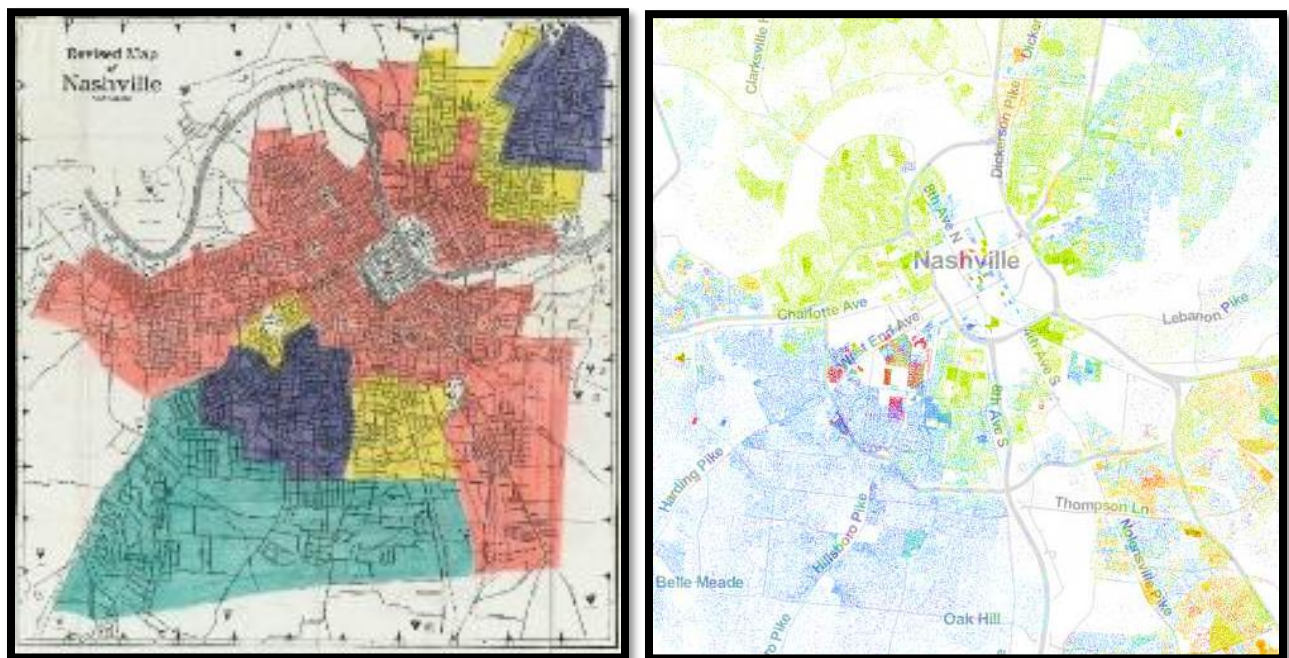


Figure 5. Two moments in time: HOLC map of Nashville, circa 1930, and the racial dot map, 2010<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> I retrieved the Nashville HOLC map from the National Archives and Records Administration. Copyright information for the racial dot map is as follows: Image Copyright, 2013, Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia (Dustin A. Cable, creator).

Using 2010 census data, the racial dot map places a single dot per person in the census tract where the person resides. The dots are color coded to reflect the respondent's self-reported racial identity: white is coded as blue; black, green; asian, red; hispanics, orange; and all other racial categories, brown. With its highly concentrated swaths of blue and green, this map reveals the degree to which Nashville remains racially segregated. Although Nashville demographics have changed dramatically over recent decades—nearly 50% of residents are now people of color, up from 20% in 1970—as of 2010, nearly 1 in 5 white households still live in census tracts that are over 90% white (U.S. Census Bureau, 1970, 2010).<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, people of color overwhelmingly live in areas that were deemed declining and hazardous nearly a century ago, and very few live in the “best” areas (shaded green in the HOLC map).

Considering these two maps side by side demonstrates the relative stability of Nashville's black neighborhoods over time. Indeed, the racialization of Nashville neighborhoods has a long history. Although the very first settlement in what was to become Nashville included a number of free black persons, as those settlements grew, the majority of black residents of the region were enslaved, working on plantations outside of the city center, where the wealth of the region was produced by their labor (Lovett, 1999). In 1860, just 4000 black people lived in the city of Nashville. This dramatically changed with the onset of the Civil War (Lovett, 1999). Within the first year of battle, the Union army gained control of the city, and a great migration of freedom-seeking black families found their way to Nashville; by 1865 the black population had tripled (Lovett, 1999).

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<sup>19</sup> This reflects Census data at the tract level, geographic areas that generally encompass 2,500 to 8,000 people.

As these new residents were still considered someone else's property, the Union army settled them into what were called 'contraband camps,' three large encampments spread around the city: the northwest camp in North Nashville, Edgehill in West Nashville, and Edgefield in East Nashville (Lovett, 1999). In exchange for lodging, the army enlisted the labor of black men and women fleeing slavery to build the forts, trenches, and rifle pits necessary to fortify the city (Kreyling, 2005). The conditions were squalid, subject to flooding and disease (Lovett, 1999). And yet, these camps held the promise of freedom for those born into slavery, and after the war these became the first black neighborhoods in Nashville. As wealth allowed, some black families moved out of these neighborhoods, and yet these areas remain significant to Nashville's black communities to this day. Just six months after the war ended, Fisk University was founded on the edge of the Northwest camp, and continues to operate as the state's oldest private HBCU. The first black Baptist congregation in Edgefield was also started within a year of the war's close, and celebrated their 150th anniversary in their historic building in 2017.

Beginning with containing blacks in contraband camps during the war, the racialization of Nashville neighborhoods has continued over time. This can be traced through the HOLC redlining of black neighborhoods in the 1930s, the discriminatory loan practices which provided subsidized home ownership opportunities in the suburbs for white families for decades, and the urban renewal freeway construction gutted and/or annexed black neighborhoods from the 1950s-1970s. Although the Civil Rights Movement won important victories against discrimination, the racialization of Nashville intensified during the period. As historian Benjamin Houston writes, "The dotted lines of roads now replaced the WHITE and COLORED signs of the past ... an entire city was redrawn and reshaped in



order to preserve the legacies of the past” (2012, p.242). These legacies have proved to be deeply rooted.

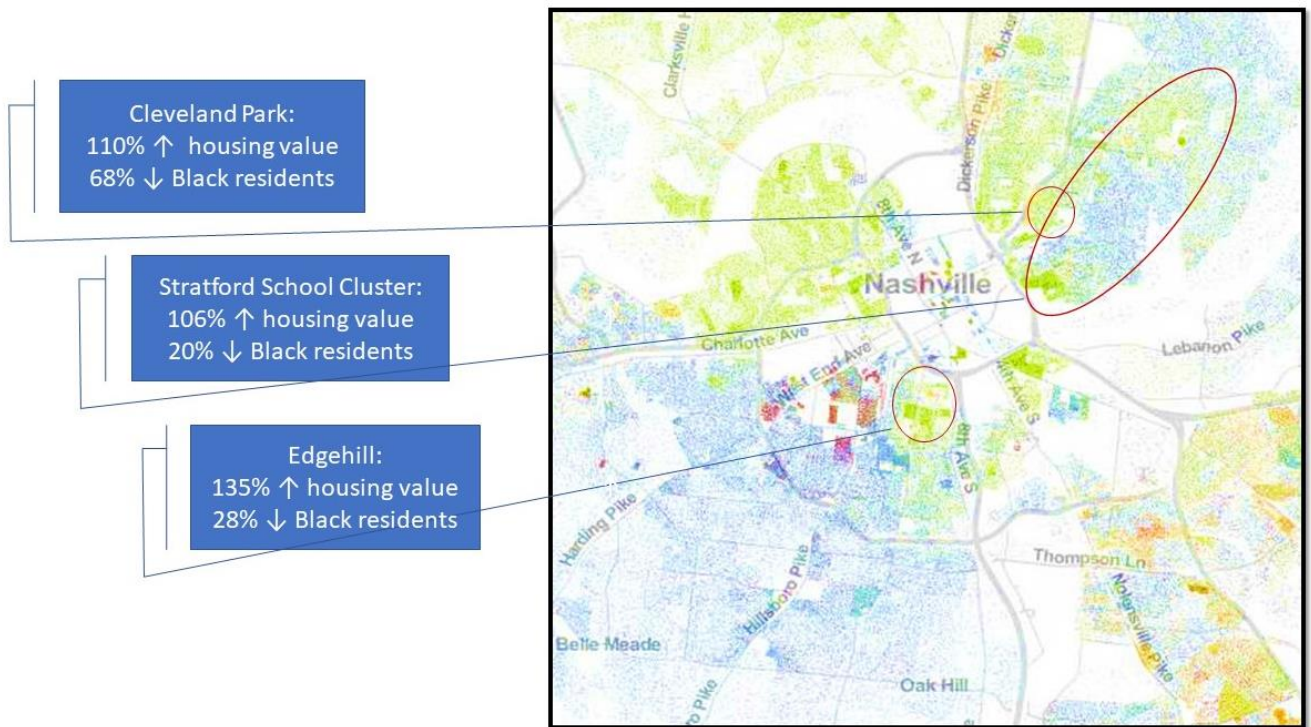
As a result, Nashville’s black neighborhoods have long been sites of tension, marked by deprivation and disinvestment from the city while also being sites of industriousness, congregation, creativity and resilience. And, with Nashville’s current development boom, many of these neighborhoods are now radically transforming. To the extent the City of Nashville has addressed gentrification at all, it is as a housing problem.<sup>20</sup> City administrators are not approaching gentrification as a racialized spatial process that also effects relationships, knowledge, histories, and visions for the future. It is in this often-ignored realm of more than material effects that the Neighborhood Story Project intervenes.

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<sup>20</sup> In the 2016-2017 fiscal year, the city provided \$15 million to the Barnes Fund, Nashville’s affordable housing trust fund, and the Mayor’s proposed budget for next year include a \$25 million bond to further shore up funding to preserve and build affordable housing in the city. In September, 2016, Metro Council passed a voluntary Inclusionary Housing bill, designed to incentivize developers to build affordable homes for purchase. The current administration also donated 30 metro-owned properties to be developed as affordable housing. With these efforts, the city reports that more than 1500 affordable and workforce housing units have been preserved, built, or are soon coming to market. Although these are all marked improvements, many are concerned these efforts are insufficient, including the city administration (Mayor’s Office, 2017).

### CHAPTER 3. TRACING THE THREE PROJECTS

Between February and December 2016, I piloted the Neighborhood Story Project in three Nashville neighborhoods: the Cleveland Park neighborhood of East Nashville, the Edgehill neighborhood in Southwest Nashville, and the neighborhood surrounding Stratford High School, in East Nashville.



*Figure 6.* Changing housing values (1999-2014) and racial demographics (2000-2010) within the three pilot areas, overlaid on racial dot map of city

As summarized in Figure 6, each of these areas is experiencing rapid demographic change that is dramatically out of step with county-wide averages.<sup>21</sup> During the time that housing values across the county increased by 54%, in each of these neighborhoods values

<sup>21</sup> See Appendix F for complete description of sources and processing of geographic and demographic data.

rose by more than 100%. And while the black population of the county increased by more than 15% (compared with less than 1% for whites, who, while making up a larger number of the city's overall population, are increasing at a slower rate), the black population decreased significantly in these three areas.

Although only a few miles apart from one another, the neighborhoods in the study are distinct geographically and historically. Participants in each project brought differing interests and concerns, and there were significant variations in both research questions and culminating projects across the three settings: The Cleveland Park Story Project used the research process to strengthen social ties within their neighborhood, Edgehill leveraged the project as a tool for organizing residents against displacement, and Stratford employed the process to retell the history of the school. In the pages that follow, I introduce each setting in turn, first situating the neighborhood geographically and historically, then describing the Neighborhood Story Project participants, before tracing the projects as they progressed over the 12 weeks. After considering the projects separately, I explore similarities in the ways members theorized gentrification's effects in their neighborhoods. In the subsequent chapters, I return to my research questions to explore the effects of participation on team members, as well as the design elements that facilitated participant outcomes.

### **Cleveland Park**

Today, Cleveland Park references a variety of geographic scales. It is an actual park located on N. 6<sup>th</sup> St. on Nashville's eastside, equipped with a community center that opened in 1963. It is also the official name of the small neighborhood adjacent to the park, covering approximately a half square mile between Douglas St. to the north and Cleveland St. to the south, Dickerson St. to the west and Ellington Parkway to the east. 'Cleveland Park' is also

used colloquially by many residents to describe a collection of neighborhoods—including Greenwood, Maxwell Heights, McFerrin Park and Cleveland Park—that surround the park and community center. The Cleveland Park Story Project ultimately adopted this latter, larger geographic scale as it attracted team members from each of these areas.

Although there have been black people living in East Nashville since the 1700s, Cleveland Park truly became an African American enclave following the Civil War. The Edgefield Contraband Camp was established on the eastern banks of the Cumberland River in 1864, just south of the neighborhood now known as Cleveland Park. Residents of the Edgefield Camp built infrastructure for the U.S. government, while simultaneously building for their own future. Within a year of the war's end, these new residents had established First Baptist Church of East Nashville on Main St. (Lovett, 1999). Additional churches, schools and businesses soon followed, and a number of small black neighborhoods took root throughout East Nashville, often existing adjacent to white neighborhoods. Such was the case with Cleveland Park.

In the 1950s, Cleveland Park was home to robust Civil Rights organizing to desegregate East Nashville schools and businesses, much of which was generated in First Baptist Church of East Nashville (National Register of Historic Places). During this period, East Nashville was also targeted for slum clearance, public housing construction, and freeway construction under a massive East Nashville Urban Renewal Project. Indeed, the \$24 million project proved to be the largest in the Southeast (Erickson, 2016). Businesses, churches and more than 1000 homes were razed in the process (Carey, 2001). Cleveland Park was particularly impacted, as family homes were cleared away for a new expressway—

now named Ellington parkway—that bisected the neighborhood. As a result of these projects, the neighborhood was essentially a construction zone for nearly 20 years.

Many residents believe that the combination of neighborhood upheaval, residential displacement, and the insertion of the highway simultaneously damaged social cohesion while decreasing the value of area homes (Plazas, 2017). In 1970, Cleveland Park was comprised of 75% black households (U.S. Census Bureau, 1970). After court-ordered school desegregation took effect in the 1970s, white flight from the area accelerated (Erickson, 2016), and by 1990, the neighborhood was 90% black (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990). For many years, the neighborhood experienced high rates of poverty, addiction, and crime, and an increasing number of residents struggled to find opportunities for educational and economic advancement (Hartman, 1975). However, a number of anchor churches and businesses remained. Working through these institutions and a strong Cleveland Park Neighborhood Association, longtime residents are proud to have brought about important improvements to their neighborhood over the last 20 years, decreasing crime and improving schools (S. McCullough, personal communication, 1/9/2016).

Concurrent to these internal efforts to improve the neighborhood, in the early 2000s the 5 Points area of East Nashville received significant redevelopment attention from the city and private developers, and the surrounding neighborhoods began to gentrify, including Cleveland Park (Kreyling, 2013; Rau & Garrison, 2017). Middle and upper income residents, enticed by the opportunity to live in a walkable neighborhood minutes from downtown, found relatively affordable homes in the neighborhood. Restaurants and bars whose price point catered to these new, more affluent neighbors opened. Today, the neighborhood demographics are rapidly changing. Between 2002 and 2016, the Nashville

Assessor of Property reports housing costs went up 110% in the area, inevitably driving up rents and property taxes, and between 2000 and 2010, black residents decreased by 68% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

For many long-time residents, it is impossible to separate the past from the present. Sam McCollough, president emeritus of the Cleveland Park Neighborhood Association, observes, “If urban renewal didn’t get you in the '60s, the interstate got you. If the interstate didn’t get you, Ellington Parkway got you. Now, it’s gentrification, housing costs and taxes that will get you” (Plazas, 2017). In addition, a number of hallmark black businesses—from barber shops to soul food joints—have closed down, and in 2017, as First Baptist Church of East Nashville celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the historic church also faced questions of whether it could afford to remain in place (Meyer, 2017).

Within Cleveland Park, tensions have arisen along race and class lines, as residents of different tenures recall different pasts, experience different presents and imagine different futures. By 2016, these tensions fissured the neighborhood association, resulting in the establishment of two neighborhood groups: one led by newer white residents and another by older, black residents (personal communication, Sam McCullough, 1/9/2016). At the time the Cleveland Park Story Project launched, members of these two associations were beginning a mediation process. My collaborating researcher and I conducted outreach for the project through both neighborhood networks, which served as anchor organizations for the project. The division within the community was on the minds of many who were interested in joining the project. At one information session, a long-time resident observed “this could help close some gaps and build unity again.”

Ultimately, eight residents joined the project. Larry, Andrea and her husband George are black homeowners who identify as longtime residents. All three are elders in their community; Larry and Andrea grew up in the neighborhood, and George has lived there more than 30 years.<sup>22</sup> Though of an age when some have retired, all three each still work full time. Larry maintains the grounds at an area university, Andrea works at an insurance company, and George works at a large factory. Three other team members consider themselves newer residents of the neighborhood, having moved into the area in the last decade. Also homeowners, these team members include Ms. Pauline, an elder black woman who operates a small pre-school in her home; Leslie, an adult black woman who coordinates research at a medical center, and Dee, an adult Latina woman who recently retired from the post office and moved to Nashville to marry Larry. The final two members of the group are former neighborhood residents priced out by rising rents, but who retain strong ties to the neighborhood. Both in their 30s, at the time of the project Maria, a Latina woman, was attending divinity school, and Courtney, a white woman, was working as a practicing artist. This group was joined by Jyoti, my collaborating researcher, and I. Jyoti is a South Asian woman who has a number of ties to the neighborhood from her previous applied research related to gentrification. Both she and I live outside of Cleveland Park, though only a few minutes away.

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<sup>22</sup> Rather than referring to a precise chronological age (which some members disclosed but I did not systematically gather) or employment status (as many participants past retirement age were still working), I am using the term 'elder' to refer to participants who demonstrated and were granted social status by virtue of their wisdom, lived experience, and the formal and informal leadership roles they played in their families, faith communities and neighborhoods. I am using 'youth' to refer to young adults in high school or undergraduate college, and adults to refer to those between these life stages associated with youth and elders.



*Figure 7. Members of the Cleveland Park Story Project*

As members got to know one another over the first few weeks, they spoke with great care about their neighborhood. Several—particularly Andrea and Larry, born and raised in the area—demonstrated rich historical knowledge, and all expressed a strong desire to learn more about their community. Despite these strong ties to place, only Andrea and Leslie were actively involved in their neighborhood associations (both acting as their association presidents). A couple of others participated in their associations, and the remaining team members were not involved in formal civic groups, though most noted informal social ties in the community.

Over the first several weeks, prompted by activities encouraging residents to reflect on the neighborhood, members began to articulate their concerns about Cleveland Park. Overwhelmingly, they were troubled by the diminished sense of cohesion within the community, particularly across generational lines. George shared, “If I could change one thing about my neighborhood it would be, um, young and the old interacting more.” For many, this decreased cohesion reflected a lost sense of interdependence within the



neighborhood. Ms. Pauline noted with irony that many of the new houses in Cleveland Park are built close in proximity, and yet neighbors are seemingly farther apart. Such a shift in how people relate to their neighbors and neighborhoods is not without consequence, particularly as the neighborhood experiences higher turnover. As Leslie reflected, “I don’t want to generalize too much, but some of the new people, I know they’re only there for a short time...but there is like a ripping of the fabric of the neighborhood when you kind of dive in and dive out.” Many members came into the Cleveland Park Story Project concerned that this *ripping* of their neighborhood was disproportionately harming some residents more than others, particularly elders, low-income residents, and residents of color. They were also curious about patterns of displacement—beginning with Indian removal in the 1700s, to the removal of homes during urban renewal in the 1950s, to people pushed out by rising rents and property taxes today.

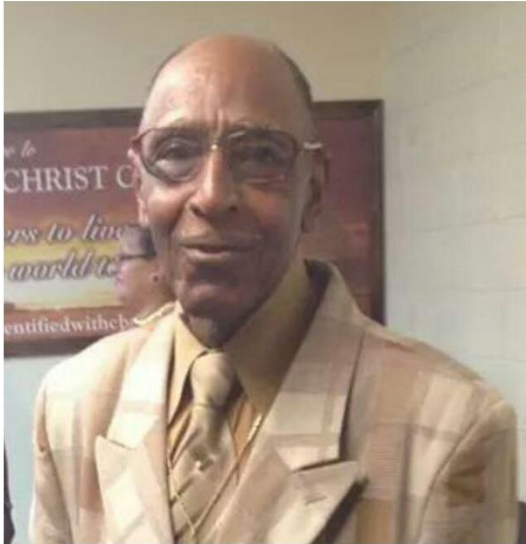
Grounded in their collective concerns, in week five the group generated dozens of possible research questions. After a lengthy deliberation, they decided to move forward with four: What holds Cleveland Park together? How can we make Cleveland Park home again? How does racial struggle show up in Cleveland Park? And, how can we protect our neighbors from displacement? Members formed three work groups: an interview team and a photography team investigated the first two questions by conducting interviews with neighbors and collecting historic and contemporary photographs of the neighborhood, and a document analysis team investigated the question of racial struggle through archival research. To address the final question regarding displacement, the group wanted to generate a list of resources to share with neighbors, and one member offered to take on that task independently.

Over the next few weeks, the interview team created an interview guide and collected seventeen audiotaped interviews. They began by interviewing one another, which allowed members to become comfortable discussing the project, gaining consent, following the guide, and recording interviews on their phones. They then reached out to people in the neighborhood. Following each interview, they also took a portrait. The photography team collected vintage photographs of the neighborhood from longtime residents, and gathered additional images of the neighborhood today. Meanwhile, the document analysis team made independent trips to the city archives to look into neighborhood history, read published books and articles about the neighborhood, and gathered demographic data. As we began to reflect on what we were learning through our respective efforts, the team decided to host a multi-media interactive community exhibition as their culminating project. The team hoped the event would provide opportunities for neighbors to learn about their community, meet one another, and reflect on their own responsibilities as neighbors. In the days leading up to the event, Dee reflected:

I'm going to be praying and I'm going to be hoping that, that the people that come out...that something will touch their inner spiritual being inside that they would say to themselves, '*You know, I have been not doing this or not doing that or not reaching out or not being, um, more sharing and more communicating with my fellow man, my neighbor,*' ...That it will be such an impact to them that this community will see that change.

Her team members shared the hope that the event would foster some of the sense of community and shared history they believed Cleveland Park was losing.

Held in the gym of the Cleveland Park Community Center—down the hall from where we had been meeting the past 12 weeks—the exhibition included a display of large-format portraits of the 17 neighbors who had been interviewed (see Figure 8), along with a quote from each person related to the questions: what holds Cleveland Park together, and how can we make Cleveland Park home again?



“See, when people learn to love and be concerned about each other, it creates I will say a spiritual environment. And that’s the type of neighborhood you want to live in. Even though things that change, so much going on, but if you have love for each other, it binds you together.”

-Mr. Meddling



“Sometimes I wish it was easy as kids are to just play with each other, that, you know, adults would have the same concept—not necessarily playing around—but just, you know, 'hey, they're doing something I like,' why not join in, or why not have fun, and why not do something creative or expressive of yourself, because you can learn a lot about people just by simple things.”

-Kendall

*Figure 8.* Sample posters from exhibition

Nearby, a video played, with audio from the interviews overlaid on images of the neighborhood’s past and present. A large printed timeline wrapped around two walls of the gym, containing key events in the neighborhood’s history, particularly related to racial struggle. The timeline included 43 events and/or eras, beginning with the indigenous ties to Cleveland Park and continued to the present moment. A nearby table offered sticky notes

and markers so attendees could add to the timeline. Among other interactive features of the exhibition, there was an activity table for children, a light reception, and people were encouraged to write a word on a stone to take home, signifying what they wanted to remember about their neighborhood.

About fifty people came through the gym over the course of the two-hour event, perusing materials, adding to the timeline, and visiting with others. Ms. Pauline noted that many of the ‘foundational families’—elder black neighbors who had multi-generational ties to the neighborhood—were present, noting that it was a “good reunion...I think that that it rekindled a bond bringing back good memories.” In a neighborhood where many residents feel like their neighborhood is changing without them, the event created space for long-term residents to see their place history affirmed.

The significance of that affirmation became particularly salient to me during an interaction I had at the table where we had displayed dozens of smooth stones and permanent markers. I was encouraging people to select a stone and add to it a word or phrase that they wanted to take with them. An elder in the neighborhood approached the table, and I asked if she wanted to write a word on a rock. She looked at the stones and then looked at me, with an expression I couldn’t quite read. “It’s maybe a little silly,” I offered, and she responded in a teasing tone, “you said it.” I laughed and she moved away from the table to resume visiting with others. A short while later she came back, found a rock—she

wanted a large one—and asked me to write, ‘born here.’ She returned to her friends, then circled back to the table once again and asked me to add a date—her birthday—to her stone.



*Figure 9. Cleveland Park neighbor with stone*

Though turn-out was modest, team members were pleased with the results. In addition to long-time residents, a number of newer neighbors came, many of whom expressed gratitude for the chance to learn more about their community. Also in attendance were members from both Cleveland Park Neighborhood Associations. As Andrea later reflected, “I think it needed to be intimate, because there has been a lot of sensitive ... It is very sensitive right now.” From the start, Ms. Andrea had hoped the project would bring healing to the fractured community, and she believed the event was appropriately scaled to achieve that goal. Following the event, the photography exhibit was moved to the hallway of the community center—to be viewed by those attending the Cleveland Park Neighborhood Association monthly meetings, among others—and the video was posted online.<sup>23</sup> In addition, the three largest neighborhood associations in the area (Cleveland

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<sup>23</sup>The video is viewable at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohCGG6eJlzM&feature=youtu.be>

Park, McFerrin Park and Maxwell Heights) posted the video and digital versions of the timeline and other historical artifacts on their social media pages.

### **Edgehill**

The southwest Nashville neighborhood of Edgehill has many similarities to Cleveland Park. Its growth as a robust black neighborhood can also be traced to the Civil War, and to a contraband camp that was built near neighboring Fort Negley. Within months of the war's end, formerly enslaved residents began building schools, churches, and businesses, ultimately creating a thriving neighborhood (Lovett, 1999). Like Cleveland Park, the area is proximal to downtown, and was once a patchwork of black and white neighborhoods. Edgehill was also targeted by urban renewal freeway construction in the 1950s, experienced white flight and disinvestment in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century along with a rise in poverty and crime, and has experienced rapid gentrification in recent decades. But Edgehill is also distinct from Cleveland Park in many ways, having particular strengths and vulnerabilities.

By the 1940s, Edgehill was an established middle class and professional black neighborhood, serviced by numerous black-owned businesses, and home to a number of black doctors, lawyers, as well as the state's first black representative (Houston, 2012; Nashville Civic Design Center, 2003). As a result, the neighborhood likely had more political and social power than did lower-income neighborhoods such as Cleveland Park. But the neighborhood's location also made it uniquely vulnerable. Urban renewal was particularly devastating to Edgehill. It completely altered the street system, separating a previously unified neighborhood by two major freeways, cutting-off the once robust commercial area on 12<sup>th</sup> Ave, and razing the homes of more than 2000 people to build

public housing (Houston, 2012; Nashville Civic Design Center, 2003). As interstates 40 and 65 barricaded the neighborhood to the north and east, Edgehill faced encroachment from Belmont University to the South (which expanded under urban renewal), and the increasingly powerful Music Row to the West (Nashville Civic Design Center, 2003).<sup>24</sup>

Although a number of anchor businesses and churches remained, Edgehill was squeezed, and the neighborhood was economically and socially frayed. But when the city announced plans to build a major expansion to Edgehill public housing in the 1960s, residents pushed back, forming a powerful neighborhood association called the “Edgehill Committee.” This committee of longtime black residents, supported by Rev. Bill Barnes, (a white minister who founded Edgehill United Methodist Church as an integrated house of worship), successfully defeated the expansion on the grounds that mixed-income neighborhoods were more ethical and effective than large-scale public housing developments (Barnes, n.d.). In 1968, Edgehill United Methodist Church launched Organized Neighbors of Edgehill (ONE) as the nonprofit arm of their organizing and service work. Edgehill residents and ONE remained mobilized through the Civil Rights Movement and into the current era, working to improve the schools, safety, and well-being of their neighbors. Though ONE has not achieved all their goals, many long-time residents have a strong identity as a neighborhood that can fight for its own preservation.

Today, this one square mile neighborhood is bounded by I-65 and I-40 to the north and east, Wedgewood Ave. to the South, and 17<sup>th</sup> Ave South to the west. Edgehill still faces encroachment from Music Row, Belmont and Vanderbilt universities. According to Metro

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<sup>24</sup> Music Row is the geographic area where many of the city’s recording studios, record label offices and radio stations are located. It is considered the heart of Nashville’s music industry.

Assessor's Office data, between 2002 and 2016, housing costs went up 135% in Edgehill, and—in a neighborhood that was nearly 90% black from the 1970s through the 1990s, between 2000 and 2010 the number of black households decreased by 28%. Like Cleveland Park, there are now two neighborhood associations, ONE—which meets in Edgehill public housing, and is attended by many of the longer-term black residents of the neighborhood—and Edgehill Village Neighborhood Association—organized and attended by newer, whiter, and more affluent residents. However, as in the past, there are people trying to bridge racial and economic divides. A coalition of neighborhoods groups—including both neighborhood associations—formed in 2016, and one of their initial efforts was to form a neighborhood history committee to document the area's history and advocate for their collective well-being (personal communication, Joel Dark, 4/5/16). In addition, Edgehill United Methodist Church continues to serve as an integrated house of worship, and was as the organizational partner in the Edgehill Story Project. Two members of the church helped develop a recruitment strategy, which included outreach to both neighborhood associations. Ultimately, the Edgehill Story Project included eight team members, in addition to my collaborating researcher and me.

Seven of the team members are black women with deep ties to the neighborhood. Four of these are adults or elders who rent their homes, and no longer work in the formal economy. Among the elders are Ms. Mary and Ms. TK, who live in Edgehill public housing, and Ms. Betty, who rents a home nearby. Juanita also grew up in Edgehill, and though she rents outside the neighborhood, she has long imagined retiring in Edgehill. Shirley, a student in a nearby college, also rents. Though she is newly living in the neighborhood, she has worshipped and volunteered at Edgehill United Methodist Church



for several years. The two homeowners in the group are Suzanne and Vanessa, both adult, working women who spent formative years as members of Edgehill United Methodist Church, and both have family homes in the neighborhood (though Suzanne now lives in East Nashville). The only white man in the group was Max, an adult who works at the church and rented in the neighborhood until he was priced out. The two collaborating researchers, Mercy and I, are both white women who do not live in the neighborhood.

As was the case in Cleveland Park, all members of the Edgehill Story Project entered with a strong sense of attachment to place and people in their community, and a foundation of knowledge about their neighborhood's history—Ms. TK and Ms. Betty alone had a combined century of experience in the neighborhood. With the exception of Vanessa, who had not recently been involved in the neighborhood, all members came in with some connection to existing neighborhood organizations, though for most, their involvement had been limited to attending meetings or playing modest leadership roles. Ms. Mary, Ms. TK, and Ms. Betty—friends before the project began—as well as Juanita, regularly attended monthly ONE meetings. Shirley, Suzanne, and Max were all involved in Edgehill United Methodist Church, and both Max and Suzanne played leadership roles in other community work. Not long before the Edgehill Story Project began, Max helped launch a Nashville chapter of Homes for All, a national campaign to organize renters and protest displacement. From the start, Max hoped that the Edgehill Story Project would complement the work of Homes for All Nashville.



*Figure 10.* Edgehill Story Project team meeting

Though not everyone was familiar with Nashville Homes for All at the start of the project, concerns about displacement were widely shared among members. At the first meeting, Juanita explained, “I’m seeing our neighborhood change drastically, even catastrophically, and I want to do something about that.” She continued, asking if we could “create a booklet or something that would be able to be used to stop developments” and others immediately chimed in, echoing the need for materials to advocate against development-driven displacement in the neighborhood. In this spirited discussion, Vanessa exclaimed, “in order for us to change stuff we have to be activists. It’s up to us to use our product to take to the developers, the council, the mayor, and say, hey, you want to destroy *this?*” Over the following weeks, it became clear that members had an array of concerns about development, including a deep worry about people being displaced, concerns about the negative effects of the changing built environment, and the ruptured social ties as people move out of the neighborhood and new people move in. Several people referred to a loss of “togetherness.” Juanita explained, “My concern is that Edgehill is no longer going to actually be a community...that it is turning into a wasteland.”

As the Edgehill Story Project got off the ground, Max was also recruiting for Nashville Homes for All, and several members of the Story Project joined this effort. In our fifth week, our planned meeting conflicted with Nashville Homes for All's first major event—a Renter's Day of Action cookout, rally and march staged adjacent to a nearby development. We shifted our meeting time so members could participate in both events, and eight of the ten of us attended the day of action. When the group gathered for the Story Project meeting—dripping sweat after a 2-mile march in 90-degree heat, and voices coarse from chanting—the excitement in the room was palpable. That energy carried through the afternoon as we synthesized our concerns from the last four weeks into two multi-part research questions to guide our remaining work together: 1) How are our neighbors being displaced from Edgehill, and what can we do to stop it? 2) What are the policies and funding sources fueling development in Edgehill, and how can we shape the development to be more equitable? The group saw these questions as two sides of the same coin—with the first concerned with the effects of gentrification, and the second concerned with the causes. We began mapping possible sources of data and methods of data collection and analysis, and members formed two working groups: an interview team and a data team.

In the weeks that followed, the interview team developed interview questions, practiced interviews with one another, and ultimately gathered eleven videotaped interviews. Pulling out key themes from the interviews, the team made a 20-minute video to be used as an educational and organizing tool in the community. The data team collected and analyzed data on housing values, foreclosures, evictions, and demographic changes. We pulled key findings, supplemented by illustrative quotes from interviewees, and a list of resources for renters and homeowners, into a report. The final document also included a

comic strip explaining how zoning works and how community members can get involved in shaping development in the neighborhood.



*Figure 11.* Excerpt from Edgehill Story Project zoning comic strip

The team's sense of urgency sharpened in week seven when news broke that Park at Hillside—a large private apartment building in Edgehill that accepts Section 8 rental assistance—sold for 20 million dollars, after selling for just 6 million two years prior. This increased sense of precarity informed the design of the culminating community event, which the group titled “Edgehill State of Emergency: A Call to Action in Our Neighborhood.” The group imagined the event as a place for neighbors to learn more about how gentrification has affected the neighborhood, and to feel better equipped to get involved. As Suzanne put it, “I hope...that people feel like there's a place for them to get plugged in and that neighbors feel like they are better connected to each other, but also feeling like there's a way to support others in the neighborhood. And also a way for them to be supported as needed.” At the same time, the group had an organizing goal. In Ms. TK's words, “it was about getting up, waking your neighbor up, telling them, ‘Come on. Get up. Let's go. Let's get up and talk up

for what you want.’ Because see, if we didn’t ever talk up for it, we was not going to get this.”

Attended by more than 80 people, the event featured a showing of the film, the release of the report, and a social-action fair where attendees could connect with various organizations working against displacement.<sup>25</sup> Members were very pleased with the turnout at the event. Further, the event received broad press coverage, including an article in the *Tennessean* (Humbles, 2016), and stories on the local public radio affiliate and on the three major news channels. In subsequent weeks, the initial press was followed by two additional news interviews with members of the Edgehill Story Project. The high level of press exceeded members’ expectations, as it dramatically increased the reach of the project.



*Figure 12.* Members of the Edgehill Story Project following their event

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<sup>25</sup> The film and report are available online at <https://edgehillstateofemergencyreport.wordpress.com/>

In the months since, Edgehill members have seen an uptick in neighbor involvement in a number of neighborhood groups, including ONE and Homes for All Nashville. In addition, four Edgehill Story Project members have maintained strong involvement in Homes for All, and are continuing to organize neighbors under the banner of the Edgehill Story Project.

### **Stratford**

The third Neighborhood Story Project was piloted in a school zone. While Stratford has never been the name of a neighborhood, it is the name of a school that began as, and—after a period of bussing in the 80s—has returned to, a neighborhood school. Covering a much larger geographic area than the other two projects, today the school zone stretches six miles north to south, from the suburb of Madison to the I-24 loop ringing downtown, and is generally bounded by the Cumberland River to the east and Gallatin Pike to the west. The school draws from two large long-time black neighborhoods—including Cayce Homes, the largest public housing project in Nashville—as well as a cluster of historically white neighborhoods, both affluent and working class. These include the neighborhoods known as Historic Edgefield, East End, Lockland Springs, Eastwood and Inglewood.

Stratford has long been shaped by the intersection of segregationist ideology and shifting educational policy. When the school opened as a junior high in 1961, the school zone was slightly smaller than today, and encompassed a newly constructed suburban middle-class neighborhood.<sup>26</sup> At the time, the area zoned for the school was 98% white (U.S. Census Bureau, 1960). Despite opening several years after the historic *Brown v. Board*

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<sup>26</sup> Throughout this section, I draw on Stratford school zone maps and enrollment information I collected from the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools Archives, located at 2601 Bransford Ave, Nashville, TN 37204.

of Education supreme court decision, Nashville schools remained entrenched in segregation, and district officials likely did not consider whether the few black families in the area zoned for Stratford might want to send their children to the neighborhood school. A review of early yearbooks makes evident the school received strong parent engagement, excelled in academics and sports, and earned national commendations for educational excellence.

In 1970, the Nashville school district was court-ordered to desegregate through rezoning and bussing. In response, the district added a 30-block island from a black, North Nashville neighborhood to the Stratford school zone. Many white families resisted desegregation, moving to the outskirts of the county untouched by the desegregation order (Erickson, 2016). Others remained in the neighborhood but pulled their children from the public schools. In 1970, the white population of the area zoned for Stratford remained very high—89% (U.S. Census Bureau, 1970) — but white student enrollment in the school dropped to 73%. Although Stratford maintained a reputation for excellence, between 1969 and 1973 overall enrollment at Stratford dropped 30%, leaving not only fewer students, but less parents engaged in the school as well.

Bussing increased in the 1980s, and the retreat of white families from Stratford continued. The school district was targeted with lawsuits related to its integration efforts, and complaints from both black and white communities about the loss of neighborhood schools (Erickson, 2016). Although some students at Stratford continued to thrive, by the 1990s the school had entered a period of turmoil, with three principals cycling through in just four years. The district abandoned bussing, though at this point, Stratford had re-segregated into a predominantly black school, and the neighborhood demographics had also

changed. An increasing number of Stratford households struggled financially, and for some students the increased stresses at home made it harder to come to school. The school had one of the highest truancy rates in the district, and received increasing negative attention from the press, particularly after a student brought a bomb to the school in the mid-nineties.

By 2000, Stratford's facilities were poorly maintained, teacher turnover rate reached 30% annually, the school struggled with issues related to discipline and safety, and reported very high rates of suspension and expulsion (State of Tennessee Office of Educational Accountability, 2002). In 2001, Stratford failed to meet criteria established by the Tennessee Department of Education and was put on the state's 'failing school' list (Mielczarek, 2003). Though Stratford had returned to a neighborhood school, by 2000, many who could go elsewhere did. The white population in the Stratford school zone dropped to 44% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000), and only 30% of Stratford students were white. Many in Nashville associated the problems in the school with the student population, rather than with broader issues of racial and economic inequality and a lack of district and community investment in the school. As a result, the school and its predominantly black student body were stigmatized.

With new leadership and district investment, Stratford began to stabilize in the early 2000s. In recent years, Stratford has had more than \$20 million in renovations, and begun distinguishing itself as a STEM school (Langston, 2014). Concurrent to the transformations within the school, the surrounding neighborhood is also changing. The Stratford zone is now one of the most desirable places to live in Nashville (Garrison, 2015). Developers and real estate companies have played an active role in shaping the physical transformation of the area, while also crafting a new narrative about the neighborhood.



In 2015, Aerial Development—one of the largest development groups targeting “transitional areas” in Nashville—released a promotional film featuring a high-end housing development in the Stratford school zone. As the camera pans over a modest single-family home, the narrator says, “some bad news lived here before...” (Trageser, 2015). While the “bad news” remains racially unmarked, the cast of actors representing those here now—shown jogging, drinking lattes, doing yoga, and hosting roof-top dinner parties—is all white (or racially ambiguous).<sup>27</sup> Aerial is not alone in equating a revitalized neighborhood with the replacement of poor people and people of color with affluent, white residents. In 2015, Armstrong Real Estate ran an advertisement campaign reading, “East Nashville: More neighbor than hood” (Cavendish, 2015). Messages like these are explicit attempts to differentiate the neighborhood from its stigmatized past, and make it clear that certain bodies are imagined to be *in place* in this changing neighborhood, and others are not.

This new narrative of who belongs in East Nashville is quickly becoming a reality across the Stratford school zone, where there has been a 110% increase in home values over the last decade, and a concurrent 20% decrease in black households (U.S. Census Bureau 2000; U.S. Census Bureau 2010). White families now make up 62% of the zoned neighborhood. However, given that only 22% of Stratford students are white, many of these families still do not see Stratford as their neighborhood school, and many of Stratford’s current students struggle against the reputation of attending a low-achieving, high-risk school.

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<sup>27</sup> Aerial removed the video after receiving public criticism of the messaging (Paulson, 2015).

The Stratford Story Project was the largest of the three teams. The 14 members included seven current students, four alumni, and one parent of alumni, in addition to my co-researcher and I. All the students were seniors, and in addition to the cash stipend, the students had an additional incentive; the school agreed that participating in the project fulfilled their capstone requirement for graduation. Of the six students who completed the project, Jaime, Zander, and Nate were white, Mia and Mcaela were black and Dev was East Indian. Some of the students knew each other prior to the project, though not all. Jaime—a school ambassador and soccer player—had the most preexisting connections with other students: she played soccer with Mia, was dating Nate, and friends with Zander and Dev. In a STEM school that highly values athletics, Nate, Zander and Dev were notably not interested in sports or STEM—all three were drawn toward creative pursuits such as photography and videography. Mia, who began as the only black student on the team, recruited Mcaela and Jazmine (who could not complete the project), both of whom were in band. Dev was seen as something of a superstar by his peers—he excelled academically and was involved as a school ambassador, in yearbook, and other creative extracurriculars. He was the only student I knew prior to the project, and he was eager to participate, though he had a conflicting work schedule the first month. Indeed, in addition to school and extracurricular activities, nearly all the students were also working part time, or had child-care responsibilities at home.

The participating adults represented a range of generations and connections to the school. Brenda, the first black student to enroll at Stratford as a 7<sup>th</sup> grader in 1963, currently serves as a city council representative, and was seen as an elder in the group. The other elder in the group was Rae, a recent retiree, and mother of two sons who graduated in the 1980s.

Darnell and Gary graduated in the 1980s, and Gicola, the most recent graduate, is class of 2007. Aside from my collaborating researcher and I, all of the participating adults and elders were black, and though all remained connected to the school, only Gicola and Rae still live in the Stratford area. I am a neighbor—I live across the street from the school—and Joseph, my collaborating researcher, is an Asian man with no prior connection to Stratford or to the neighborhood.

Of the three projects, the Stratford team had the greatest degree of racial and gender diversity. Similar to the previous projects, team members entered with existing place attachments and social ties. However, with the exception of Gary—a self-proclaimed “super alumni” who participates in nearly every school function—most adult team members were only peripherally involved in the school. Perhaps unsurprisingly, historical knowledge about the school and neighborhood was largely held by the alumni and parent, with current students having little knowledge about the school’s past.

It took over a month to finalize membership in the Stratford group, with two members—Darnell and Jazmine—starting and unable to continue given outside responsibilities, and others—Brenda, Mcaela, and Dev—joining several weeks into the project. Despite these challenges, the group identified a number of shared concerns, particularly the misrepresentation of the school, students, and neighborhood in the media. During week two, the team reviewed a number of news articles about Stratford. Of the first 100 returns on a google news search, all but two were related to the football team, and most were related to a single star player. All the accompanying images were of black male athletes; there were no images or articles about women students—athletes or otherwise—and no mention of the recent success of the school’s award-winning robotics team. Further,

the few articles unrelated to football emphasized deficits in the school, neighborhood, or students. As Brenda noted, the absence of a more holistic representation “kind of works on your psyche...for the public, this is what they are seeing, this is how they form their opinion.”

In week three, the team jelled around their guiding question: How has the changing reputation of Stratford impacted people’s investment in the school, and how can we change it for the better? The group formed an interview team and an archival data team. The interview team set out to collect interviews from students and teachers representing every decade of the school’s history, ultimately recording 21 videotaped interviews in five weeks. Meanwhile, the archival data team gathered images from school yearbooks, demographic data from the district archives, and reports and newspaper articles about the school over time. They also created a Facebook page for the project, which quickly grew to more than 200 alumni, students, and parents who posted memories, images, and reflections related to Stratford. In week eight, the team decided to weave these materials together into a feature-length documentary film. Though this was an ambitious goal to complete in the remaining four weeks, the students, and in particular Dev—the only member with substantive video experience—were confident in the timeline.

Ultimately, we decided to bill the culminating community event as an ‘early screening’ of the film, and use the evening to gather additional feedback to finalize the documentary. More than 100 people, predominantly alumni and current students, attended the screening and participated in an animated feedback session with the team.



*Figure 13.* Stratford Story Project Team at early screening

The response was overwhelmingly positive. Many people remarked they learned important historical context about their school, and that the film provided a refreshingly nuanced story of an often-stigmatized educational institution. Attendees also offered feedback about perspectives that seems to be missing; for example, several alumni from the 1990s and 2000s felt like their generation was cast in a negative light.

Following the screening and a team debrief, a number of members—primarily Dev and alumni Gicola and Gary—were eager to conduct additional interviews and complete the film. Over the next two months, they conducted a second round of 16 interviews as well as supplementary archival research, and premiered the final 43-minute film in February 16, 2017, six months after the start of the project. Again, approximately 100 people attended the screening. This time, the event was co-sponsored by the neighborhood association, spurring many more neighbors to attend.

The team had hoped the film would be educational—changing the way students, neighbors, and teachers saw Stratford—and they largely believed they were successful. As Dev reflected after the project ended:

We started off by at least sparking a little question in people's minds, like 'what happened and what can we do to change?' ... We have a lot of people who live in this neighborhood who still don't even know about the school or who have really outdated feelings about the school. We have a lot of new people coming in, so I think ... the video helps people understand.

The film has since been shown at a number of neighborhood functions, incorporated into courses by Stratford teachers, and reached more than 2500 people on Facebook.<sup>28</sup>

### **Theorizing gentrification**

Having traced the Neighborhood Story Project in three pilot settings, a number of similarities and differences are worth underscoring. The projects were each located in a neighborhood experiencing dramatic economic and demographic shifts, though these changes were nuanced by each area's particular history and context. The projects differed in terms of demographics and member skills and interests. For example, a greater proportion of elders participated in Cleveland Park, and a greater proportion of youth participated in Stratford. Team members in Cleveland Park and Edgehill entered with a higher level of place knowledge about their communities than did most of the Stratford team; the Stratford group had the highest collective level of computer literacy skills of the three projects. And although each group ultimately focused on a distinct set of research questions, there were similarities in the ways they theorized the effects of gentrification. Team members across the three projects raised concerns related to housing and changes in the built environment; to knowledge about, and the reputation of, their neighborhood; and to changing relationships

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<sup>28</sup> It can be viewed online at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbN9fUS4CL4FH4sMt792oWA>.

between people and place. As explored below, I consider these as material, epistemic, and affective concerns, respectively.

### **Material concerns**

Team members across all three projects raised a number of concerns related to how gentrification was shaping the material conditions of their lives. Members were worried about rising housing costs and the resulting increase in residential displacement. Members frequently discussed this through an intersectional lens, reflecting an awareness that neighbors and neighborhoods were differentially affected by gentrification. Recalling a conversation with a newer white neighbor, Leslie shared, “he said something to me about market forces, umm, being why there’s a shift, and I said to him, ‘Well it’s interesting that things *go down if you’re brown*, and things go up if you’re white.’” As reflected in this anecdote, team members were particularly attentive to the impact of gentrification on people of color. They also noted the vulnerabilities of children and elders. For example, Gicola worried that Stratford students might be displaced from their school—as well as their neighborhood—as area rents rose, and Betty worries about losing elders “due to the change in the *so-called Affordable Housing*.”

For those members who owned homes, several recognized the generational effects of displacement. In their practice interview, George and Ms. Pauline had the following exchange about how gentrification was impacting the neighborhood:

George: Is this something that concerns you or not so much?

Ms. Pauline: It does concern me. It does. Uh, it concerns me on a personal level because when I, um, let’s say when the Lord helped, enabled me to see that buying a

home is better than renting a home, I did that in mind of leaving an inheritance to my son and his children and their children's children, for them to have a choice... So yes it concerns me. It concerns me because I am considered, um, senior, you know? My age at 65, it's not as easy to uproot and start all over, you know?

For Ms. Pauline, the changes in her neighborhood threaten her own sense of security, as well as the legacy she hopes to leave to her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren.

Loss of housing was not the only material consequence of gentrification that team members identified. In both Edgehill and Cleveland Park, members noted that despite the multitude of new restaurants, there were actually less places in the neighborhood where they could afford to eat. These new locales had become destinations for people from outside the neighborhood. On Cleveland Park's narrow roads, the swell in street parking and traffic inconvenienced residents and raised fears among some that emergency vehicles may not be able to get through in event of a fire or health crisis. Furthermore, contrary to popular belief that new development improves the aesthetic of neighborhoods, there was the feeling among some members that the aesthetics suffered:

Ms. Pauline: what has been the most significant event or change in the neighborhood?

George: Um, development of some houses.

Ms. Pauline: ...can you elaborate a little bit?

George: Because some of the houses do not blend with the other houses in the neighborhood... And to be quite honestly, you know, it makes—it makes the



neighborhood look, it puts a, it puts a bad, in other words, it makes the neighborhood look ugly.

On a typical summer Saturday in George's neighborhood, you can find neighbors demonstrating their pride of place by maintaining their lawns and gardens. Yet, despite their efforts, the contrast of the newly constructed modern buildings casts their neighbor's modest homes in a less favorable light.

Though team members expressed concerns about these material effects of gentrification, they were not opposed to change in and of itself:

Ms. TK: Then, a part of me would welcome the new in as well. Like you say, different people have different ideas, and bring in new changes. Like he said, as long as a change come in, and those that have been in this neighborhood can be included in the change, come on. You do not just tax us so outrageously expensive that I cannot afford to do it, you know?

Ms. Mary: News flash, that is what it is about. Them moving in here and we moving out.

Unfortunately, members have yet to experience redevelopment where they "can be included in the change." For many, the material experience of gentrification is one of exclusion: new development is causing rents and property taxes to rise, making their future in the neighborhood more tenuous; houses are being built that existing neighbors cannot afford to rent or own; restaurants are opening that serve a higher income clientele; and the aesthetics are changing such that it is harder to see beauty in your own home.

## Epistemic Concerns

Though material changes in the neighborhood were central for team members—particularly in Edgehill and Cleveland Park—members also had a number of epistemic concerns. These are broadly related to what is known about, and who is seen as knowledgeable within, gentrifying neighborhoods.

Team members were concerned by a lost sense of history in their neighborhoods. In each project, members shared the legacies of their community that mattered to them— deep social networks in Cleveland Park, a history of civic action in Edgehill, and an intergenerational alumni pride at Stratford. And yet, as Ms. Mary reflected, as the neighborhood changes, “that is what is going the fastest—the history is disappearing.”

In its place, team members in all three projects were deeply disturbed by news stories suggesting that *before* recent development their neighborhoods were dirty, unsafe, or uncared for by residents. Several members of the Edgehill Story Project described these articles as “offensive,” and devaluing of the neighborhood’s past. As Suzanne explained, “It is like Edgehill is going through this re-branding process, instead of recognizing its importance in the history of Nashville.” At Stratford High School, the rebranding of the neighborhood has preceded that of the school, which still faces significant stigma. When I asked team members what Stratford represents to those outside the school, their first thoughts were “ghetto,” “loud,” “dumb,” and “projects.” Brenda offered, “you know, a lot of times people have thought this is a place for low achievers.” Jaime—who transferred in after her Freshman year—agreed, sharing, “When I came to Stratford, I thought it was going to be this terrible school...I thought it was going to be awful, and it's not. I'm a lot happier here.”

Members of the Stratford Story Project want the school to be known on its own terms—defined by the people who know it best—and this sentiment was shared across the three projects. As Leslie concluded, “words have life, have power, and what we say about the neighborhood definitely colors it a different way...I think we need to be able to change some of that language.” Yet team members were concerned that the very people who have knowledge about their communities are often dismissed or devalued.

In all three neighborhoods, *whose perspective matters* has been highly classed and raced. News articles highlight new buildings, new business owners, and new residents, and the voices of longtime residents or those priced out of the neighborhood are often absent. Story Project team members described their own and their neighbors’ experiences of being “bullied” and “harassed” to sell their homes. For example, members of the Edgehill Story Project interviewed Pamela, a black homeowner, who described being pursued by a developer wanting to buy her home. After clearly expressing she did not want to sell, she returned from work one day to find a full contract written up in her mailbox. As Pamela recalled, “That really actually made me angry for someone to insinuate that I’m not smart enough or I’m not intelligent enough to know when something is being forced on me. That I can’t make a decision as to for what I want for my own home.” Like Pamela, many members spoke of the pain of being dismissed as knowers and knowledgeable in their own neighborhoods. Perhaps more fundamentally, they spoke of feeling increasingly *unknown* in places that had long been familiar. In Cleveland Park, Leslie—the President of her neighborhood association—described the time her white neighbors called the police on her as she walked her dog because her presence on the street appeared suspicious. Members of the Edgehill Story Project shared similar experiences, leading Ms. Betty to conclude:

“We need to get to know one another more...I know you, I know your name, I know who is in your house, you know who is in my house. You just **know** about me. I think that needs to come back to the neighborhood.”

### **Affective Concerns**

In addition to team member’s material and epistemic concerns, they were troubled by how gentrification is affecting resident’s relationships to people and place. As the composition of the neighborhood changes, many members spoke of a lost sense of interdependence within the community. Juanita reflected:

...we used to actually take care of each other. Because if I didn't have, and somebody else had, I had. Because we didn't mind sharing with each other. We didn't mind, you know, taking care of each other, that way, as well. You know, not just looking out for each other as far as out on the streets, but in our homes...Now it's like, I guess it goes along with that individual stuff. *I take care of me. I take care of mine. I don't need you in my business.* It's not about being in each other's business, it's about actually watching out for each other. And cause, when one grows, we all grow.

In Stratford, neighborhood gentrification has intersected with educational policy and persistent white flight such that there is a wide disconnect between the school and parts of the community. Rae, whose children graduated from Stratford in the 1980s, mourns the lack of care Stratford students experience from their school. Reflecting on her hopes for Stratford, she offered:

I guess I long for Stratford to be a place where students and people can come and feel safe. They can learn. And I think it's really important for young people to have fun

and to *own* their environment. Not someone or some system always dictating, but seeing more of a collective environment where you feel a part of it. And, again, it just comes back to how I felt when I was growing up, even though it was in the segregated system. I was excited. I felt loved. I didn't realize how much, how important it was that people knew my family and my community.

As members reflected on the sense of community cohesion that has been lost as a result of shifting social demographics, they were not reminiscing a nostalgic, imagined past, but grieving a lived history and actual relationships. Ms. TK explained:

...the people that you have been growing up with all your life, some of them go to Antioch, some of them go to Hendersonville, everybody is stretched out. That thing that we called a neighborhood or a family, we feel lost. A lot of them, they had to move on. We are like, 'Well darn, I feel so naked. So lost without my other people, and without my neighborhood.' That is one of my concerns, that we do not lose each other because we matter for each other. That is terrible, you know.

As Ms. TK makes painfully clear, gentrification can have profoundly disruptive consequences on social ties. And as she says, it is not only a loss of 'my people,' but also a loss of a 'my neighborhood'—a sense of place and belonging.

Clearly, the changing composition of the neighborhood is partially to blame for this lost sense of cohesion and place attachments, but these losses are exacerbated by the physical changes in the neighborhood. The Edgehill team articulated the notion of 'construction fatigue' to describe the experience of those who choose to leave their neighborhood because the changing physical environment no longer feels like home.

Suzanne described a friend who recently moved out “because there's all this construction around her and of course, of course they're building houses that are two times as big... Yeah, you're right. They didn't force her-but she felt like her quality of life had decreased.” For some, this diminished quality of life is accompanied by profound grief. As Ms. Mary explained, “I could look all the way up to 12th and Wedgewood where I lived. With all the buildings going up, I can't see that anymore. God, it's so bad. I don't know. It's a feeling...” Suzanne offered, “it's like a feeling of loss that fills you,” to which Ms. Mary replied, “Yes, it is. That's exactly what it feels like.”

As team members theorized the consequences of gentrification, they painted a picture of losses that extended far beyond residential displacement. When Mary shared that “the quality is being sucked out of Edgehill...it's like we living in, we're going to be living in an empty shell, because of the building,” she made evident the ways that our material experience of having or not having a safe and secure place to live cannot be disconnected from what we know about that place, and how we feel about ourselves, our neighbors and our neighborhood. Furthermore, residents like Mary do not have to be physically displaced to be epistemically or affectively harmed by gentrification, to lose their place as knowledgeable and known, or to lose their sense of place in community.

Ultimately, members of the three Neighborhood Story Projects anchored their inquiry and neighborhood action in how they were theorizing gentrification's harms. Each group honed in on a different element of neighborhood change: Cleveland Park focused most on restoring relationships, Edgehill on preventing physical displacement, and Stratford on changing the narrative of their school. Importantly, despite their pain over the material, epistemic and affective harms of gentrification, members of the three projects had visions for

how their neighborhoods could be otherwise. As reflected in the exchange between George and Ms. Pauline below, they imagined their communities—not as places that never changed—but as places where people have and could again care for one another:

George: If you could change one thing about your neighborhood, what would it be?

Ms. Pauline: ...for them to keep in mind the indigent, the poor, the handicapped...the homeless. Again, to make it as feasible for all of us to live together, um, and grow together because trying to have one portion of a society without the other portion, it may seem that it will be okay but it's not...Seniors need young people, young people need seniors...if all you want in your circle, in your neighborhood, are the people that are up-and-coming, and you forget your mom, your grandmother, your uncle, granddaddy, because they're old now and they're seniors and this is the 'it place,' something is going to be lost. Something will be lost.

This vision of building communities of interdependence—where people endeavor to learn about their neighbors and neighborhood, and strive to be good neighbors to one another—was echoed across projects. With these aspirations in mind, I turn now to considering how participating in the Neighborhood Story Project affected team members.

## CHAPTER 4. OUTCOME FINDINGS

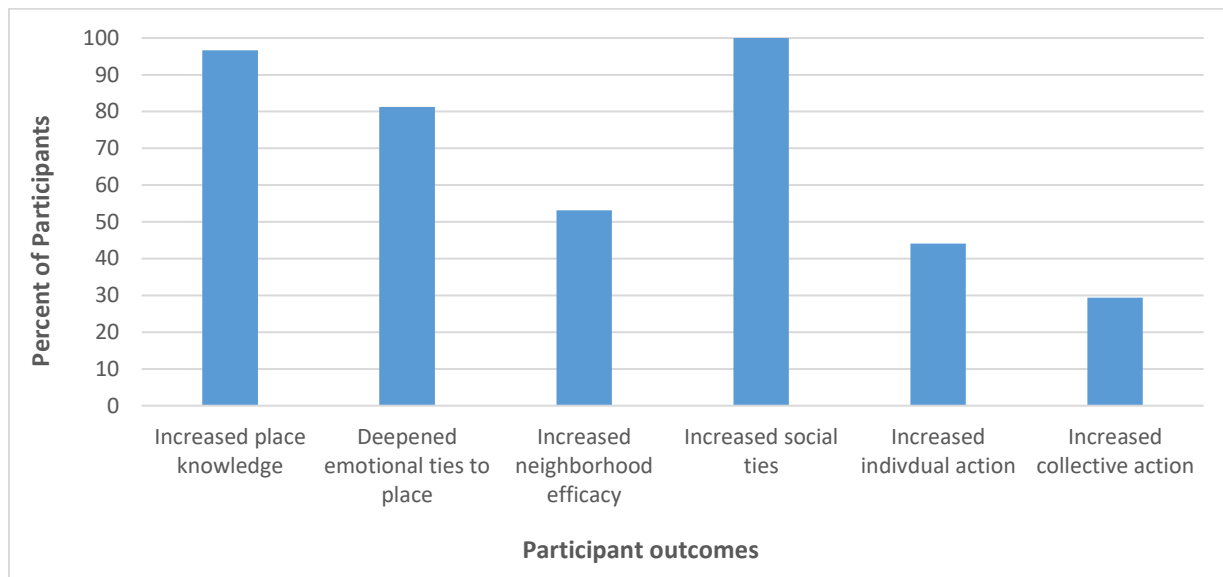
Throughout the Neighborhood Story Project, I played dual roles. Working with each neighborhood team, I served as facilitator, helping each group to achieve their goals. At the same time, I served as the principal investigator, paying attention to the intervention as it unfolded and to participant outcomes as they emerged. Echoing the theoretical model introduced in Chapter 1, and the research questions introduced in Chapter 2, I wanted to understand how participation in the Neighborhood Story Project affected residents' place attachment and social ties, and if and how participation lead to continued civic action. For the purpose of this study, place attachment can be understood as the combination of residents' knowledge about their neighborhood, emotional ties to their neighborhood, and a sense of efficacy in their neighborhood.<sup>29</sup> I define social ties as positive bonds with others in the neighborhood, and civic action as formal or informal engagement in the neighborhood. As detailed herein, by analyzing the observational, focus group and interview data I found that participation in the Neighborhood Story Project overwhelmingly strengthened members' attachment to their neighborhoods, and deepened members' social ties. By virtue of their participation, all members increased their civic action over the course of the project,

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<sup>29</sup> In Manzo and Perkins' (2006) model of place attachment, the behavioral dimension is theorized to include formal and informal modes of participating in the neighborhood, demonstrated by behaviors rather than efficacy. I use efficacy in this operationalization of place attachment as it is a precursor to participation, and also to differentiate place attachment from civic action, which I explore as a distinct outcome area.



though the degree to which participation continued beyond the project varied. Figure 13 provides a snapshot of participant outcomes across all three projects.<sup>30</sup> In the pages that follow I explore similarities and differences between the three projects, as well as the unintended effects of participation.



*Figure 14.* Summary of participant outcomes

### **Place Attachment**

Given the cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions of place attachment (Manzo and Perkins, 2006), I was particularly interested in team member’s knowledge about their neighborhood, their feelings toward their neighborhood, and their sense of

<sup>30</sup> In this figure, changes to participants’ place attachment is captured in the first three columns from the left: increased place knowledge, deepened emotional ties to place, and increased neighborhood efficacy. Social ties are reflected in the fourth column, as indicated. The last two columns in the figure relate to continued civic action: increased individual action, and increased collective action.

efficacy within their neighborhood. Though most team members entered the project with some foundation in each of these areas, all participants expressed value in gaining additional knowledge about their communities, and for most, this learning strengthened their attachment to, and sense of agency in, their neighborhoods.

### **Place Knowledge**

All but one team member reported significant increases in place knowledge over the course of the 12 weeks (see Figure 13). This is notable given that some—particularly the long-time residents in Cleveland Park and Edgehill, and the Stratford alumni—brought a great deal of historical knowledge to the project. Even so, these long-time residents found it meaningful to learn more about their community. Though Larry was born and raised in the Cleveland Park neighborhood, he was unaware of the history of the Edgefield Contraband Camp prior to the project. As he reflected:

I found out something the first time I was here that startled me...the, the slaves, the camps, came here. I, I did not know that. That blew me out of the water and uh so everything has a, has a lineage, just like all of us, just like any plant. Put a seed, comes up, it has many roots and it just grows.

Numerous team members remarked that tracing their community lineage helped them make sense of the challenges—and the possibilities—of the present moment.

During one of the Stratford Story Project sessions, the team hosted a focus group with some of the first staff to work at Stratford. These elders described what it was like for them to be teaching at the school while its reputation rapidly declined. Jaime, a high school senior, shared with the guests, “you said, ‘I don't know if we're teaching at this school that

they are talking about.'...That's kind of how I feel, and I'm sure some of the other students feel too. It's like, we don't feel like we're at the same school that the media portrays this school as." For Jaime, it was affirming to hear a retired teacher give voice to an experience the two shared across generations. Following the same focus group, Gicola was struck by the ways the school had worked to engage the community in the past. She noted:

One thing that really stuck out to me...was how both of you emphasized that this was a new community when this school first started, and it's come back to that phase again where it's a new community. Those same tactics and intentional outreach to the community, communication to the community, is what needs to happen to make it a family and not just a building.

Learning the history of the school—particularly how the school staff sought relationships with neighbors when Stratford first opened—helped the Stratford team imagine what might be needed to improve relationships between the school and community now, learnings they carried into their community project.

Although learning their neighborhood history was meaningful to many, so too was gaining greater insight about the contemporary spatial processes that were shaping the neighborhood. For many, this form of place knowledge involved learning new vocabulary and concepts—such as gentrification, market-rate, tax increment financing, and zoning—which allowed them to understand and participate in community discussions about their neighborhood. Midway through the Edgehill Story Project, Betty reflected on her own learning process:

I feel like me not knowing something is like I'm right here (she placed her hand on the table, signifying herself, and covered it with a notebook), and all these people that

knew all this information, I feel like they were incog, I think the word is *incognito* where you lay back, watch them and look at other people suffer. I feel like this information is like, *okay I caught you*. I'm coming up out of it, I'm going to embrace this, I'm going to embrace change and I'm going to help everybody understand that.

For Betty and many others, participating in the Neighborhood Story Project offered a form of political education. As members learned about the mechanisms driving development, they had a better understanding of what was shaping their neighborhood, and how and where they could intervene.

### **Emotional ties to place**

As reflected in Betty's quote above, for many, learning about their community strengthened team member's commitment to the people and place of their neighborhood. Though they entered the project with a range of relationships to their neighborhood, nearly every member expressed deepening their emotional connections to their neighborhood (see Figure 13). For example, Gicola, a Stratford alumna, entered the project with a strong affective connection to the school. Reflecting on the project, she shared, "I think what was so rewarding was just being able to reconnect with my school, learn the history of my school. Being able to share that and put that in a historical piece." In contrast, Mercy, the research assistant on the Edgehill Story Project, was relatively new to Nashville, and lived outside the Edgehill neighborhood. Several months following the project's conclusion, she noted "When I go past, I feel a connection to Edgehill, and a care for it that feels really meaningful. But it also feels like, being a part of this has helped me to see how I can be a part of a neighborhood that I live in." Not only did she develop emotional ties to Edgehill, participation shifted her relationship to her own neighborhood. Those who entered the

project with an ambivalent relationship to the project setting also expressed an increased sense of connection and commitment to place.

Several months after the Stratford Story Project ended, Dev and I sat in my backyard reflecting on the project. He confessed he used to “hate” the school: “I would always think of the school as like, ‘what is wrong with this school?’” He talked about the importance of learning about the history of the school, white flight and disinvestment. As he explained:

We often forget. Okay, why did this happen, or what's the cause behind the school being at the place where it is? ...What I learned in this project about my school was that the neighborhood doesn't like the school, or they didn't like it for a very long time...Just show a little more love to this school, and I guess you could change the school up.

Participating in the Stratford Story Project helped Dev feel and show a little more love to the school.

While the overwhelming trend was that team members became *more* emotionally connected to place over the course of the project, there was one notable exception. Towards the end of the Cleveland Park Story Project, Leslie reflected:

I started this process thinking, um, that this was my forever home. This was the...the house I retire in, the house that will be there, and in the course of the last month that feeling has changed. Um, it seems like the more movement there is, the more unstable I've felt and, um, it doesn't frighten me but it has certainly changed how I was planning.

Leslie was the only Neighborhood Story Project team member who perhaps became less place attached as a result of engaging in the project. While she remains an active member of

her neighborhood association (and has no plans to leave the area), learning more about the historic and contemporary shifts in the neighborhood have caused her to reevaluate the longevity of her residence.

### **Neighborhood Efficacy**

Over the course of the Neighborhood Story Project, every participant took action to move their team's work forward, and became more involved in their community (see discussion on long-term involvement below). For many, the experience of taking action within the project strengthened their belief that they could make a difference in their neighborhood, providing them with an enhanced sense of neighborhood efficacy. Efficacy can be understood as a building block to intentional action; a belief that one can affect change is foundational to doing so. Bandura (2008) contends that efficacy can be developed in a number of ways: People gain efficacy through mastery (i.e., having successful practice experiences); social modelling (i.e., seeing similar people succeed); social persuasion (i.e., receiving the combination of encouragement and skill development); and finally, through physiological wellbeing (i.e., experiencing physical and mental health). Many team members came into the project with an existing sense of efficacy. For some, that belief was relatively unchanged over the course of the project. Yet more than half of the team members expressed gaining an increased sense of efficacy through their participation (see Figure 13).

Gains in efficacy were evidenced in Betty's description of "coming up out of it" and ready to help others, and by Andrea, a member of the Cleveland Park project who exclaimed, "I'm excited about taking what I've learned from this research and...sharing it among my community, not just make it a 12-week, but make it a lifetime goal for my community." Participating in the project created an experience of mastery for members.

In addition, team members frequently noted being inspired one another, signaling the importance of social modelling to building efficacy (Bandura, 2008). Ms. Pauline noted the high level of collective investment in the Cleveland Park Story Project:

I was always amazed because everybody worked together and they did their portion and it was an *eagerness*, you know, for the people that went to the archives and did their research and how they were still, you know, coming together and pulling from one another...everybody stayed involved. And that's one thing—to assign someone to do something, to give those assignments—and for everyone to really take hold and *own* it. And that's what everybody did. Everybody *owned* their assignment and that was a good thing...we really took ownership of the portion we were supposed to play.

Ms. Pauline's quote also reflects a shift from individual efficacy to collective efficacy. Members increasingly saw themselves as capable of making change, and by working with one another, they also recognized their collective abilities to reach their goals (Collins, Walting Neal, & Neal, 2014).

Across the board, team members expressed a high level of pride and accomplishment in their collective work. Many people talked about wanting to build on the work of the Story Project, either individually or as a team. When the Edgehill Project was at the half-way point, Vanessa was already thinking about what comes next:

I don't like to just do stuff and then it just, that's just the end of it. It's up to us. It's up to this group to continue. Say if we decide to do a block party, festival, whatever, we have to continue to interact with each other every so often...with or without Amie.

You know, we'd love for her to be with us forever but we can continue to meet. We can continue to come up with events and do things in the neighborhood.

As discussed below, how members *acted upon* their sense of efficacy varied greatly. But overwhelmingly, team members expressed strong and meaningful gains in their knowledge about, attachment to, and belief that they could make a difference in, their neighborhoods.

### **Social Ties**

At the outset of each Neighborhood Story Project, all members knew at least one other person in the group, though most members were new to one another. Over the 12 weeks, team members formed strong bonds within their teams. This was evidenced week-by-week as members lingered together in the parking lot after sessions, exchanged hugs at the start and end of meetings, sent encouraging text messages to our group chat between sessions, and remembered and celebrated one another's birthdays. Indeed, every member spoke of the significance of gaining new relationships over the course of the project (see Figure 13). As Ms. Pauline reflected in the final meeting of the Cleveland Park Story Project, "we became family, and just from the little bit of time, I really am going to miss you guys. But the important thing is...we don't have to go our separate lives anymore." The language of becoming 'family' was echoed across the three projects, and was particularly poignant in the Stratford Story Project, which offered team members the rare chance to work as equals across generational lines. Just two weeks into the project, Jaime commented, "I like how the group is very respectful of each other because I feel like yeah, I'm in a group of adults, but they don't look down on me because I'm 17. They see me as their peer, not a child. I definitely like that." Several weeks later, Gary, an alumnus, reflected, "I remember when we first came together and how we were kind of separated, young and the mature...It's



no longer, these are kids and we're the adults, and listen to us. We're all contributing. That's my favorite thing...we're all a family.”

While the relationships formed among team members were meaningful to team members, they are perhaps unsurprising, as group work—by design—fosters interpersonal relationships. In addition to within-group relationships, some members expressed gaining a broader sense of community cohesion. This was particularly true for those who interviewed their neighbors. Months after the Cleveland Park Story Project ended, both Dee and Pauline noted they had continued to build relationships with neighbors they interviewed during the project. Others gained a sense of community cohesion through interacting with neighbors who attended the culminating community event. Overall, participation in the Neighborhood Story Project strengthened social ties, both through the relationships formed within the team, and for some, the relationships formed in the broader community.

### **Civic Action**

Over the course of the project, all Story Project members engaged in some form of action to improve their communities. However, the degree to which civic action was sustained after the project’s conclusion varied along three trajectories: continued individual action, continued collective action with other team members, and a lack of continued action.

#### **Continued Individual Action**

More than half of team members used the ideas and practices learned during the Neighborhood Story Project in their continued neighborhood engagement (See Figure 13). Ms. Andrea, who was a leader in her neighborhood association before joining the Story

Project, offers a prime example. As we gathered each week in the Cleveland Park Community Center, Ms. Andrea would note aloud facilitation techniques she wanted to bring back to her association—from encouraging phonetic spelling on name tags, to using painter’s tape to safely adhere butcher paper onto walls. She was also soaking in some of the more subtle elements of facilitation. When I visited with Ms. Andrea several months after the project had ended, she reflected on how she drew on what she learned in the project at a recent neighborhood meeting:

It has made a difference in us, and we are pouring into our community what has been poured into us. It may not come out maybe the first two months, we may not use it, but it is planted inside of us. The presentation that I did when we had our meeting Friday night, [what] I learned through Cleveland Park Project, it started to come out of me. I felt very comfortable. It is like it became natural for me to stand up there and to talk, and to control the meeting when there was kind of like some friction there.

While Ms. Andrea continued her community action through a formal leadership role in her community, other members continued less formally. As Ms. TK and I met at her apartment to reflect on the Edgehill Story Project, a handful of her neighbors popped in to give or receive community updates, see if she had anything cooking, or to seek her advice. It was clear she is seen as a lay leader in her neighborhood. Since the project ended, Ms. TK has been using her influence to encourage her neighbors’ involvement in the community, particularly as her public housing neighborhood is now slated for demolition and redevelopment. As she put it:

when you all helped me to understand—opened my mind to understand—then it was like, ‘Oh ya’ll, come on. Now we know this’... And you know, we’re not afraid. We feel empowered and not afraid because you understand what’s going on. That’s amazing how it just took, what? Two or three people to wake up these other people.

Ms. Andrea and Ms. TK are examples of how members leveraged the knowledge and confidence they gained in the Neighborhood Story Project to continue making a difference regarding issues of gentrification in their neighborhoods, by working within formal and informal community networks.

### **Continued Collective Action**

A smaller portion of team members—just under a third—were inspired by the Neighborhood Story Project to continue collective action together. This was most robust among the members of the Edgehill Story Project. Three months following the conclusion of the project, four members were still working together as part of Homes for All Nashville. In this capacity, they were attending and testifying at city council meetings, organizing neighborhood gatherings, and meeting with groups of renters about tenant rights. Vanessa is one of those still engaged in that work. In week four of the Story Project, she reflected on her yearning to be involved in her community:

... in a lot of ways, I just feel like it's almost some kind of divine intervention ...because I've been in this neighborhood for a long time...these past, you know, 10-15 years, I have been watching the neighborhood...It's like ‘what can I do, what can I do? How can I get involved?’ Then all of a sudden, it's like I'm involved and this is just, I'm just so blessed...even though I don't know, I don't feel like I've done

anything that outstanding so far, but I just feel, I feel some sense of empowerment. I just feel like I'm not just sitting around watching all of this happen and doing nothing about it.

For Vanessa, that feeling of empowerment has fueled her continued engagement. Similarly, once Ms. Betty got engaged with other Edgehill neighbors, she was eager to continue their work together. For Betty, the experience of the Story Project prepared her for leadership in Homes for All:

I've learned how to be an organizer...When Max said, 'Betty, you want to come on the steering committee?' I'm like, 'Yeah, I'm ready for everything'...That's what we did at Story Project. We really steered our own event. We had our event. We planned that event. We found who we was going to bring, how much food we was going to have. That's really all they do in the steering committee. And figure out who we want to come, was there going to be some camera people, all of that.

For those who continued in collective community action, the Neighborhood Story Project provided a launching pad for their future work together.

### **Lack of Continued Action**

Although just over half of Neighborhood Story Project team members have continued to engage in community action—individually or collectively—just under half have not. For some, it was simply not a priority to do so. All the Stratford students were seniors, and though not all have left Nashville, all left East Nashville within months of their project's completion. Yet other members who had not engaged in community action expressed a desire to be more involved.

When we met individually, both Dee and Ms. Pauline articulated concern about the vulnerability of elders in Cleveland Park, and both had a number of ideas about how to assess this population's needs and create more opportunities for elder engagement. Both had also attended their neighborhood association in the past, and believed this organization to be an appropriate venue to bring their recommendations, yet neither had done so. Despite the leadership they had shown during the Story Project (and their leadership roles within their faith communities) the women expressed some reticence to taking on leadership in the neighborhood at large.

The differing trajectories in continued community action have a number of possible explanations, including differences in individual member goals, desires, and confidence; distinct neighborhood contexts; the relative strength of existing neighborhood organizations; and the degree to which the project itself facilitated continued action. As Breton observes of the limitations of group work, "Once a group terminates, ex-group members cannot protect, consolidate, and build on these achievements if they are socially isolated; they need a supportive environment" (2004, p. 64). As the facilitator, I realized in retrospect that I had done little to prime the Cleveland Park team members—the first of the three projects—to consider continued action, something I became more intentional about in the remaining two projects. Although a handful of Stratford members continue to engage in the school and surrounding neighborhood, the Edgehill group was differentiated by a particularly high level of continued individual and collective action.

What was different in Edgehill? First, from the start the Edgehill Story Project had the strongest existing social and organizational network. A greater number of members already knew one another and were already engaged in their neighborhood. Other studies

have found that residents are more involved in their communities where there is a greater social norm of involvement (Foster-Fishman, Pierce, & Van Egeren, 2009), which may be a factor in Edgehill. Second, as the Story Project was underway, a number of highly publicized developments were occurring in the neighborhood, creating a heightened sense of urgency to get involved. Third, Max's role in the group as a team member and an organizer with Homes for All created an easy segue for those who wanted to continue working together. Finally, as evidenced in Vanessa's prior reflection, more members in Edgehill were simply asking themselves, "what can I do? How can I get involved?", and looking for a long-term way to engage in their community. Fueled by the seriousness of the present moment, they were able to actualize their desire to stay involved by easily transitioning from the Story Project to working with another local organization alongside people they had come to know and care about. I presume that it was this combination of factors that differentiated Edgehill.

As noted in Chapter 2, one of the intended effects of the Neighborhood Story Project was to foster continued civic action. In considering the three trajectories related to this goal, I do not mean to typologize continued *collective action* as the 'best' outcome and *lack of action* as the 'worst.' Given the Neighborhood Story Project's commitment to centering marginalized knowledges, the degree to which members continue to take action is important to the extent that it is necessary for them to achieve their individual and collective goals. Members of the Edgehill group articulated their goals in terms of movement building from the start. As such, it is appropriate to measure the project's success, at least in part, by its ability to nurture sustained collective action. Although members of the Cleveland Park and

Stratford projects hoped their work would make a difference—and believed that it had—they did not set long-term goals for their work together.

Nonetheless, many of the participants that did not report continued action still described their experience in the Neighborhood Story Project as having long-term, transformative effects. Dee described the project as “on her bucket list” - one of the most impactful experiences in her life. Ms. Pauline explained, “... it changed us... It's so much beyond what we really think, and to be a part of it is almost life-changing because your thought process has changed.” These reflections from two members who did not continue involvement in their neighborhood are reminders that sustained action is not the only measure of meaning. Having said that, the different trajectories of continued action have implications in understanding the impact of interventions such as the Neighborhood Story Project, which I return to in Chapter 6.

### **Unintended Outcomes**

The previous sections of this chapter explored outcomes related to the Neighborhood Story Project's intended effects: to positively impact team members in terms of their relationship to their neighborhood, social ties, and civic action. These were also the three outcome areas that team members identified making the most significant gains. There were, however, a number of unintended effects that occurred at a lesser frequency. Three are particularly noteworthy: the adult educational value of the project, the significance of participation for elders, and the mental health benefits for people traumatized by the changes in their neighborhoods.

First, a number of team members expressed gaining technological literacy skills during the project. This was particularly true for members with limited formal education

and/or technology access, and older members whose prior educational and work experience did not include use of computers or other 'smart' technology. Throughout the project, many members were excited to learn to use the technology they already had in new ways, for example using their phone to take and send pictures, or to record and save interviews. Others gained experience with new technologies. Betty, who on several occasions said she wanted to enhance her computer skills, worked with me to develop a comic strip explaining how zoning processes work. Using an online program, Betty and I learned to drag and drop characters in place, change their expressions and postures, and add speech bubbles. While developing confidence and competence in using technology was not a primary goal of the project, this was a particularly rewarding aspect of the project for a number of team members. Further, given the degree to which civic engagement increasingly relies on electronic communication, these skills also created access points for future community involvement.

Second, the project appeared to have particular value for elders. Each of the three projects included elders who had recently retired or were nearing retirement, and many expressed some degree of isolation within their communities. Ms. Pauline commented on several occasions that it was good to have a reason to get out of the house. Dee, a retiree who was newer to her neighborhood, noted that the Story Project was a way for her to make friends and get involved in the neighborhood. During our last gathering, George, the quietest member of the Cleveland Park team, recalled with humor his reaction when Ms. Andrea (his spouse) first encouraged him to join:

I, myself was brought out of my comfort zone, because all I did was go to work, come back, go to work, come back. And um, Andrea went, she came and said 'do



you want to go,' and I said 'no'. She said, 'no, you'll like it.' I said, 'no, I won't.' I said, 'a lot of women in there?' And she said 'yes'. I said, 'I don't want to go.'

[laughing] I said okay, I came, and I never left, and, thank you.

Indeed, by this point George had become a caring and dedicated member of the team, and the fact that he and other elders in the group 'came and never left' speaks to the meaning they found in their participation. It may be that the design of the Story Project lent itself to the developmental need of older adults to continue to feel generative, and that their wisdom is valued and useful to their communities. The project's effectiveness at strengthening social ties among older adults is particularly noteworthy given that loneliness is increasingly recognized as a predictor of health risk and mortality (Hawkey & Cacioppo, 2007; Heinrich & Gullone, 2006; Qualls, 2014). In addition, elders are an important and perhaps untapped resource in the community, with life experience, historical knowledge, and—in many cases—time to give. Several members noted that their younger neighbors, who were busy with work, school, and raising children, had a more difficult time staying involved and informed in the neighborhood.

Third, though the Neighborhood Story Project was not designed as a mental health intervention, a number of team members expressed gaining an increased sense of wellness through the project. For some, the project first *amplified* their stress related to the changes in their neighborhood, particularly as they learned more about the scope and consequences of gentrification. A month in to the Edgehill project, Ms. Mary expressed her pain over the changes in her neighborhood:

I'm not one to rain on anyone's parade but the quality is being sucked out of Edgehill. And, um, it's like we living in, we're going to be living in an empty shell,

because of the building...It's changing right before our eyes. So I don't want to be in denial about what's going on. I'm not in denial. The building right across from where I live, on the corner there, it exists. I can't deny that.

As the project progressed from mapping concerns to designing the research, Mary's spirits lifted, and she commented, "I don't feel like it's a losing uphill battle no more." A couple of weeks later, Suzanne, another Edgehill Story Project member, articulated her experience of frustration in response to an interview we had conducted with a planning professional:

I feel like Ms. Mary felt a few weeks ago. At the moment I'm kind of at a down place... I wanted to just quickly reflect on what I felt like after the interview last week...I walked away from that and I thought to myself it feels like neighborhood groups are being asked to play nice. I felt diminished... That *play nice* piece that just stuck with me. I feel like I play nice in a lot of other aspects of life and a lot of other people do too and yet it feels like we get crapped on in doing that.

Two weeks later, as we were closing out our weekly session, Ms. Mary checked in with Suzanne:

Mary: I need to ask a question Suzanne, if I may. I remember you said something about ...'oh this ain't going nowhere and I don't want to continue fighting a losing battle,' so to speak. So, do you feel that way, do you still feel that way?

Suzanne: The way I felt a few weeks ago? Yeah yeah yeah, it ebbs and flows...You might have to take a little, you sit on the chair and rest for a few minutes and then, okay you have to get back up and keep going. There's no other way, and it's too good. There's too much power in what I feel like is just regular people. There is.

For both Ms. Mary and Suzanne, it appears that the increased stress that accompanied the initial learning phase was developmental, and that the process of continued work together helped them reconcile the stress and gain renewed hope and energy for action.

Another member, Ms. TK, entered the project during a particularly challenging time in her life, both personally and as an Edgehill resident. As she later told me, participating in the Story Project “was the thing that grounded me and kept me from - I don't know, kept me from being insane almost.” Eight weeks into the Edgehill Story Project, Ms. TK shared with the team the effect the project was having on her. To capture the fullness of her experience, I quote her at length:

What I've got out of this, oh lord, is so much little stuff that I don't know how to begin it but, let me say this. When I first came here I was going through a lot of stuff and a lot of thinking in my mind, it seemed like I was losing stuff—I don't know if you understand what I'm saying—train of thought for one thing. Seems like when I came here, and I watched Amie and everybody, and especially Amie how she would take something we would say and fix it and break it all down where it made sense. It seems like it gave me life again. You know, to say, okay girl, don't you sit down. There's plenty of things to do. And I know if I feel this way, then I realized that some of the other people in my neighborhood probably feel the same way. Shut down and feel like well maybe there's nothing I can do. But it is. It's something that everybody in this neighborhood can do and that has really given me hope, really, really hope for myself and for the situation of Edgehill...And again, I say that some of the other people that may have been frustrated, with them being able to understand something,

it gives life back again and I guess that's what we're really trying to do anyway—is give life back again.

Through learning new things, being affirmed, and taking action in her neighborhood, participating in the Neighborhood Story Project *gave her life again*; she regained a sense of hope and motivation to help herself and her community.

### **Synthesizing Outcomes and Limitations**

The previous sections have highlighted the three most significant outcomes (as well as some of the unintended effects) for participants of the Neighborhood Story Project. First, in neighborhoods where many long-time residents are feeling increasingly out of place, team members deepened their relationship to place. Second, in settings where many have lost friends due to rising rents and property taxes, participation strengthened social ties. And third, facing conditions where many people feel hopeless and helpless to affect change, team members developed an increased capacity to take action, which nearly half of the team members credit with fueling their continued engagement several months after the conclusion of the project. Although I presented these three outcomes separately, team members often spoke of them in an integrated fashion. During our follow-up interview, I asked Gary what was most rewarding for him as a member of the Stratford Story Project. He responded:

Well, obviously gaining new friendships and relationships but I learned some history that I didn't know...The fact that learning more information on statistically what was going and the demographics of race and class during certain eras was very, very important and enlightening. So, I got more out of that, learning more of the nuts and bolts of how segregation and relocation affected the school in a different way. And

then how the school changed from different decades. That was a really amazing. So, just the fact that at the finished project it was something that was very well done and the fact that it could've been just something we read on paper but it turned in to a visual project that really drew you in and made you feel some of the passion behind the project and it gave you an opportunity to see how Stratford evolved. You lived it and you were able to see that creation come to fruition.

Like Gary, many team members answered this question of “what was most rewarding?” by jumping from relationships gained, to information learned, to producing something meaningful for their community.

### **Limitations**

Despite member gains, there are also notable limitations to the Neighborhood Story Project. First, impacting 8-12 people per project, the Neighborhood Story Project is modest in reach. The intended beneficiaries are the team members themselves, and although their collective work may reach a broader audience, the intervention is designed to effect change at the group level. That said, the outcomes can certainly be scaled through replication; and such efforts are currently underway.<sup>31</sup>

Second, the project was limited with regard to which residents it reached. Despite my efforts at recruiting a mix of newer and longer-term residents, team members across the three projects were predominantly black women with longstanding ties to the neighborhood. Thus, with some important exceptions, the project did not build substantive connective

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<sup>31</sup> Humanities Tennessee, a regional humanities organization, is launching a state-wide Neighborhood Story Project initiative. They are funding five pairs of facilitators from different cities to attend a facilitator training in early 2018, who will then launch the Neighborhood Story Project in their own communities.

tissue between older and newer residents, or bridge divides of race, class, or tenure. Rather, the Neighborhood Story Project played an important role in mobilizing those most often marginalized in gentrifying neighborhoods, and connecting these neighbors to one another.

Third, and perhaps more significantly, the project is limited in its ability to sustain civic action. The Neighborhood Story Project can raise awareness, build relationships, develop skills and agency, and in some cases, inspire continued collective action. Members may choose to use the Neighborhood Story Project to support community organizing efforts—as was the case with the Edgehill team—but that is ultimately up to each team’s discretion. Turning the tide of gentrification’s negative effects requires sustained pressure and engagement. This 12-week, neighborhood-based intervention makes a humble contribution toward that effort. With appropriate support, small wins can be leveraged toward longer-term goals (Foster-Fishman et al, 2006). The greater the degree to which the Neighborhood Story Project mobilizes long-term community engagement, the more effectively the project outcomes can be leveraged toward broader community change.

These limitations notwithstanding, for residents feeling weary from and battered by frayed social ties, uncaring development, and persistent stigmatization, the Neighborhood Story Project helped them to learn more about the place they live, deepen connections to others in their community, and increase feelings of capability to make a difference. And for many, the project provided important scaffolding to extend their engagement in neighborhood change efforts.

## CHAPTER 5. PROCESS FINDINGS

As explored in the previous chapter, during the Neighborhood Story Project, team members learned more about the place they live, built relationships with others in their community, and gained an increased sense that they could make a difference in their neighborhoods. But what about the project facilitated these gains? When I asked Ms. Betty what made the Neighborhood Story Project impactful for her, she explained:

All the studying that we did. If I was in there and we were just sitting there and just talking—and plus we got to work and start doing things. All the studying that we did, the cooperation that we had, with all the research that we did. Once I seen that research form up and found out information, that made me want to do things. Does that make sense?

Betty describes three central project characteristics that map onto the participant outcomes: team members strengthened their understandings of and attachment to place through a learning environment (“the studying that we did”), deepened social ties through a caring environment (“the cooperation that we had”), and increased their civic action through an empowering environment (“doing things”). Through analysis of observational, focus group and interview data, I found that it was the cooccurrence of these three characteristics that facilitated project outcomes.

For practitioners, evidence of intervention outcomes has limited replication-utility without an accompanying description of what facilitated participant gains (Sandlin, O’Malley, and Burdick, 2011). As such, I approached this project with a number of process-oriented questions: What types of group processes engage residents in critically reflecting on their neighborhood, deepen social ties, and inform collective action? To answer these

questions, I coded data for both outcome and process, noting when a particular outcome—such as strengthened relationships between members—was related to a particular activity or facilitation practice. In the pages that follow, I consider the three central project characteristics—a learning environment, a caring environment, and an empowering environment—focusing on the program design elements that were most critical to facilitating change among members. In addition, I discuss the role of the facilitator in enabling, amplifying and at times constraining the effectiveness of the project, as well as how facilitation was reciprocated among members.

### **A Learning Environment**

Although the term ‘learning environment’ can be used to describe physical educational settings (i.e. classrooms or libraries), I use it here to refer to the conditions of and approach to learning within the Neighborhood Story Project. Within action research scholarship, considerable attention has been paid to the importance of seeking marginalized knowledges while at the same time creating environments that surface heterogeneity and facilitate critical reflection within groups (Janes, 2015; Buckles, Khedkar & Ghevde, 2015). Similarly, within the scholarship of teaching and learning, there is increasing emphasis on recognizing student’s pre-existing knowledge, providing curriculum relevant to the contexts of student’s lives, and utilizing active learning practices (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2004). These themes also emerged in this study: team members’ learning was activated by opportunities to 1) engage existing knowledge, 2) reflect critically on neighborhood change, 3) consider other perspectives, and 4) develop and deploy research skills.



## **Engage Existing Knowledge**

Engaging pre-existing knowledge serves multiple purposes. From a practical perspective, learners scaffold new information onto what we already know. As such, it is helpful to surface and share the knowledge present within a group, as well as any incomplete understandings that might need to be addressed (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2004). From a liberatory perspective, mapping existing knowledge recognizes the expertise of team members, which is particularly significant when members' perspectives have been marginalized by virtue of their age, race, and/or class.

Within the Neighborhood Story Project, a number of the earliest activities were designed to tap into the knowledge within the group. For example, in the first or second week of each project, we created a neighborhood timeline. Members worked in pairs to identify key moments in the neighborhood's history and recorded them on a long sheet of butcher paper covering the wall. Following the timeline activity with the Edgehill group, Mary commented, "I think I was a little surprised of the stuff that I knew that I didn't think I knew, especially since I'm the youngest one here, as far as I've been living here about 10 years." With an air of pride, she continued, "I've been involved. I've definitely been involved." Not only did members learn from one another in this activity, it also affirmed resident's wisdom about their own communities.

## **Reflect Critically on Neighborhood Change**

Learning was also supported by activities designed to foster critical reflection on neighborhood change, with explicit attention to issues of equity. By critical reflection, I am referring to a dialogic process through which members begin to connect their personal

experiences to broader sociopolitical and economic forces, also referred to as consciousness-raising (Breton, 2004; Gutierrez, 1990). For example, an activity early in the Story Project was designed to assist members in exploring the dominant narrative about their neighborhood, as reflected in current news articles. As members reviewed printed articles about their neighborhood in pairs, I encouraged them to consider both the text and images, and to highlight words or phrases that stood out. Ms. Pauline and her partner read an article describing the influx of ‘tall and skinny’ houses in Cleveland Park, where developers are currently siting multiple two-story homes on lots that previously contained a single, one-story home. Reporting her findings back to the group, Ms. Pauline explained:

The thing that kind of stuck out for me is um there was a statement that says is they’re developing with ‘millennial-minded.’ Um, this excludes elderly, handicapped, nothing is handicapped-accessible, nothing is for per se the elderly because millennial-minded, they can hike those steps, you know... So those were the things that kind of stuck out for us, that, you know, it’s millennium-minded. I’m not a millennium.

As an elder, Ms. Pauline was particularly attuned to the housing needs of people who were aging or living with disabilities. Her insights helped the group challenge the master narrative that neighborhood development is universally beneficial, and to develop a grounded analysis of who was being left out of current development in the neighborhood.

In the example above, Ms. Pauline helped her team develop an equity lens. At other moments, as facilitator, I raised questions designed to foster critical reflection with respect to issues of equity. For example, early in the Cleveland Park Story Project, Ms. Pauline had mentioned that she appreciated the way that people used to look out for one another by

paying attention to who was on the block, and alerting each other of suspicious activity. Several others agreed that this was part of the cohesion they valued in the neighborhood. The following week, Leslie—president of her neighborhood association—described being viewed with suspicion by her newer, white residents, and shared that neighbors had called the police about her as she walked her dog in the neighborhood. Sensing an opportunity to help the group develop a deeper analysis about what kinds of neighborhood surveillance contributed to cohesion, I queried Ms. Pauline about her earlier reflection:

Amie: You know I think maybe it was you, Ms. Pauline, that talked about last week being observant and looking out for each other and maybe that's part of the appeal of the neighborhood, too. Because that being responsible, you know, for caring for each other.

Ms. Pauline: Yeah, you see someone that's kind of out of place at a certain time during the day and they may be walking down the avenue, but you haven't seen that person before or, you know....

Amie: How, how do we um kind of square that or with this piece that um Leslie was talking about of neighbors who are intolerant, you know, and basically racist towards their black neighbors, you know, like every black person looks like they're out of place, right? Because that's not the same thing you're talking about.

The exchange started a broader conversation concerning resident surveillance. Members concluded that when you *know* your neighbors, neighborhood surveillance can create safety; without this knowledge, surveillance too often functions as racial profiling. Through such dialogues, the Neighborhood Story Project helped members develop a critical consciousness

about how gentrification was affecting their communities.

### **Consider other Perspectives**

Learning was further stimulated through activities that encouraged members to consider other's perspectives and/or reevaluate assumptions. This often occurred during the analysis phase of the project, as members reflected on interviews they had collected. For example, after interviewing one of her Edgehill neighbors, Ms. Mary reflected, "The interview I had yesterday it went wild. Because, fear had never come up. This lady she was afraid. She wouldn't go sit outside anymore because of the building on the end of the street." Ms. Mary continued to describe how the new, multi-story construction had left her neighbor feeling vulnerable. Her neighbor's house now sat in shadow most of the day, and she could no longer see who was coming down the block. Both her view and physical space were constricted, such that she no longer felt comfortable sitting on her porch. Listening to Ms. Mary recount the pain in her neighbor's voice, the group was struck by how this story countered the dominant narrative of *who fears who or what* in their neighborhood. Referring to the assumptions of those outside Edgehill, I reflected back to the group, "when people talk about fear and safety often in this neighborhood they have a picture in their head about what people are afraid of, and it's young black men. It's not construction." This insight, gained from an interview with a neighbor, helped all of us deepen our understanding of how people were experiencing gentrification in ways we had not fully appreciated, and in ways that reframed popular narratives about their neighborhood.

Other members gained information that challenged previously held beliefs. Following her interviews with neighbors in Cleveland Park, Ms. Pauline was particularly struck by the experiences of economic vulnerability voiced by her young white neighbors.

She reflected, “you may think, well, okay, honestly, you're Caucasian and never would I have thought that you were concerned that you might have to leave out of this neighborhood because you can't afford it.” Listening to her neighbors helped her to reevaluate her assumptions, and nuanced her understanding of how gentrification was impacting her neighborhood.

### **Develop and Deploy Research Skills**

Finally, reflecting the pedagogic principle that people often learn best by doing (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2004), team members highly valued the opportunity to develop and deploy research skills. Within group meetings, members collaboratively developed interview guides, practiced conducting interviews, generated principles for ethical research, conducted thematic coding, and interpreted graphs. Between meetings, members reinforced their learning through additional data collection and analysis activities. In addition, some members learned new technologies through the research process. Reflecting on his time with the Stratford Story Project, Dev noted, “I learned how to use a whole new software...I learned how to fix audio. I learned how to set up interviews with individuals. I did like three interviews in one day...like the film itself has taught me more than a class would teach me.”

An example from the Edgehill Story Project demonstrates how the various learning activities—mapping existing knowledge, fostering critical reflection, reevaluating assumptions, and developing research skills—often built upon one another. Once the group identified its research question, ‘How are our neighbors are being displaced?’, we began brainstorming potential causes of displacement. The conversation was lively and fast-paced, with every member offering observations—often accompanied by stories of friends and

family—while I recorded the ideas on a flipchart. In the end, the list of causes of displacement included: rising rents, evictions from public housing and private apartments, foreclosures, rising property taxes, predatory developers, hostile/racist neighbors, discontinuation of Section 8, and the previously described phenomenon we framed as “development fatigue.” From this list, we identified sources of data to explore our hypotheses, and delegated data collection tasks. As members gathered data, we then analyzed results together. Sometimes, the findings supported our hypotheses. For example, data from the assessor’s office indicated a spike in home sales in the last decade, as well as rapid increases in home values and rental rates in the neighborhood. Other findings contradicted our hypotheses. For example, members had assumed that foreclosures were part of what was driving black residents from the neighborhood. I gathered foreclosure data from the Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County Assessor’s Office and the group compared the rate of foreclosure in Edgehill to the rate in Davidson County overall. Reviewing data from 2000-2015, members noted that the trends in Edgehill mirrored those in the county, and that foreclosures were actually relatively rare in the neighborhood—averaging four a year in this period. Clearly this was not enough to produce the changes they were witnessing in Edgehill. Through mapping existing knowledge and hunches, gathering data, and analyzing patterns and trends, Edgehill Story Project members built a shared, informed analysis of how gentrification was impacting their community. These activities also fostered an intellectual community within each team (Kline, M., Dolgon, C., & Dresser, L., 2000), as they increasingly saw themselves as resident experts within their neighborhood.

## A Caring Environment

Care can be understood as a cluster of practices and values necessary to sustain and repair life (Held, 2006; Tronto, 1993). Although the specific practices that constitute care vary across cultures and contexts, there is no doubt that people require caring relationships throughout the life course to survive. While there are periods of time, such as at the beginning and end of life, where caring relationships may be distinguished by one person's dependence on another, care is more often characterized by interdependence. Family, friends, colleagues and even acquaintances can meet one another's needs for emotional connection, the sense of being valued, or for help gaining perspective. Yet while caring is relational, not all interpersonal exchanges are caring. The Neighborhood Story Project was characterized by the intentional creation of a caring environment among members. Drawing on the work of feminist philosopher Virginia Held, in such an environment "the carer and the cared-for share an interest in their mutual well-being" (2006, p. 35), and all group members are both carers and cared-for.

The significance of a caring environment has long been recognized within the tradition of group work, and is central to the creation of mutual aid, which Shwartz described more than sixty years ago as "... a helping system in which the clients need each other as well as the worker" (1961, p. 19). The concepts of care and mutual aid were also incorporated into what renowned psychiatrist Irvin Yalom (1970) termed *therapeutic factors* in group work. These are conditions which, when present within a group, contribute to a sense of well-being among members, such as: group cohesion (feeling a sense of belonging), the installation of hope (seeing others be helped by the group), universality (the sense that one's experience is shared by others) and altruism (being of service to others). The process

elements that contributed to a caring environment within the Neighborhood Story Project were those designed to 1) foster intergroup relationships, 2) encourage appreciation of self and others, and 3) create opportunities for members to help one another.

### **Foster Intergroup Relationships**

A group cannot function well unless members have a sense of cohesion and belonging (Yalom, 1970). As such, the overall structure of each session was designed to foster intergroup relationships. For example, I frequently set up pair and triad activities, encouraging members to join with new partners and take turns reflecting on a question or prompt. In one follow up interview, Rae noted, "I like how you got us the first three weeks, I think, to get to know each other, to let our guards down, establishing roots, breaking us up, not allowing us to attach to each one little cluster." We also started meetings with a welcoming check-in, during which I encouraged members to share something 'new and good' since we met last (or 'whatever's on top', if members were struggling to find something good). During follow-up interviews, a number of people remarked on the value of the opening check-ins. For example, Vanessa noted:

I think that was a nice icebreaker, a nice way to give everybody a chance to in a way, exhale a little before we got into all the screws and bolts, nuts and bolts. Also, there may have been a time or two where there was somebody was really struggling to find something good to say about that week. As long as you're honest, that's okay too. I think that would help us to understand each other better, if somebody was really struggling to say something that had happened that was good or positive, then we know they had really had a rough week. I don't know, maybe we wouldn't necessarily do anything about it, but the more information I have, the better I can



interact with someone...and then it's a way to help get to know people, because the things that are good are related to whatever the priorities are in their life. Just by asking a simple question like that, it helps you - over the course of 12 weeks, I think it helps to get you to understand somebody better because they'll talk about family, or their job, or the community, or whatever. I thought that was a good way to open up.

As evidenced in Vanessa's reflection, pair activities and check ins—in both content and in process—fostered relationships by creating the opportunity for members to listen to and learn about one another.

For the listener, this can create a sense of universality—that one's personal challenges are shared by others. For the speaker, such activities offer a powerful affirmation. After a particularly high-energy session midway through the Edgehill Story Project, Ms. TK commented “I like how each and every one of us listens to the other person's ideas that they have, and they're so eager to listen and they want to know. That's what make it easier for somebody to say something, because the next person want to know, so I like that about this team.” Similarly, while reflecting on her highlights from the Stratford Story Project Mia offered, “I'm not the type of person to work in a group with anybody. I like to single myself out. And, um, a take away is... being able to work with adults and actually having them listen to what I have to say. I don't know, it just feel good to have somebody listen to me.” And in Cleveland Park, George observed, “we can go ahead and talk about so many things. That, you know, nothing's stupid or whatever, and everything is like, ‘Hmm. I never thought about it like that.’” As members learned about and affirmed one another, cohesion formed within each group.

To help members learn to listen to one another, I offered formalized practices for listening—for example, using a timer during a pair activity and directing members to each take two minutes to reflect on the prompt while their partner simply listened. I also normalized and ritualized listening practices by using rounds to start and end each session, and suggesting that each person speak once before anyone spoke twice.

### **Encourage Appreciation of Self and Others**

The cohesion within each Neighborhood Story Project team was deepened through a number of activities in which members appreciated themselves and others. For example, within the first few weeks we began ending each meeting with a round where members could identify a personal highlight from the gathering, and offer an appreciation of the person sitting to their left (or right, on alternate weeks). Sometimes members offered general compliments about what a colleague contributed to the group, but they were often specific, noting the difference that person had made to them. Early in the Stratford Story Project, Mia reflected, “what I appreciate about Rae is she listened and she understood where I was coming from when we were doing our little interview. It made me feel good...” Mia’s appreciation of Rae both reflected, and contributed to, the caring environment of the group.

Also within the first few weeks, we completed an activity that involved mapping each group member’s assets. I drew large stars along a stretch of butcher paper, one for each team member. I encouraged members to identify the strengths they brought to the project, as I recorded their answers inside their stars. Other members quickly added in, and the stars filled with strengths, self-identified and observed by others. Though a few team members expressed initial hesitation in articulating their own skills, this activity became animated in all three groups, with members eager to appreciate themselves and one another. The day we

completed this activity in the Edgehill Story Project, Shirley reflected in closing, “I know it is a given to say, ‘Do not brag about yourself,’ but it is a good feeling. You know, appreciate what God gave you, telling people what you got, so I like that.” Months later, a number of participants reflected on these opportunities to appreciate themselves and others as among the most helpful in the group. Celebrating their strengths boosted members’ confidence in their ability to make a positive difference in their community.

### **Create Opportunities for Members to Help One Another**

Finally, a caring environment resulted from the many ways members helped one another. As the Edgehill group circled up at the close of our community event, Ms. TK looked around the group and, pointing at each of us, said, “What I really love is that it took ALL OF US to get it done.” This recognition of the mutual aid that developed within the group was echoed across the three projects, as team members reflected on the many activities that necessitated collaboration and interdependence, such as the timeline activity, peer interviews, and planning the community event. Considering his work in the Stratford Story Project, Zander offered, “I think it was great that we kind of had to rely on each other. There weren't people that were like, ‘I just didn't do it.’ We all did our part.” As these reflections make evident, members appreciated not only the product(s) of their collective labor, but the process of working together to accomplish their shared goals.

Taken together, activities that fostered intergroup relationships, encouraged appreciation of self and others, and created opportunities for members to help one another, created a caring environment characterized by mutual aid. Importantly, while facilitation and semi-structured activities supported the development of a caring environment, members also actively contributed to creating this environment with and for one another.

## **An Empowering Environment**

Finally, the Neighborhood Story Project was characterized by the formation of an empowering environment, by which I mean an environment within which people became increasingly aware of and confident in their capacity to affect change. The concept of empowerment bridges beliefs and action. As Badura describes, “Unless people believe they can produce desired results and forestall detrimental ones by their actions, they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties” (2001, p. 10). Empowerment is a core function of social group work, popular education, and critical PAR, which all—to varying degrees—seek to develop an individual’s capacity to affect change through the experience of working together (Breton, 2004; Gutierrez, 1990; Horton & Freire, 1990). While the Neighborhood Story Project can be understood to have fostered efficacy broadly through the action research process, I focus here on three micro-processes: activities and prompts designed to 1) encourage member leadership, 2) facilitate the uptake of member ideas, and 3) formalize member roles.

### **Encourage Member Leadership**

At the start of each Neighborhood Story Project, I assumed the primary leadership roles. However, I encouraged increasing amounts of leadership from members early in the process. For example, in the opening weeks, when group membership was still in flux, I frequently asked returning members to introduce the Story Project—even if they had only been to one meeting, or had only been at the meeting for a half hour before a new member arrived. In subsequent weeks, when team members missed sessions or came late, others readily brought their colleagues up to speed. As members explained the project, their language reflected increasing ownership of the work. For example, in the course of a single

meeting, Dee shifted from asking the group what ‘you’ are going to do, to describing to a late-arrival what ‘we’ are doing together. These early leadership experiences developed efficacy in members by creating mastery experiences while also functioning as social modeling (Bandura, 2008); as members practiced taking leadership they were also demonstrating to one another that they could take initiative within the group.

### **Facilitate the Uptake of Member Ideas**

In educational settings, there is a robust body of evidence that uptake of learner ideas supports student achievement; that is, the more students have their contributions ‘taken up’ in the classroom—their questions answered, their ideas given air time, and their language reflected back by the teacher—the more efficacious they are in school (Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeister, & Long, 2003). This resonates with Bandura’s (2008) contention that social persuasion—in this case, demonstrating encouragement of member participation through uptake—can foster efficacy. As much as I was a leader in my role as facilitator, I simultaneously positioned myself as a follower of each group’s collective leadership, and demonstrated uptake in a variety of ways. For example, from the outset, the Edgehill team was deeply concerned with countering the negative effects of residential displacement. At our first meeting, Vanessa said, “I know the point of this isn’t to be political, and I don’t want to get Amie in trouble, but in order for us to change stuff we have to be activists.” The discussion became very spirited, with Max countering that he actually wanted “to start some trouble” and recalling the neighborhood’s history of trouble-making to protect resident rights. Several people chimed in affirmatively. I reminded the group that how they wanted to focus the project was their decision. In each project, I encouraged members to see me as

their secretary and support team—someone to document their progress and get them the materials they needed to do their work.

As we moved through the 12 weeks, I engaged both the content and the form of members' contributions, so they could see how they were actively shaping the team's work. For example, early in the Cleveland Park Project, Ms. Andrea suggested a printed agenda each week would be helpful, and others agreed. I brought agendas to the following meetings, and carried the practice into the remaining projects. Other times, I responded to metaphors rather than material recommendations. In the second week of the Edgehill Story Project, Ms. Mary described the project to a new member by using a cooking metaphor. She began, "We wanted to know, with everybody coming together working on the project, what it would look like at the end," before continuing, "Of course, it's going to determine what we put in. It's like ingredients for a cake or something. Make sure we got all the ingredients that needs to go in." I reinforced this comment, offering, "That's a great way of thinking about it. I think we're at the point now where we're just opening up our cupboards to figure out what do we even have in the house and do we need to go to the store?" In the weeks that followed, members frequently returned to this metaphor. As each Story Project progressed, uptake of member ideas became more explicit, as members generated their own potential lines of inquiry, selected a research question to guide their work, and made decisions about what data to collect and how to disseminate their findings.

### **Formalize Member Roles**

In addition to encouraging leadership and demonstrating uptake of member ideas, as the research project moved into the data collection phase, we formalized member roles, which contributed to a sense of mastery (Bandura, 2008). Each member joined data

collection teams in which they assigned themselves specific goals, such as conducting a certain number of interviews within the following week, or researching a particular period of history. I supported members by providing them with both training and materials needed to complete their tasks. For example, as the interview team was developing questions, we conducted practice interviews within the group, during which I encouraged interviewers to call a 'time-out' whenever they felt unsure of how to proceed. At the close of these practice sessions, I offered affirmations of what they did well and specific recommendations to consider in the future. After the interview team agreed on their final questions, I typed them into an interview guide, made copies, and dropped them off at team member's homes. This support was critical in scaffolding increasing leadership in the project, and reflects Bandura's (2008) contention that social persuasion—receiving both encouragement and guidance—is necessary for developing efficacy.

Assuming leadership roles and completing tasks generated a sense of personal accomplishment among members. At the close of the Stratford project, Jaime reflected, "I'm really proud of my interview. I feel like I might have given just a little bit of something that could be useful." And as members saw the project through to completion, many articulated a great deal of pride and mastery. When the Edgehill group gathered to debrief, Ms. TK remarked:

Finishing feels good, ya'll, for the first time in a long time. Finishing feels good. You know, you can't never forget the place that you - like you say, 'we been born again.' You know, somewhere where you got your strength and power from again. You know? Yeah. That's nice, ain't it?

Although the Neighborhood Story Project was intentionally designed to create an empowering environment, members own efforts, both individually and collectively, contributed to this environment. In each Story Project, some members took unprompted initiative between sessions to visit the library for resources, bring in their family artifacts, or begin creating data collection instruments. These actions inspired others, including me and my collaborating researchers. Several weeks into the Cleveland Park project, Jyoti, a fellow PhD student, shared:

Ms. Andrea, you are definitely one of those people who just like gets right down to it. Like Amie told me last week how you had gone to the archive. I was like, 'What?' Like I'm supposed to be a researcher and I haven't gone to the archive like once in my time here, and so that spirit and dedication is really incredible.

In addition to drawing inspiration from one another's individual actions, many found inspiration in the process of working together. Just as self-efficacy is foundational to individual action, collective efficacy—the belief that a group together can achieve their goals—is central to collective action (Bandura, 2008). At one point, Rae shared that she had recently used the Stratford Story Project as “a good example of what a team really looks like when they work together.” She explained:

I have worked with many adults in my life. Some challenge you, but this group has been - I mean, you all don't know how easy you've made this happen. There are adults that would be struggling, fighting, have their own agendas, and I didn't feel that...I never walked out of here with any stress. I always knew that I had to be somewhere on Monday, and was excited about it.



By encouraging member leadership, demonstrating uptake of member's contributions, and formalizing roles within the group, members increasingly saw themselves as agentic—first in their ability to shape processes within the group, and then in their ability to shape their broader community.

### **Facilitation Challenges**

The previous sections explored the design elements and facilitation processes that animated member gains throughout the Neighborhood Story Project. However, I am not suggesting that the Neighborhood Story Project *only* or *always* offered a learning, caring and empowering environment. I focus here on specific challenges that undermined the creation of these conditions, and how I attempted to navigate those challenges. As I was responsible for the program design and facilitation, this section is necessarily self-reflective, offering a critique of my own practice. As the renowned community psychologist Seymour Sarason notes “the community interventionist is a very complicated variable” (2004, p.276). Following Langhout (2015), I endeavor here to make myself visible as an interventionist, knowing that the facilitation challenges described herein are at times generic (they could arise in any group, with any facilitator) and at times personal (resulting from my particular strengths, weaknesses, biases, and positionality). My aim is here is not to offer ‘fixes’ to the challenges I experienced, but rather to make transparent the difficulties I observed, as well as my process of responding to those, so that others might anticipate similar dilemmas and contemplate possible responses.

## Challenges to Creating a Learning Environment

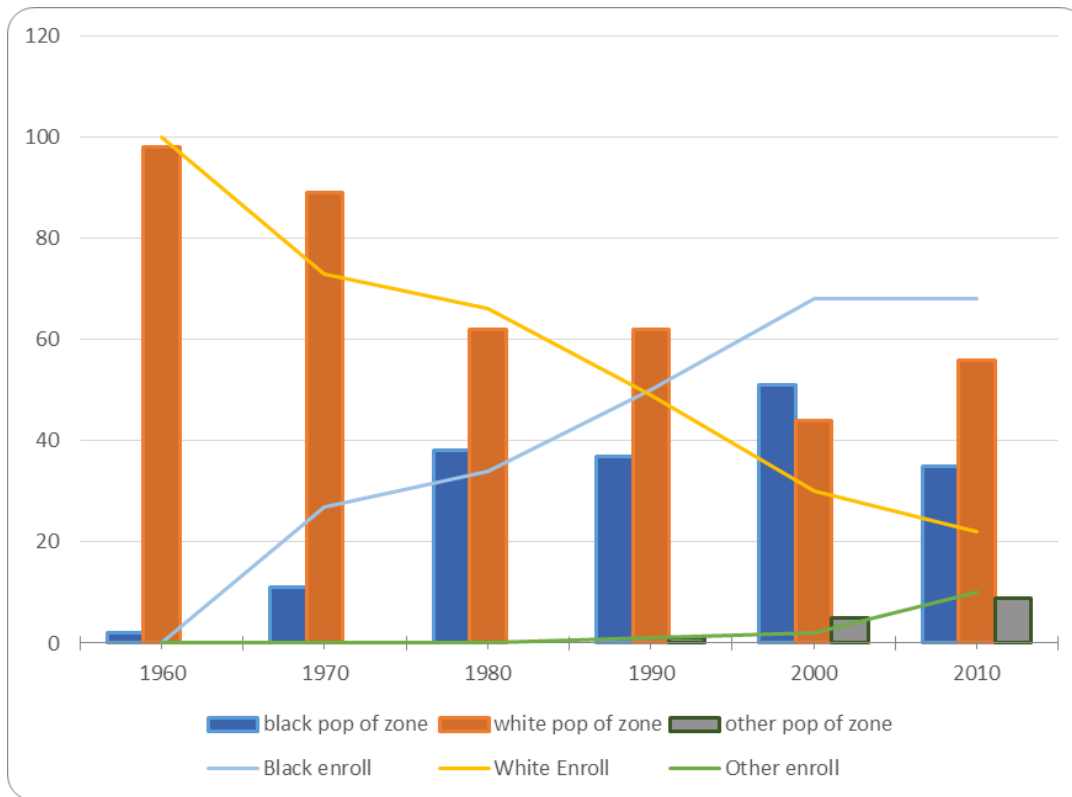
In designing the Neighborhood Story Project, I had a number of learning goals in mind: 1) that members would gain an increased sense of themselves as knowers—both in that they had valuable existing knowledge, and that they had the capacity to learn more and deepen their knowledge base, 2) that members would gain meaningful knowledge about their neighborhoods, and 3) that members would gain knowledge of and confidence in the research process. Taken together, I hoped the learning environment would provide transferable confidence, knowledge and skills. Although these learning goals were broadly met, as facilitator, I struggled at times to appropriately scale learning goals within with the project time-frame. I was also challenged to help each group develop a collective analysis of their neighborhood, while keeping in mind that this analysis was still partial and subject to scrutiny and revision. Furthermore, learning was hampered at moments by overly ambitious and/or unclear facilitation on my part.

**Scaling learning goals.** The Neighborhood Story Project was constrained, both in terms of the number of sessions, and the length of each group meeting, and aspects of the research process received unequal attention. Given the eagerness of team members to conduct interviews, gather images, and collect archival data, data collection often bled into days previously allocated for analysis. As we also needed sufficient time to prepare dissemination materials and plan the concluding community event, robust analysis of data was often shortchanged.

For example, I provided each Story Project team with transcripts of their collected interviews, and spent some time working with teams to consider how they could code

interviews to answer their research questions. However, no team had time to complete a comprehensive coding of all interviews, opting instead to complete a first-round review of all transcripts and pull out key quotes that spoke to their questions. As another example, the Stratford team conducted an online survey of community perceptions of the school. They received 200 responses over a two-week period, but given the demands of editing the videotaped interviews for the documentary, the survey data was largely ignored. Overall, the analysis phase of research was rushed, minimal, or in the case of the Stratford survey, left undone.

One way I addressed this challenge, particularly with regard to analyzing quantitative data, was to complete some computations independently and bring results in the form of a graph that team members could analyze. For example, while the Stratford team had a hunch that the neighborhood demographics were not reflected in school enrollment, the data was not easily accessible. I visited the Metro Nashville Public Schools archives and located maps of the school zones for each of the decennial Census years. In addition, I gathered school enrollment and racial demographic data for each of these years. I then analyzed census data for the census tracts corresponding with the school zone for each decade. I plotted a line graph of Stratford enrollment by race over a bar graph of the neighborhood demographics by race, and brought this in for the team to analyze. The graph painted a stark picture of white flight from Stratford High School, even as white families remained in the neighborhood. This visual aid helped members build a grounded understanding of the trends they experienced firsthand.



*Figure 15. Relationship of neighborhood demographics to enrollment demographics*

The Stratford team’s discussion of this graph was highly animated. I had wished members of the Stratford Story Project could have learned how to complete the computations themselves to gain a fuller experience of data analysis. Yet, by completing initial computations and bringing in graphs for the team to review, members learned some data analysis skills, such as identifying and interpreting trends over time. That said, they likely would have been proud of and satisfied with their work without this additional piece of analysis. Indeed, for the most part it was me, not members of the projects, who wished we had more time for data analysis. Given that the Neighborhood Story Project is designed as an action research project, and my learning goal that members gain knowledge of and confidence in the research process, I was concerned that the time constraints limited our

ability to deepen learning about the process of conducting research. The challenge for me as the facilitator/educator was to appropriately scale my learning goals to the length of the program.

**Differentiating counter stories from “true” stories.** A second challenge to creating a learning environment concerned the balance between helping members gain meaningful knowledge about one’s neighborhood, while recognizing there are a multiplicity of ways to know and understand a place. For example, the Stratford Story Project was primarily concerned with countering the dominant, stigmatizing narrative of the school and students. However, as members collected interviews they encountered conflicting views of Stratford from alumni, students, teachers, and neighbors. At the same meeting where we reviewed the graph above (see Figure 14), I closed the session by asking members to share their hope for the project. The first to answer was a Stratford senior, who offered, “That we just get the, finally get all the facts straight. Get the true story.” I returned to his comment after the round had concluded:

your hope is that we get the facts straight and tell the true story, and I appreciate that. And, where I sit, there is no true story, and there are no ‘facts’ - there are many stories and there's many ways of interpreting data. Like, people could look at this and say, ‘oh this school went to hell because it was all black people’, and people have done that. And in fact, they will do that again, and say the school is better because there's more white people and that's the danger with a graph like this **absent** the context of the story, because when you have the **story** about what's happening, it's actually a story of racism. That's a different telling, and it is a different story, and my hope is we can tell a different story, not because it will be the **only** story or the **right**

story but a different story, and it's one that hasn't been told, and we can tell it in a way that doesn't make people feel bad, but that makes people think critically about why they're carrying the narratives they carry about the school and who it harms and who it helps.

We returned to this distinction—between telling “a” Stratford story and telling “the” Stratford story—time and again, and it prepared the team for some of the critical responses they received from viewers who felt the documentary film was incomplete. In each of the three projects, a critical aspect of the learning environment was helping members develop a thoughtful analysis of their neighborhood while recognizing that their understandings will always be partial.

**Clarifying facilitation.** A final challenge to the learning environment was unclear or overly ambitious facilitation on my part. For all three projects, generating research questions was one of the most confusing activities for team members. Having charted our core concerns as a group, I provided minimal instruction about how to formulate research questions before encouraging people to work in pairs to “turn our concerns into questions.” When I brought the group back together to record their ideas, contributions ranged from overly specific questions of historical fact (i.e. “when did the freeway go in?”) to overly broad questions (i.e. “why doesn’t the government care about seniors?”), to potential interview questions for neighbors (i.e. “what do you want to see different in your neighborhood?”). Clearly, I provided insufficient scaffolding for team members to understand the function of a research question, and what makes a ‘good’ question. While we ultimately worked through this learning together, the process was confusing for members.

While the above example refers to a specific activity that was unclear, at other times I compromised the learning environment by being overly ambitious as to the amount of material I wanted to cover during a given session. Although I endeavored to attune to members' comprehension and readiness to move onto a new topic, my assessment was not always accurate. In an early gathering with the Edgehill group, I said, "I have this problem where I try and do too many things in one meeting, so I am trying to make a decision: do I squeeze in another thing right now before the last thing?" Ms. Mary quickly responded "No!" and the group broke out in laughter. Ms. Mary softened, explaining:

It is hard sometimes when you're trying to process it later. You are like, okay, we did talk about this here, and then I get lost in this here, and cannot go back to that there. So, that is what I am talking about.

This feedback was helpful, and let me know that this was not the first time Ms. Mary (and likely others) had experienced difficulty keeping track of our collective process.

To mitigate confusion from unclear instruction or overzealous planning, I frequently paused to check for understanding (asking, "does that make sense?" or "what are your thoughts?"). I also aired on the side of transparency (as evidenced in the example above) as I considered whether to introduce a new activity, and sought feedback from my collaborating researchers, who often observed things I had missed. For example, working in pairs with other team members, collaborating researchers had insight into the degree to which instructions were clear to others, and let me know when additional time or explanation was needed.

## Challenges to Creating a Caring Environment

In addition to navigating challenges related to creating an effective learning environment, there were a number of challenges to building a caring environment, particularly related to trust-building, addressing biases and dominant behaviors, and managing shifting group membership.

**Building trust.** The first challenge was to establish my own trustworthiness with members. A number of members brought with a healthy skepticism toward the project and me. Some of this was expressed as curiosity. At his first meeting, before sitting down, Larry wanted to know my motivation for starting the Cleveland Park Story Project. He asked, “Everything has a nucleus – nothing can live without a nucleus, so what’s the nucleus?” Others were more overtly suspicious of my involvement in their communities. At the first gathering of the Edgehill Story Project, Vanessa asked pointedly, “I want to know how this is going to benefit the neighborhood, and not just be some project that helps you get your degree.” Months after the project concluded, Ms. TK reflected on her suspicion of me:

Amie: When you were first thinking about being a part of it, did you have any concerns about participating?

Ms. TK: At first. I was like, ‘Who are these people? What do they want?’ Those was my concern. ‘Is they trying to put us in a trick bag or what? Can we trust them?’

Amie: And *these people* is me, right?

Ms. TK: *These people* is Amie, this is you Amie I'm talking about. You the people.

Although Ms. TK did not explicitly mention my whiteness, several others did. During our follow-up interviews, Vanessa said she had initially wondered, “who’s this white lady?”



Establishing my trustworthiness necessarily took time. I navigated this by being forthright with members about my own concerns and commitments—sharing the ‘the nucleus’ of the project, as Larry had suggested. As a relative newcomer to Nashville, and an outsider in two of the three areas, I deferred to members knowledge of their neighborhoods and both encouraged and followed their leadership in shaping a line of inquiry about their communities. At the same time, I endeavored to be a contributing member of the team by offering facilitation, technical assistance, and sharing content knowledge about gentrification, when appropriate. And perhaps most importantly, I strove to be vigilant about how my own biases might be affecting how I perceived and interacted with members, tracking and interrogating my interactions in field notes.

For example, as we began the second session of the Edgehill Story Project, I was disturbed that few people from week one were in attendance. That night, I wrote in my field notes:

I was feeling some anxiety at the start of the meeting... *where is everyone?* Thoughts flashed through my mind: *had they got scared away somehow? Had they only come for the money last time?* These were interesting to notice – everyone had seemed genuinely engaged last time, so neither of these made sense, and the latter immediately felt like a record – an internalized message that the public housing residents were only in it for the money...

As it turned out, the anxiety was unwarranted; by the end of the meeting, all but one person had returned. However, the internalized message that had seeded in my consciousness

persisted throughout the two hours. My field notes continued, “When Ms. TK came in, with less than 30 minutes left, my first thought was, ‘*she just came for the stipend.*’”

Ms. TK had indeed arrived late, and had quickly joined our discussion of significant people in Edgehill’s history. Drawing from her deep knowledge of the community, Ms. TK contributed more names and stories than anyone else around the table. We closed the session with administrative business, discussing how to distribute stipends—weekly or at the end of the twelve weeks. Ms. TK advocated for waiting until the end, when we could fairly allocate the amount according to how many meetings people had attended. She also apologized for her late arrival, tearing up as she shared that she had been at the funeral of neighborhood elder.

That Ms. TK had come, in spite of having experienced this loss, was a testament to her commitment to her community and her investment in the project. It was both painful and humbling to recognize that I had unconsciously criminalized rather than empathized with Ms. TK’s lateness. As I concluded in my field notes, “This was a powerful opportunity for me to catch my projected racial bias.” To the extent that I was able, catching my biases was critical to building authentic relationships with members. However, given that implicit biases operate “unwittingly, unintentionally, and unavoidably” (Hardin & Banjaji, 2013, p.14), I have to assume that I did not—and cannot—catch them all.<sup>32</sup>

**Addressing dominant behaviors.** An additional challenge to building a caring environment was addressing behaviors within the group that reinforced relationships of

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<sup>32</sup> Implicit biases are stereotypes held at the unconscious level. Despite the widespread belief that racism is in the past, research indicates that most Americans—and a vast majority of whites—possess and act on implicit biases against people of color and other marginalized groups (Sue, 2012).

inequality. Although members of the Stratford Story Project spoke often of their appreciation of the opportunity to work across generational lines, the adults in the group—in their eagerness to contribute—frequently interrupted youth. The intentions of the adults’ were simply to engage (enthusiastically) in the activity at hand. And yet, this behavior marginalized the voices of youth team members. At times, I indirectly managed these expressions of dominance by redirecting the conversation back to the young person who was interrupted. Other times I was more direct: while debriefing the screening of the Stratford Story Project film, a pair of particularly animated adults were continuously interrupting youth. After several unsuccessful attempts to return the conversation to the young person trying to speak, I interrupted an adult saying, “hold up – kids aren’t talking.” The group quickly self-corrected, and became more mindful of their participation. Yet, the challenge to hold space for youth voices—despite the strong ties that had formed over the 12 weeks—demonstrates the persistence of this pattern of dominance.

**Managing inconsistent participation.** A further vulnerability to developing a caring environment was the shifting membership of each group. Across all three projects, membership was in flux the first several weeks, with people starting who were unable to continue, others joining mid-way, and others participating inconsistently. This was most apparent in the Stratford Story Project, where members would occasionally agree to tasks one week and then be absent the following session.<sup>33</sup> This was particularly hard on Dev, who—as described below—was the lead videographer for the Stratford documentary; when others did not pass along their work in a timely fashion, it made his job more difficult.

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<sup>33</sup> There were a number of reasons for this. All the high school students had jobs and several were participating in sports or band. In addition, all but one of the adults was also working full time. These outside commitments at times conflicted with the project.

Given that mutual aid is created, in part, by members being able to rely on one another, the shifting membership at times undermined the sense of interdependence among team members.

### **Challenges to Creating an Empowering Environment**

Finally, although many members experienced gains in efficacy over the course of the Neighborhood Story Project, a number of tensions shaped the degree to which the project fostered an empowering environment, in particular the degree to which I directly led the group, and the degree to which leadership was dispersed and collectivized among members.

**Moderating levels of leadership.** As facilitator, I was continuously navigating when to directly lead the group, when to seed ideas for the group to consider, and when to follow the leadership of others. Ultimately, I aimed to foster a high-level of group investment in and ownership of the Neighborhood Story Project, and endeavored to lead, seed, or follow based on what best facilitated that outcome. At times, a strong suggestion from me felt appropriate. At other times, I wondered in my field notes whether I had shortchanged a discussion or imposed my perspective. For example, following the Stratford Story Project session in which the group decided to create a film, I reflected:

I asked about how to organize the film – over time or by theme. In the interest of time, I heavily suggested that we organize it historically, which made sense to the group. I played a more decisive/leadership role here than I would have liked should we have had more time. While I think the group would have come up with the same outcome – we have been circling around this plan for a while – in the end it felt a bit like ‘my decision’ or at least my suggestion.

At other times, I was aware of member suggestions that I did not take-up, or encourage the group to consider. Critical reflection, both independently and with collaborating researchers, helped me to discern when I might be overusing my influence, or when additional structure and leadership was necessary. That said, the tension between when to lead, seed, and follow remained unresolved.

**Collectivizing action.** A second challenge to building an empowering environment involved the tension between individual and collective action, which manifested both ideologically and practically. Ideologically, many Story Project team members were unused to making collective decisions, or completing work collaboratively. It took time for members to acclimate first to the fact that I, as facilitator, was not going to ‘do’ the research project for them, nor were they going to ‘do’ it by themselves. In the first few weeks, Dee frequently used the language of “you” to describe the project—for example asking questions like, “when are you going to have the final event?” I replied by giving ownership back to the group, offering “it’s up to us to decide as a team.” In other moments, when members had strong opinions about what needed to happen, it was important to create space for alternative perspectives. For example, when the Edgehill group was preparing to edit their film, one member strongly stated the film should be no more than five minutes in length. I encouraged others to weigh in, and eventually the group reached consensus on a 20-minute film.

This shift from ‘you’ or ‘me’ to ‘we’ was significant, but also challenging to maintain. Practically, in order to foster a sense of collective efficacy and project ownership, it was important that many members be able to trace their contributions to the final product. However, the process of creating final products—such as reports, videos, and posters—is

often individual. Furthermore, to the degree that the products require specialized equipment, software and skills, fewer people who can participate in their creation. In each project there were individuals who played lead roles in preparing final products. This included me and other members of the research team: In Cleveland Park, Jyoti designed the final printed timeline, in Edgehill I completed the final report, and in Stratford I finalized the narrative that structured the film. However, in all cases the content for these final products was collaboratively produced and edited. Further, team members also played key roles in preparing final products. Most significantly, the two film projects were led by Max in Edgehill and Dev at Stratford. The Edgehill project was less ambitious (they interviewed fewer people, and produced a shorter video), and a number of members collaborated with Max in the film's production. Though he did all the recording and editing, other members participated as interviewers and interviewees, and also helped select key themes to highlight and excerpts to include. In contrast, The Stratford Story Project was much more ambitious, and in the end, Dev conducted most of the interviews independently. Though a number of other students expressed interest in learning video editing skills, given the constraints of time and software, Dev also completed most of the editing and design work alone. In retrospect, it appears that the more sophisticated the final product, the less collaborative it can be.

In summary, although members learned a great deal during the projects, their learning was limited by the project's inherent time constraints, and at times stifled by my unclear or overly ambitious facilitation. While members valued the strong social ties that formed over the course of the project, building and maintaining a caring environment required navigating distrust, biases and dominant group behaviors, as well as inconsistent

membership. And despite many team members gaining a sense of efficacy through their participation, the degree to which the project fostered an empowering environment was shaped by tensions between leading, seeding and following, and tensions between individual and collective action. Some of these challenges resulted from the program design—such as the difficulty of completing work within a fixed time period, which could be addressed by extending the timeline to allow more time for analysis. Other challenges related to process—such as the degree to which some member ideas were embraced and others were not—or to positionality—such as how I read and was read by members given our respective social identities. Challenges related to process and positionality cannot be fully planned for or anticipated. In practice, I found that that Neighborhood Story Project members navigated these challenges together, often taking ownership for creating conditions in which we all could complete our best work.

### **Relationships of Reciprocity**

This chapter has explored the design and facilitation processes that both animated and at times stifled member gains, yet members themselves also actively shaped the environment, teaching and supporting one another, and inspiring others with their own initiative. The degree to which members also encouraged and supported me is also noteworthy; just as they invested in one another and in their communities, they invested in me.

My first session of the first Story Project offers an example. Despite a variety of outreach efforts, only three people came to the initial meeting in Cleveland Park, and for nearly the first hour, Ms. Andrea was the only one present (aside from me and my collaborating researcher). Though we had only just met, I expressed my uncertainty about

how to proceed, and my worry over the low turnout must have been palpable. She encouraged me to keep going, offered to help with recruitment, and expressed her belief that the project was needed. Months later, in one of our final team meetings, Ms. Andrea reflected back to this first gathering:

Well, Amie... I've been thinking about this through the whole thing, that my mind went back when we first, we first came in here and it, not many people showed up and it appeared you ... may have gotten a little discouraged and you was trying to decide whether we should go forward. So, I just want to say thank you for moving forward and, and trusting in what, what was in your heart for you to do...

In Edgehill, Ms. Mary similarly encouraged me the first session, making eye contact and saying “it takes courage to show up at a group you don't know and invite people to be part of something.” At our last meeting, she too reflected back on that first session:

And, Amie, God bless you. I love you. I want to say you have done a wonderful job. I saw fear on you when I came in. I'm sorry—it wasn't a fear, but it was concern. *Are they going to come? Are they going to stay? Are they going to behave?* And you have been - your leadership has just been inspiring. And I've been able to go back with that same spirit of leadership...I have y'all to thank for that. God bless you. I love you.

Nearly a year later, when I reviewed an early draft of this manuscript with Ms. Mary, she said, “I remember that first meeting, you was the only little white girl there, and most the rest of us already knew each other. It was obvious to me that you were the one that needed encouraging.” She was right. Having my vulnerability seen by these team members was



both affirming and reassuring; they buoyed my resolve to keep pushing myself and the projects forward.

Over the course of the Neighborhood Story Project, just as members frequently appreciated one another, they also appreciated me. Several weeks into the Edgehill project, Ms. TK reflected in a closing round, “Well, I like how Amie teaches us how to you know, how to look forward to something. She does that a lot. How she stands up and...she just generates the mind, and at least she do mine, and I like that.” As an educator and community practitioner, hearing that the project was producing hope and ‘generating the mind’ was deeply impactful. Through their encouragement, appreciation, and engagement, members of the Neighborhood Story Project not only invested in their communities, they invested in me. During the tearful closing session with the Cleveland Park team, I tried to put into words to the difference the team made to me:

I just feel so incredibly grateful to you. And this has been super fun and awesome and great, but it's also—if I get a Ph.D., it's because of you. Seriously. This is my dissertation research, and I'm doing this project to see what do these kinds of projects do, what difference do they make, and this is the first one. I'm going to hopefully do a couple more... and I've been the leader in some ways, but I am a student and you are my teachers here. I'm learning from you how this works, if it works, if it makes a difference, how to make it better, and so I'm incredibly indebted to you for this opportunity. You are all part of my—what we call—committee. You're all on my committee... You're helping me grow in huge ways, so thank you for taking the risk and making the commitment and investing the time and investing your heart, and

reaching out to your neighbors. And, you know, it was just really, really lovely. I feel super lucky to get to have these relationships.

As the projects progressed, I continued to feel grateful, indebted, and lucky to be mentored by such an outstanding group of neighbors who created a learning, caring, and empowering environment for me, as well as for their neighbors.

### **Synthesizing Process Findings**

Cultivating a learning, caring and empowering environment created conditions for consciousness raising, relationship building, and civic action within the Neighborhood Story Project. This was accomplished by intentional design and facilitation, navigating challenges, and the reciprocal efforts of members. Ms. Betty's transformation during the course of the Edgehill Story Project exemplified the themes of the last two chapters, linking the Neighborhood Story Project processes to team member outcomes.

At the first meeting, Ms. Betty expressed reluctance to join. At the end of that initial session, Betty held up her consent form and addressed the group:

I haven't signed this yet, I need to soak it in, because this is important, it's real important. I don't want to do anything that will hurt my neighborhood, and I want to help my neighborhood. If I sign this, I don't want anything to be misinterpreted, like 'what is she doing over there with them white people getting her little stipend'. I am taking this seriously.

Ms. Betty was clearly committed to her community, and expressed a healthy skepticism of me and the project. Yet, over the coming weeks, as she learned about my motivations as a facilitator, and about her peers in the project, she became increasingly engaged. She was

quick to participate in weekly sessions, and eagerly volunteered for leadership roles outside of our weekly meetings. She was hungry to learn new concepts and words, and reflected mid-way, “I appreciate this team because I came in here, like I have told y'all before, not knowing anything, and as we have been doing our Saturdays...it's like a puzzle to me and now the puzzle is coming together...” When discerning which data collection team to join, she chose the data analysis team over the interview team explicitly to learn new skills. As she put it, “I like dealing with people but I want to change up. I can handle the people, I want to deal with that right there,” pointing to the words ‘data analysis’ on the board. Later, as the team finalized the report, we deliberated whether or not to list our names on the document. Ms. Betty listened respectfully to the discussion, commenting, “I'm looking at it two sides, and I'm not taking sides because I already know my side, I want my name.” The following week she was more adamant, “You know you can put my name on it. Put my name all over it, please!” At the close of that session, she noticed the change in herself – from the first session to the current moment:

I am proud of that I stopped being afraid and having fear that I had in the beginning. Because, once I got to feel the love and really see the seriousness of this and just really got to see what we were doing, that took away the fear. I'm just so glad that that left me. Because, remember, I didn't want to sign my name.

Months later, when I reflected with Ms. Betty about her participation in the project, I asked her what it made such a difference for her. As noted at the start of this chapter, she replied:

All the studying that we did. If I was in there and we were just sitting there and just talking—and plus we got to work and start doing things. All the studying that we

did, the cooperation that we had, with all the research that we did. Once I seen that research form up and found out information, that made me want to do things.

Hearing the combined themes of learning (“the studying that we did”), caring (“the cooperation that we had”), and empowering (“doing things”), I reflected back to Betty my observation about the seeming importance of these three dimensions:

Amie: One of the things that came to my- that seemed to me, is that part of what made it work, there were three different things happening at once. There was a space for learning and it seems like it was really powerful for people to just learn things about their neighborhood, and learn the terms, and learn what these different things mean. It was also really important that we had a supportive group, that encouraged each other, supported each other, and it was really important that we were doing research. We weren't just receiving information, but we were out collecting information and taking action. It seemed like it was that-

Betty: That's what I just got through saying.

It was, in fact, what she had just got through saying, and what many team members articulated—often in a single breath—when expressing the project’s impact. The intentional co-creation of a learning, caring and empowering environment propelled member gains throughout the Neighborhood Story Project, and for many, beyond.

## CHAPTER 6. IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Nearly 15 years ago, Garven, Gutierrez and Galinsky, the editors of the Handbook of Social Work with Groups, offered the following challenge:

We need to promote research designs that capture real-life practice situations and also give us an accurate assessment of effectiveness. We need to go beyond practitioner descriptions and free-flowing subjective evaluations to well-developed ethnographies and well-formulated evaluations” (2004, p.7).

As noted in a recently published text dedicated to group work research, the need for empirical study of group works remains pressing today (Garvin, Tolman, and Macgowen, 2016). In the previous chapters, I have endeavored to meet this challenge by providing a sufficiently rich description of the Neighborhood Story Project to make transferability judgements possible, explicating: the intervention design, the context in which the project was implemented, participant outcomes, group processes, and project limitations. With this accounting, my hope is that scholars, practitioners, and neighbors can evaluate the appropriateness of the Neighborhood Story Project for other settings. And yet, while I respect and echo the call for accurate assessments and well-formed evaluations, there are inherent tension between exactness and emergence, between fidelity and unfinishedness.

On one hand, as a practitioner, I am ever mindful of the need to skill-share, and want to provide tools to those who are eager to try out a version of the Neighborhood Story Project in their communities. As such, in addition to this text, I have created a facilitation guide that provides detailed week-by-week session outlines.<sup>34</sup> On other hand, although I have highlighted specific activities in the preceding chapters (and detailed these and others

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<sup>34</sup> This facilitation guide is available from the author by request.

in the aforementioned guide), there are invariably alternative activities that could have been equally (if not more) effective. I am reminded of the conversation between popular educators Miles Horton and Paolo Freire, in which Freire—reflecting on his literacy education work in Brazil—observed, “you could start without too much preoccupation concerning methods and techniques and materials because you had the principal ingredient, which was the desire of the people...” (1990, p. 78). I too found the ‘principal ingredient’ to be the desire of the people. And, though I sought to maintain implementation-fidelity across the three projects,<sup>35</sup> I also believe there is something important about this (and all) interventions continuing to live, adapt, and evolve.

I designed the Neighborhood Story Project in the tradition of the *unfinished alternative* introduced in Chapter 1. Unlike a highly proscriptive intervention, an unfinished alternative satisfies two conditions: it contradicts core elements of an existing approach to a social condition to be sufficiently disruptive to the status quo, and second, it competes with the current model enough to be considered realistic (Mathiesen, 1974). The Neighborhood Story Project emerged as an ‘alternative’ to the status quo, which too often excludes residents from identifying the consequences of, and responses to, gentrification. As a low-cost, time-limited intervention, The Neighborhood Story Project also offers a plausible model for intervening in gentrifying neighborhoods that may complement existing efforts to build and preserve affordable housing.

In describing the importance of ‘the unfinished,’ Mathiesen cautions that once an alternative becomes finished (i.e., packaged, copy written, scaled), it by definition *becomes* the status quo, and is resistant to change. He writes:

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<sup>35</sup> For example, each of the three projects followed the same curriculum summarized in Appendix B, used the same activities, and followed the same general timeline.

I have gradually acquired the belief that the alternative lies in the unfinished, in the sketch, in what is not yet fully existing. The ‘finished alternative’ is ‘finished’ in the double sense of the word (2014, p. 47).

Mathiesen’s words have resonance with Kathleen Stewart’s call for “weak theory in an unfinished world” (2008, p. 72.), suggesting there are possibilities within and around us we cannot yet see or measure. A certain amount of dynamism, emergence and possibility is built into the Neighborhood Story Project, in that the members determine the questions they ask, the data they collect, the interpretation of findings and form of dissemination. Even still, given the unfinished-ness of the world, and the incompleteness of our own understandings, both our theorizing and intervening must be always living, always draft, always contextual, and never quite right.

With this tension between fidelity and unfinishedness in mind, this chapter takes a step back from the particularity of the Neighborhood Story Project to offer three broad implications of this study for community development practice and policy. First, drawing from the outcome and process findings detailed in the Chapters 4 and 5, I offer a generalized practice model for group level interventions in gentrifying neighborhoods. Second, recognizing that the Neighborhood Story Project is just one of many possible interventions, I consider this study’s findings in relationship to other alternative interventions in gentrifying neighborhoods, suggesting an expanded role for community development practice. Finally, I consider the role of policy-makers and ongoing research in supporting these efforts.

## **A Practice Model for Group Work in Gentrifying Neighborhoods**

As I concluded in Chapter 5, it was the co-occurrence of a learning, caring, and empowering environment, rather than any one of these dimensions alone, that supported participant gains in the Neighborhood Story Project. By providing all three, the Neighborhood Story Project offered an entry point for residents to learn about their communities, build meaningful relationships with neighbors, and work together to achieve a collective goal. This suggests a practice model complementing the theoretical model described in Chapter 1 (see Figure 1). The stronger a person's ties to place and other people, the more likely they are to come together to advocate for their communities (Collins, Walting Neal, & Neal, 2014; Mannarini & Fedi, 2009; Mihaylov and Perkins, 2014). Importantly, place-attachments and social ties are some of the very dimensions of neighborhoods that may be harmed by gentrification, but this study suggests they can also be strengthened by place-based interventions, such as the Neighborhood Story Project, and these dimensions can be leveraged to intervene productively in changing neighborhoods. As Lewicka (2011) concluded in a comprehensive review of studies of place attachment, the *processes* through which attachments to people and place are formed have been under researched. This study begins to address this gap: Through creating a learning, caring, and empowering environment, The Neighborhood Story Project offers a group work practice model for fostering attachments to people and places, and facilitating collective action in gentrifying neighborhoods (see Figure 15).





Figure 16. A group-work practice model in gentrifying neighborhoods

Although aspects of these environmental conditions are common in a variety of settings, they are less common in spaces in which people come together to take action in their neighborhoods. Indeed, in all three Neighborhood Story Project groups, members noted that our work together felt “different” than other community initiatives they participate in, such as neighborhood association meetings. Such spaces are often designed to facilitate civic participation (for people to give input, advocate for or against something, or plan a community event or protest). *Learning* may be a byproduct of these engagements, but it is rarely the primary function. As a number of Neighborhood Story Project members explained, it is difficult to track and participate in neighborhood gatherings related to gentrification when terms such as ‘zoning,’ ‘tax increment financing,’ ‘market-rate,’ and the ubiquitous ‘affordable housing’ are used without explanation or definition. Without explicit attention to learning, many neighbors cannot find purchase in these conversations; nor is

there an obvious inroad to offer their expertise. In contrast, as studies of participant engagement in other low-income communities conclude, residents are more engaged in community work when they believe they have knowledge and skill to contribute (Foster-Fishman, Pierce, Van Egeren, 2009).

Furthermore, *caring* is often absent from spaces of neighborhood civic action. A number of Neighborhood Story Project team members described attending neighborhood meetings where organizers put more attention on following Robert's Rules of Order than on building relationships. Vanessa noted that many meetings she participates in are "grueling" and "contentious." In contrast, she found that in the Edgehill Story Project "people were willing to listen to each other, people were tolerant of different ideas, and patient with each other. It was kind of miraculous in a lot of ways." While there are important critiques of community development initiatives that emphasize community-building *at the expense of* civic action (deFilippis, Fisher, & Shragge, 2006), for members of the Neighborhood Story Project, building supportive relationships *amplified* their learning and action.

Finally, although spaces of civic engagement are intuitively *empowering* in that they are often volunteer-driven and action-oriented, many rely on the presence and continued engagement of people who already see themselves as leaders, rather than facilitating the development of agency.<sup>36</sup> In contrast, the Neighborhood Story Project intentionally built member's skills, comfort, and confidence in taking leadership. The learning, caring, and empowering dimensions of the project were mutually supporting; by providing all three, the Neighborhood Story Project offered an entry point for residents concerned about

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<sup>36</sup> Neighborhood-based community organizing models that intentionally develop leadership across all levels of membership are an important exception (Ahsan, 2008).

neighborhood change to develop an analysis of their community's past and present, to build meaningful relationships, and to take action to improve their neighborhoods. Importantly, The Neighborhood Story Project was not designed to independently eradicate gentrification; it is a small-group and time-limited intervention that engages residents in addressing some of the effects of gentrification while developing the knowledge, relationships, and skills needed to sustain efforts beyond the projects conclusion. It is up to participants to decide how to leverage those gains—for personal development, local neighborhood engagement, or comprehensive community organizing.

Although The Neighborhood Story Project was designed as a response to a specific type of spatial and social transformation—gentrification—the tripartite practice model described above may have relevance for community practice more broadly. Indeed, findings from this study are consistent with previous theorizing and empirical work on community development. For example, in a seminal study of grassroots activists, Kieffer (1984) finds that empowerment is characterized by an improved self-concept, enhanced understandings, and cultivation of resources for social action. He concludes, “While empowerment is, at root, an individual demand, it is nurtured by the effects of collective effort” (1984, p.28). Similarly, Maton’s (2008) theory of empowering community settings suggests that individuals become individually and civically empowered as a result of participating in environments that emphasize skill-development, caring, and self-efficacy (among other characteristics). In both cases, learning, caring, and taking action are all essential. Indeed, the spirit of this tripartite practice model is captured in Myles Horton’s reflections on educational practice:

If I had to put a finger on what I consider... a good radical education, it wouldn't be anything about methods or techniques. It would be about loving people first... and then next is respect for people's abilities to learn and to act and shape their own lives... The third thing grows out of caring for people and having respect for people's ability to do things, and that is that you value their experience (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 177)

Given the apparent generalizability of these core elements—creating conditions for learning, caring, and taking action—insights from this practice model can inform and/or strengthen the design of other neighborhood interventions. For example, existing neighborhood associations or other civic groups might reflect on how they foster a learning, caring, and empowering environment, and how these dimensions of their practice might be strengthened. This self-assessment might include questions such as:

- How do we structure and pace our meetings to help people share their expertise, identify gaps in their knowledge, and learn more about their community?
- How do we facilitate opportunities for members to build relationships with one another, recognize each other's strengths, and demonstrate care for one another?
- How do we create opportunities for all members to develop and practice leadership skills, and experience taking collective action?

These same questions can be adapted by those designing new neighborhood interventions. In addition to providing a practice model for group work in gentrifying neighborhoods, this study suggests the need to broaden the landscape of community practice responses in neighborhoods experiencing rapid demographic change.

## **An Expanded Role for Community Development**

As Neighborhood Story Project team members made abundantly clear, residents of gentrifying neighborhoods are concerned with keeping more than just their home. They are also interested with preserving relationships and histories, with mobilizing resident resistance and power, and with transforming neighborhood reputations and levels of neighborhood engagement. As such, there is a critical need to reimagine the role of community development practice beyond helping people find or keep housing. While these roles remain absolutely critical, they fail to account for the range of residents' losses and desires.

As introduced briefly in Chapter 1, there are already a multitude of grassroots efforts led by artists, community organizers, and scholar-activists responding to gentrification's negative effects. To the extent that these initiatives focus on more than just building/preserving affordable housing, they can be considered 'more than material' interventions. In conducting a comprehensive literature search for empirical studies of more than material interventions in gentrifying neighborhoods, I found 17 articles, documenting 14 distinct projects.<sup>37</sup> Adding the Neighborhood Story Project brings the number of projects included in this review to 15 (for a complete list of projects, see Appendix G).

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<sup>37</sup> I conducted a comprehensive search for interventions that respond to more than material effects of gentrification. I first completed a simultaneous database search of all 59 Pro Quest databases, which index thousands of titles across multiple disciplines, restricting my search to peer-reviewed journals, and keeping it unrestricted with regard to geography and year of publication. Recognizing that these interventions do not emerge from a single discipline, draw from a single theoretical tradition, or use shared language, I utilized multiple combinations of search terms to acquire a sample. I began by searching all possible combinations of the following search terms, as found in the article abstracts: Gentrification OR redevelopment OR neighborhood change, AND, Community Practice OR Participatory OR action research OR place-making OR dialogue OR memory OR public history OR cartography OR civic. I reviewed abstracts or all articles returned from this search with the following criteria for consideration in this review: (1) that the article provide an empirical account (2) of an intervention (operationalized as any organized response to changing neighborhood conditions) (3) focused on addressing the more than material effects (4) of neighborhood gentrification. When an abstract met these inclusion criteria, I reviewed the article in full.

Surveying these studies, there appear to be four general approaches to more than material interventions in gentrifying neighborhoods (though a number of projects—as the Neighborhood Story Project—span multiple approaches):

- *creative placemaking* projects engage the arts to transform how people feel about, relate to, and interact in their neighborhood;
- *public pedagogy* initiatives create opportunities for people to learn about their neighborhood;
- *public science* projects engage people in studying and taking informed action in their neighborhoods;<sup>38</sup> and
- *community organizing* efforts mobilize residents to build and exercise power to affect change in their neighborhood.

Though a relatively limited sample, the 15 projects included in this review provide a starting point for considering the applications of more than material interventions in gentrifying neighborhoods. Synthesizing results across studies suggests four central findings.

### **Beneficial Outcomes**

First, in all but one project, authors provided evidence of beneficial outcomes of the intervention, including raising neighbors' collective consciousness about gentrification and processes of neighborhood change (Cahill, 2006; Drew, 2012; McClean, 2014; McLean2014b; Thurber & Fraser, 2016), strengthening relationships among residents (Chidester & Gadsby, 2009; Thurber, Collins, Greer, McKnight, & Thompson, in press),

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<sup>38</sup> Given disciplinary differences in how participatory modes of research are termed, I have elected to use the term public science as a broad umbrella that includes projects conceptualized as PAR, public archaeology, and collaborative ethnography, as examples.

and transforming residents' relationships to place (Somdahl-Sands, 2008), all of which were also reflected in the Neighborhood Story Project.

Interventions that engaged residents as artists, teachers, and researchers—like the Neighborhood Story Project—had the additional benefit of democratizing knowledge production. This has individual effects, as residents increasingly value their own knowledge and abilities to theorize (Cahill, 2006; Drew, 2012; McLean 2014), as well as community-level effects, as residents use their knowledge to shape representations and/or narratives of their neighborhood that can influence neighborhood change (Darcy, 2013; Hodkinson & Essin, 2015; Thurber, Collins, Greer, McKnight, & Thompson, in press; Thurber & Fraser, 2016; Sinha, 2013).

### **Contributions of Creative Placemaking and Public Pedagogy Interventions**

Second, the greatest contribution of creative placemaking and public pedagogy approaches is the ability to catalyze consciousness-raising among potentially large groups through relatively short-term interventions. The Mission Wall Dances—a multimedia performance responding to gentrification in San Francisco's historically Latino Mission district—serves as an example. Designed by choreographer Jo Kreiter, the project included a commissioned three-story mural depicting the 1975 Gartland Apartment arson, which many believe was intentionally set to evict low-income residents from the district. In recent years, this disturbing pattern of evicting-by-arson has reemerged in the Mission, displacing residents and eliminating affordable rentals, most of which have not been rebuilt (Somdahl-Sands, 2008). Kreiter choreographed an aerialist dance performance staged against the mural. The piece was designed to evoke this legacy of arson and displacement, as well as resident resistance to removal. Over a period of a few days, approximately 1000 people

attended the performance. Somdahl-Sands surveyed attendees immediately after the event, and distributed a follow-up questionnaire a year later. She concluded that the performance cognitively and affectively transformed the attendees' relationships to the Mission district by creating a "communal memory of the neighborhood" which "made the displacement of Mission District residents an intellectual, physical and emotional reality for the audience." (2008, p. 349). In the tradition of memory-work advocated by geographer Karen Till (2012), creative-placemaking and public pedagogy approaches can bring attention to the history of racial struggle, help residents make connections between the past and the present, and engage residents in reflecting on their responsibilities as neighbors in gentrifying neighborhoods. However, given their ephemeral, one-off nature, these approaches are limited in terms of fostering either individual or collective action.

### **Contributions of Public Science and Community Organizing Interventions**

In contrast, public science and community organizing approaches, though requiring a greater investment of time, can be effective in fostering consciousness raising as well as civic action. Echoing findings from the Neighborhood Story Project, studies find that public science and community organizing approaches advance social change by developing a pipeline of leaders (Nam, 2012 ), creating organizing networks (Darcy, 2013; McLean, 2014b) and producing materials that can be used to organize for better neighborhood conditions (Darcy, 2013; Hodgkinson & Essin, 2015; Sinha, 2012; Thurber & Fraser, 2016). This is not to suggest that public science and community organizing activities achieve all of their goals. In contrast, all the projects included in this review document ongoing sites of struggle. However, these activities are designed to *advance* that struggle by creating tools, relationships, and networks that immediately feed into civic action work.



The Residents' Voices Project (Darcy, 2013), which blends community organizing and public science, offers a particularly robust example. This international collaborative research project was co-located in Sydney, Australia and Chicago, U.S., and involved residents of public and socialized housing, as well as community workers and scholars in both settings. Michael Darcy and collaborators designed the project to counter the ways that resident perspectives are “systematically devalued or excluded from the so-called ‘evidence’ deployed to justify redevelopment of public housing and sometimes destruction of communities” (2013, p. 370). The organizing agenda was simultaneously multi-local and global. Using a shared web-space and connecting via technology allowed collaborators to learn and share best practices that can build local capacity, while also drawing connections across contexts. As Darcy explains, “This project aims to create a space where tenants are able to express, exchange and theorise about the impact of the places they live on their lives, to validate their own knowledge, and to use it in ways which best suit their interests” (2013, p. 371). Although the potential contributions of Residents' Voices appear to be significant, it is less clear whether these efforts have been sustained. The project web address is no longer functional, and little additional information is available online.

Indeed, only one of the public science and/or community organizing efforts included in this review appears to be ongoing: the Right to the City Alliance, a national coalition of organizations working for racial, economic and environmental justice ([www.therighttothecity.org](http://www.therighttothecity.org)). This raises a number of questions: were the other projects designed to be time-limited, or ongoing? If the projects were cut short, what were the causes? In the case of partnerships between the academy and community groups, how did the academic clock (including academics' desire to complete projects within the constraints

of the semester, and/or quickly collect and analyze publishable data) impact the life of the project? In the case of projects with strong local leadership, has sustainability been thwarted by the displacement of involved residents, as has been documented elsewhere (Lees, Slater, & Wyly, 2013; McLean, 2014b)?

While interventions need not, and indeed cannot, last forever, among the cases included in this review, the conditions of social inequality outlasted the intervention strategy. This is not to say that these efforts did not produce significant gains. As found with the Neighborhood Story Project, it is likely that these efforts built capacity, skills, and knowledge that can fuel other social justice efforts. But attention to sustainability does raise questions about the life-span of public science and community organizing initiatives, and how such initiatives can be crafted to collectivize and share learnings, best practices, and resources when their efforts come to a close.

### **The Need for an Equity Lens**

The final finding from this review is that effective interventions in gentrifying neighborhoods require explicit attention to equity. An equity lens is better understood as an approach to practice than a rigid set of practices. As described by Grantcraft, applying an equity lens means “paying disciplined attention to race and ethnicity while analyzing problems, looking for solutions, and defining success” (2012, p. ii). More broadly, applying an equity lens implies asking questions about who can participate in a given intervention, and who is left out; who benefits and who is harmed; and/or whose interests are prioritized and whose are ignored or secondary. One study of a neighborhood-based intervention in Toronto, Canada demonstrated the importance of bringing an equity lens to bear when addressing gentrification.

Concerned about rapid redevelopment and concurrent loss of street-level interaction in their neighborhood, a group of residents and business-owners began hosting monthly pedestrian-only street festivals as a tool of resistance to gentrification. As McLean and Rahder (2013) report, however, organizers failed to consider the impact that blocking car-traffic had on some of the working-class residents and businesses, and designed the festival activities to appeal to middle-class residents and tourists. Businesses that require traffic for deliveries and pick-ups, such as the meat and hardware store, suffered, while niche coffee shops and gift stores profited. Further, the festival increased interest in the neighborhood among middle and upper-class residents, likely accelerating the rate of gentrification. Although the initial impetus of this initiative was to resist perceived negative effects of gentrification—in particular, diminished social ties—the authors conclude that “uncritical and unquestioned ideals of public involvement, community, and creativity may reproduce the very exclusions, both symbolic and material, that they claim to challenge” (2013, p. 95). Absent a comprehensive analysis of who the street festival was designed to benefit, and who might be harmed, this creative placemaking intervention deepened rather than diminished the social harms it attempted to address. While this example foregrounds the role of those who design and implement interventions, other studies suggest that those who participate must also bring a critical consciousness regarding issues of equity, or develop that consciousness along the way (Drew, 2012; McLean, 2014).

### **What More than Material Interventions Offer**

Chapter 1 introduced three criticisms of reducing gentrification’s harms to a loss of affordable housing: such an approach pays insufficient attention to racial struggle, perpetuates damage-based views of poor people and neighborhoods, and ignores other

losses experienced in communities. Although there are important distinctions between creative placemaking, public pedagogy, public science and community organizing approaches (as highlighted above), more than material interventions are well-positioned to address these criticisms. First, as all four approaches are place-based, each reflects a commitment to context. Through exploring the particular spatial relationships within a neighborhood over time, more than material interventions (that adopt an equity lens) are likely to pay attention to the legacies of racial struggle. Second, each approach disrupts a damage-based approach by relocating authority and experience from institutions into neighborhoods. By bringing art out of museums and theatres, learning out of schools, science out of labs, and social change out of city hall, each approach claims neighborhoods as critical sites for experiencing, knowing, and acting in response to gentrification. Finally, each approach reflects a commitment to widening the lens of what is seen, known, and felt about gentrification. More than material interventions reveal losses resulting from gentrification that can be concealed by a singular focus on the loss of housing. Relatedly, each approach (albeit to differing degrees) engages people cognitively, affectively, and experientially. This reflects a recognition that human development—and by extension, social development—requires changing what people think about gentrification, changing how people relate to their neighbors and their neighborhood, and increasing their capacity to care for one another and the places they live.

In summary, more than material interventions can complement efforts to build and preserve affordable housing in important ways, engaging neighborhood histories and context, mobilizing resident's desires for their futures, and attending to a range of losses in addition to the loss of housing. Yet, it is critical to understand the strengths and limitations

of different approaches, and perhaps blend approaches to address their respective vulnerabilities. As described above, creative placemaking and public pedagogy interventions can be used to spark individual and collective development, though these approaches are limited in fostering collective action. Public science and community organizing initiatives are designed to foster collective action, though they can face difficulties in sustaining change. And importantly, the effectiveness of any intervention often hinges on the degree to which intervention designers and participants attend to issues of equity.

With these insights, practitioners working in community development—such as staff of city departments that focus on housing, development, and health; or those working in neighborhood-based non-profits—can reimagine their role with respect to gentrification. Where housing values are rapidly rising, and neighborhood demographics are in flux, a survey might assess resident's:

- needs for rental assistance, property tax abatement, and emergency housing
- knowledge of neighborhood history, understanding of gentrification, and awareness of how to engage in planning processes
- desire for strengthened social ties, assistance addressing intergroup conflict/bias, or help mobilizing resident organizing

Widening the assessment beyond material needs expands the possibilities for intervening in gentrifying neighborhoods. Practitioners can strategically draw on creative placemaking, public pedagogy, public science, and/or community organizing approaches—in addition to traditional housing development, case management, advocacy, and referral services—to meet community needs. In response to displaced homes and businesses, rental evictions,

and rising property taxes, additional interventions might mobilize and/or support existing resident organizing efforts, engage residents in participatory action research to investigate and respond to their concerns, and provide technical assistance to resident advocacy efforts. In response to the dismissal of long-time residents' knowledge, diminished opportunities for their civic engagement, or disregard for culturally significant places, additional interventions might seek to amplify residents' place-stories, create spaces of resident representation, and commemorate important places, moments, and/or people in the neighborhood. And in response to disrupted social ties, escalated social stigma, and ruptured place-attachments, additional interventions might serve to build relationships among neighbors, reduce bias and discrimination, and create contexts for people to care for and enjoy their neighborhood.

### **The Place of Policymakers**

Policymakers—in particular, leaders in city government—also have a role to play in expanding efforts to prevent and mitigate gentrification's effects. Importantly, every city is comprised of actors with different and competing interests and varying degrees of access to power. In the context of gentrification, people working in development and real estate prosper by virtue of the same processes that harm others; they have an incentive to see gentrification continue unchecked, and often have greater means and influence over policymakers than do the poor, working-class, and elderly people most vulnerable to gentrification. In response, residents in many communities are organizing those harmed by gentrification and unequitable development to collectivize their efforts.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, though the following recommendations are aimed toward policy change, implementing these

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<sup>39</sup> For example, there are more than 30 member organizations within the Right to the City Alliance ([www.righttothecity.org](http://www.righttothecity.org)); and numerous other organizations fighting for tenant rights and affordable housing within local, state and national spheres.

recommendations requires a strong organizing base that can agitate policymakers and compel city government to adopt equitable development initiatives.

First, city governments must make an explicit and actionable commitment to advancing equity, and operationalize that commitment throughout local government. This requires attending to disparities in outcomes across a wide range of indicators, including access to housing, education, transit, greenspace, and jobs. City departments that are charged with addressing issues of affordable housing must collect and analyze the data needed to track disparities in housing-access and displacement experienced by people of color and other marginalized groups. Further, they must evaluate the equity impacts of all housing policies and programs, and mitigate for existing disparities.

Second, city governments must invest in more than material interventions in areas that are already—or at risk of—gentrifying. At a policy level, this study suggests the continued need for mechanisms to create and preserve affordable housing, while also attending to and investing in more than material dimensions of place. This could involve creating program similar to % for arts, in which a percentage of overall redevelopment cost is designated for community development. Local organizations could then submit proposals to fund place-based projects addressing community concerns. To be clear, I am not suggesting funding for arts-based, educational, research or organizing efforts *in place of*, but rather *alongside of*, resources for housing. In areas where residents are facing displacement due to rising housing costs, investing in place-making projects honoring the area's cultural heritage without committing necessary resources for affordable housing would be grossly negligent. And yet, as the Neighborhood Story Project made evident, residents of gentrifying neighborhoods have serious concerns about fractured social relationships, loss of

place-knowledge, and shifting narratives of their neighborhood, in addition to the loss of affordable housing. As such, funding for housing alone is insufficient to addressing gentrification's harms.

Third, city governments need to foster greater interdisciplinarity across departments and between government and community groups. Most initiatives related to gentrification are situated in either planning departments or housing commissions. Yet, if gentrification constitutes more than a loss of homes, it is clearly a mistake to lay the burden of addressing gentrification only at the feet of these departments; new kinds of partnerships are needed. One might not expect a city planner to be facile in developing a creative placemaking initiative with a strong equity lens—though there are likely people working in the city arts commission or local arts organizations who would welcome this opportunity. Nor might we expect staff at a local housing commission to be equipped to facilitate participatory action research—though there are likely members of the health department, or a nearby educational institution that can assist in this capacity.

An example from Portland, Oregon illustrates the role of policymakers in responding to geographies of gentrification, reflecting a number of best practices as well as opportunities for innovation. In 2012, the city adopted “The Portland Plan,” a comprehensive plan that includes a ‘Framework for Equity’ with measurable goals to guide the city towards equitable outcomes for all residents ([www.portlandonline.com/portlandplan](http://www.portlandonline.com/portlandplan)). The City of Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability contracted with Portland State University geographer Lisa Bates to conduct a comprehensive geographic analysis of gentrification in the city (2013). With a city-wide equity commitment and Dr. Bates analysis in hand, the Portland Housing Bureau—which is broadly charged with solving the city's unmet housing needs—



adopted a Racial Equity Plan detailing the Bureau's specific goals, objectives, and actions to advance equity in housing (<http://training.portlandoregon.gov/phb/article/653143>).

One of the Bureau's most significant equity initiatives is the \$20 million N/NE Neighborhood Housing Strategy. This robust project is sited in a historically vibrant black neighborhood where gentrification has led to the out-migration of half the area's black residents within a decade (Portland Housing Bureau, 2014). The core elements of the N/NE Neighborhood Housing Strategy emerged from a comprehensive community engagement process, and combined strategies to build and preserve affordable housing with policies that provide priority access to displaced residents. This attempt to rebuild the black community through repatriation reflects a strong application of an equity lens. And yet, as of now, the Bureau is not incorporating more than material interventions into its strategy; its efforts are limited to building and preserving housing.

Recognizing that bringing people back into area homes is only one element of rebuilding black community, what might it look like to incorporate more than material interventions in this strategy? Is there a role for local arts projects that document and or contribute to the cultural life of the neighborhood, or for education projects that build a shared analysis of the ways the neighborhood has been shaped by sociopolitical and economic forces over time? Might a public science project help re-engage residents to study and take action in their neighborhood, or a community organizing initiative help residents to stay mobilized over the course of what will inevitably be a long, bureaucratic implementation phase? Importantly, I am not suggesting that the Housing Bureau do *more*, but that they partner with others to adopt an integrated, holistic approach to rebuilding what has been lost, and restoring a sense of community that will last.

## **A Continued Role for Research**

Although I am advocating for an immediate uptake of more than material interventions in gentrifying neighborhoods, there is also a need to concurrently expand research of these interventions. As noted previously, more than material interventions are under-evaluated. At the same time, a simple internet search suggests a proliferation of grassroots activity in this area. Systematic inquiry can assist in cataloguing these various modes of intervention, understanding their differing effects, and considering if particular intervention approaches are more appropriately suited to communities at different stages of change (Mallach, 2008). For example, community organizing might be best deployed when neighborhoods are in early stages of gentrification, as building power at this point increases the likelihood that neighbors can shape the trajectory of change. Relatedly, public pedagogy interventions might be most effective in neighborhoods that are already incorporating a critical mass of newer residents, who may lack place knowledge and neighborhood-based social ties. Continued research can help practitioners better match interventions to their specific contexts.

There is a particular need for longitudinal studies that can provide insight into how more than material initiatives in gentrifying neighborhoods can affect change over time, as well as the vulnerabilities of such interventions. For example, there is some evidence that creative placemaking initiatives documenting the cultural legacy of a particular neighborhood may affirm long-term residents place knowledge and place attachments in the short-term, while simultaneously making the neighborhood more desirable, and thus more vulnerable to gentrification, down the road (McClean, 2014). Tracking and understanding these changes is essential to ethical practice.

Finally, although the focus of this chapter has been on community development responses to gentrification, additional research is needed to consider the applicability of more than material interventions to other sites of neighborhood change, such as regions rapidly incorporating new immigrants or migrants, or communities experiencing population decline. It may be that interventions, such as the Neighborhood Story Project, can be beneficial in strengthening place attachments, develop community cohesion, and spark collective action in other settings. Ultimately, the more we understand what more than material interventions can offer, the more strategically and effectively they can be utilized.

## CHAPTER 7. RE-THEORIZING GENTRIFICATION

I was motivated to develop the Neighborhood Story Project by a belief that there was much more that we—as social workers, community psychologists, community organizers, and other neighborhood leaders—could be doing to help residents resist, respond to, and—wherever possible—prevent the multitude of losses experienced in gentrifying neighborhoods. Although my interests are deeply anchored in practice, this project is also entangled with theory, for how we understand social problems makes possibilities for transforming them legible.

As traced throughout the preceding chapters, residents of gentrifying neighborhoods experience a constellation of losses related to changes in the built environment and shifting neighborhood demographics, including losses in history, relationships, safety, a sense of belonging and a sense of place. Yet the fullness of this experience is often obscured in conceptualizations of gentrification that focus narrowly on a loss of housing. As introduced in chapter 1, third-wave gentrification scholars have argued for the need to think holistically about the stakes of gentrification, offering a variety of conceptual models for doing so. For example, Hyra (2013) offers the three-tiered framework of residential, political and cultural displacements, and Twigge-Molecey (2013) uses the typology of social, cultural, and housing market displacement. Davidson (2009) suggests an epistemological shift away from equating the loss of *abstract space* with a loss of *sense of place* (Davidson, 2009). As R&B legend Luther Vandross croons, “a house is not a home...”; if we reduce gentrification to only a loss of space (houses), we miss the effects on place (a resident’s feeling of being at home). However, these insights have been slow to be conceptually integrated in ways that can inform public policy. For example, The City of Nashville defines gentrification as:

the process of buying and renovating traditionally low-income areas, thus appealing to middle and upper-class residents and patrons. The result is an increase in the property value of the area that often displaces local residents who can no longer afford to pay housing and other increased costs. (<http://www.nashville.gov/Mayors-Office/Housing/Basics.aspx>)

Residential displacement is the sole effect of gentrification theorized in this definition. Indeed, among most city planning departments and housing bureaus, gentrification continues to be reduced to a loss of affordable housing. To be clear, political struggles for increased affordable housing are hard fought, and not won nearly often enough. Yet a singular policy focus on building and preserving affordable housing is insufficient. How can we theorize gentrification to better account for its more than material consequences?

I explore this final question in two ways, using two definitions of the adverb ‘how’. First, I consider *the manner in which* we theorize gentrification, in particular, with whom. My interest here is process: how we might democratize spaces of theorizing to center perspectives of those most harmed by gentrification? Second, I consider *with what meaning* we theorize gentrification. My interest here is content: how we might broaden our conceptualization of gentrification’s effects to better understand and more effectively intervene in gentrifying neighborhoods?

### **Who Theorizes Gentrification’s Effects?**

In the words of Dr. Maya Angelou, “The ache for home lives in all of us. The safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned” (1986, p. 196). Although the yearning for a sense of place may be a universal, the space of theorizing its loss via

gentrification has been fairly exclusive. Almost 20 years ago, preeminent gentrification scholar Loretta Lees hinted at this when she wrote, “Gentrification researchers need to think more carefully about how their research methods – as well as their theory – inflect their understandings” (1998, p. 2258). A decade later, geographer Tom Slater—one of the leading gentrification scholars today—echoed this insight in more specific terms, “*asking people about their experiences of displacement* is just as important as asking how many people have been displaced” (emphasis in original, 2008, p. 218). Indeed, our understanding of gentrification’s effects has been deepened by ethnographic accounts of residents’ lived experience (see Fraser, 2004; Stabrowski, 2014), but *who is asking and interpreting* also matters. We are all seeing from somewhere, and looking toward somewhere (Haraway, 1988). Feminists and critical race scholars have long critiqued the exclusion of those most directly affected by social problems from producing knowledge about their lives (Collins, 1990; Harding, 1991; Smith, 1999). As introduced in Chapter 1, collaborative research can serve as an antidote to these exclusions (Fine, 2016). And yet, its use appears scant in studies of gentrification.<sup>40</sup> This is problematic for a number of reasons.

First, those most directly affected by gentrification have relevant expertise. As Fine contends, “a particular wisdom about injustice is cultivated in the bodies and communities of those most intimately wounded by unjust conditions” (2016, p.358). Social

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<sup>40</sup> To determine the scope of participatory studies in this area, I conducted a simultaneous search within all databases included in the ProQuest search engine using the following inclusion criteria: (1) articles were published in a peer-reviewed journal, (2) published after January 1, 2000, and (3) satisfied the final search terms within the article abstract: (gentrification) AND (“participatory research”) OR (“action research”) or (PAR). Review of abstracts found only five studies related to gentrification that purported to use participatory methods. I do not conclude from this search that there have in fact only been five participatory studies on gentrification; indeed several others that were not returned in this search are referenced in this text. However, given that replicating the search for (gentrification) AND (interview) produced 234 results, and (gentrification) AND (survey) produced 122 results, this does suggest a relative dearth of participatory studies in the area of gentrification.

epistemologists describe this as an *epistemic advantage* accrued by those who are adversely affected by their particular social location (Alcoff, 2007). As such, those who have been harmed by gentrification may better understand the nuances of how gentrification is experienced than those who have not experienced these harms first hand. Conversely, those who are seemingly unharmed by—or benefit from—gentrification are, at the very least, epistemically disadvantaged. Some understandings or insights may be more difficult to attain. As Alcoff concludes:

this is not to say that women or marginalized peoples will have *absolute* epistemic advantage in having more critical questions in regard to every conceivable line of inquiry, but that the pattern of epistemic positionality created by some identities has the potential for relevance in broad domains of inquiry, perhaps in any inquiry (2007, p. 47).

In addition to possessing relevant expertise that can contribute to theorizing gentrification's effects, residents of gentrifying neighborhoods likely have insider knowledge of how their neighbors are already resisting gentrification, and insights into what interventions are most needed in their communities. This knowledge is critical to conceptualizing responses to gentrification that are meaningful to the local context. In sum, without resident engagement, gentrification theorizing risks being invalid and irrelevant.

Second, excluding those harmed from developing theory about gentrification is itself an injustice. Consider the compounding impact when those marginalized by gentrification—dismissed in and/or displaced from the places they call home—are also foreclosed from producing knowledge about their lives. Furthermore, their perspectives are often obscured in abstract accounts that purport to be 'about' their lived experiences.

Moreover, much urban theorizing—particularly that which is anchored in a political economy approach—argues that the problems experienced in neighborhoods can only be affected upstream, often at the level of state, national and global economic relations (DeFilippis, 2008). Such a conclusion diminishes, if not altogether excises, residents’ agency to affect change in their communities (Thurber, 2017).

The local/national and downstream/upstream arguments create an artificial binary. Strategic efforts to achieve change upstream are not incompatible with interventions implemented at the neighborhood level, and different scales of intervention are accessible to differently positioned actors. The more marginalized residents are (by virtue of gender, race, age, class, ability, sexual orientation, immigration status, and education), the more barriers they face to gaining entry to upstream points of decision-making. It is critical to expand access to spaces of intervention at regional and national levels, while appreciating the unique insights and influence neighborhood residents may have in affecting change locally. As we open up spaces of theorizing to include residents, our theories of gentrification will better account for the fullness of resident’s lived experiences.

### **The Multiple Dimensions of Neighborhoods<sup>41</sup>**

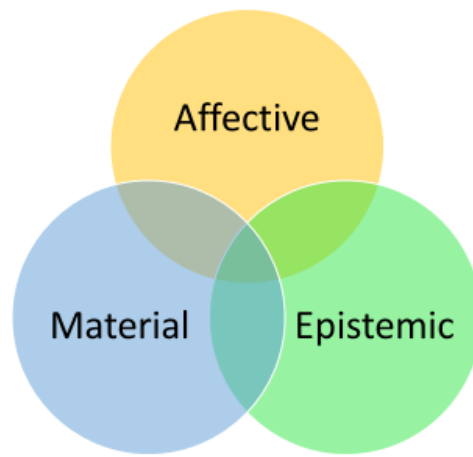
Drawing on insights from Neighborhood Story Project members, and integrating findings from other empirical work in gentrifying neighborhoods, the following pages offer a conceptual framework intended to be accessible and actionable for those theorizing—and responding to—gentrification’s effects within neighborhoods. As described in Chapter 3, Neighborhood Story Project team members raised *material* concerns related to housing and

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<sup>41</sup> An earlier version of this section is forthcoming as a chapter in the book *Urban renewal, community and participation: Theory, policy and practice*, edited by Julie Clark and Nicholas Wise (Thurber, in press).



changes in the built environment; *epistemic* concerns related to knowledge about, and the reputation of, their neighborhoods; and *affective* concerns related to changing relationships between people and place. These areas of concern offer a starting point to consider the multiple dimensions of neighborhoods that can be impacted by gentrification (see Figure 16).



*Figure 17.* Multiple dimensions of neighborhoods

In the interest of conceptual clarity, in the following sections I describe the material, epistemic, and affective dimensions of neighborhoods in turn, artificially teasing apart that which is entangled. In reality, if I am kept up at night filled with anxiety about whether I will be able to keep my home, hurt by neighbors who look at my children as if they are strangers on their own street, and long to see the face of a friend recently priced out of her nearby apartment, I will not experience these as distinctly material, epistemic, or affective or concerns. Thus, I close the chapter by returning to a call for considering neighborhoods holistically.

## Mapping Material Harms

On the most basic level, neighborhoods are places of residence (which may include houses, apartments, shelters, and homeless encampments). They are also a primary setting where people access resources and are exposed to environmental conditions—such as air and water quality—that impact health. The greater an individual’s economic resources, the less she must rely on her immediate neighborhood to meet her material needs. Conversely, the lesser an individual’s economic means, the more she needs her neighborhood to provide the resources needed for daily living. For low-income residents, gentrification can adversely impact the material conditions of life in terms of housing, resource access, and health risks.

**Housing instability.** When neighborhoods gentrify, the most obvious form of material harm is displacement. As property values increase, individual and corporate landlords may raise rents (Brookings Institution, 2001; Zuk et al, 2015) or stop traditional renting altogether in favor of short-term rentals targeting tourists (Lee, 2016). Increasingly, displaced residents must move away from the urban core to find affordable housing. This *suburbanization of poverty* can result in increased costs for the already cost-burdened; while housing costs may decrease, residents pushed away from the city may now spend more for transit to and from work, grocery stores and school (Brookings Institution, 2010). Even when neighborhood revitalization is designed to improve areas for some of the original residents, as the HOPE VI redevelopments of public housing in the 1990s claimed to do, the most vulnerable residents, such as those living with disabilities, were the most likely to be displaced (The Urban Institute, 2004).

For homeowners, rising neighborhood property values in turn increases property taxes (Brookings Institution, 2001; Zuk et al, 2015). In today’s economy, few people

experience correlating increases in wages. That said, low-wage workers and people living on fixed incomes are particularly affected by tax increases; indeed, members of the Edgehill Story Project interviewed neighbors whose property taxes had increased by nearly \$700 in just six years. The displacement of homeowners forced out by tax increases they cannot afford has a compounding generational effect. Traditionally, homeownership has been a critical avenue for American families to build wealth. Yet, through preferential lending to white people and predatory lending to people of color (versions of which continue to this day), the field of homeownership opportunities has been racially skewed to disproportionately benefit white people (Wyly, Ponder, Nettling, Po, Fung et al, 2012). As of 2011, the average white household had \$130,000 greater net worth than their black and latino counterparts, and the lack of homeownership is a significant cause of this glaring wealth gap (Shapiro, Meschede & Osoro, 2013).

Wealth has profound implications, allowing families of moderate income to help children through college, to make a down payment on a home, or to weather a period of unemployment or illness. As is the case in the Cleveland Park and Edgehill, many working-class neighborhoods experiencing gentrification today were once among the only locations in the city where people of color could own homes, and their residents were some of the first generations that did so. Given the legacy of restricted opportunities for wealth production in communities of color, the displacement of homeowners in gentrifying neighborhoods is particularly troubling, and has repercussions for the economic well-being of future generations.

**Loss of Neighborhood Resources.** In addition to residential displacement, local businesses and organizations may be displaced due to rising rents and property taxes,

reducing jobs for and amenities targeted to lower income residents (Brookings Institution, 2001). As Neighborhood Story Project members reported, new businesses may exclusively target (by price-point and types of products) middle and upper income residents, and lower-income residents will have to travel further to shop (Shaw & Hagemans, 2015). Other changes to the built environment may materially privilege newer residents, such as replacing street parking for historically black churches with bike lanes (Stein, 2015). Thus, even when residents do not lose their homes, they may lose access to other material resources in their communities.

**Health disparities.** Because of racial and class disparities in social and political power, an increase of white and/or higher income residents may increase the effectiveness of neighborhood efforts to improve safety. Some of these initiatives many have universal health benefits, such as environmental cleanup and safer roads. Yet, gentrification may also increase risks to health and safety for some residents. The Cleveland Park Story Project member who reported a white neighbor calling the police because they were concerned to see a black woman walking her dog in the neighborhood is not an anomaly. Gentrification has been correlated with increases in landlord surveillance (Stabrowski, 2014) and neighborhood policing (Smith, 2002). Given that on average, unarmed black men are 3.49 times more likely to be shot by police than of unarmed white residents (Ross, 2015), increased surveillance heightens risks of violence for black residents. In addition to the bodily harm or loss of life that may result from police violence, living with the threat of such violence increases stress, which has adverse health impacts on people of color (Paradies, 2006).

## Mapping Epistemic Harms

Neighborhoods also have an epistemic dimension in that they constitute a fundamental geographic scale in which people may come together to build and share knowledge, to participate in civic life, and—in the context of persistent racism—to imagine alternative ways of living.<sup>42</sup> As evidenced within the work of the Neighborhood Story Project, the epistemic terrain of gentrifying neighborhoods is shaped by what narratives of place are remembered and amplified, inequalities of who is known and knowable, and whose knowledge counts and is considered in shaping the future of a neighborhood.

**Dismissed knowledge and history.** Not everyone can be an expert in city planning or national economic policy. However, many people become resident experts of their own neighborhood. Some residents may serve as story-keepers, passing on tales of anchor families and businesses, beloved cultural spaces, and neighborhood turning points (such as the encroachment of a freeway or building of a new community center). Other residents gather to share insider knowledge about where they live: the best routes to travel at different times of the day, the names of the children on the block, and who in the neighborhood can help with car repair. These examples of knowledge production result from social and spatial interaction over time (Mills, 1988). Yet, gentrification alters neighborhood interactions.

As neighborhoods become occupied by people of different racial and economic backgrounds and life experiences, there is an increase in what social epistemologist Jose Medina (2013) terms *epistemic friction*. Such friction can be beneficial. When people of different backgrounds interact across difference, neighbors may be prompted to critically

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<sup>42</sup> This is not to say that neighbors are homogenous in what they know, the civic positions they take, or futures they imagine – but simply that neighborhoods are places where people engage epistemically.

reflect on their assumptions and develop greater insight. However, Medina cautions that friction can also be detrimental and result in “censoring, silencing, or inhibiting the formation of beliefs” (2013, p.50). In gentrifying neighborhoods, detrimental friction can manifest in the dismissal of longer-time residents as knowers. Public portrayals of lower income people and people of color as "the other" of society simultaneously perpetuates harmful stigma (Fraser, Burns, Bazuin, & Oakley, 2013) and creates conditions in which long-time residents are dismissed as having expertise about their own lived experiences (Thurber & Fraser, 2016).

This dismissal was reported by Neighborhood Story Project members, and has also emerged as a theme in other case studies of gentrifying neighborhoods. In Cahill’s participatory study of a gentrifying New York City neighborhood, one researcher reflected on how young women, such as herself, are ignored by society: “They’re just not considered. There’s no space made. They’re not considered for anything at all...They’re just there” (2007, p. 215). Similarly, in her study of a gentrifying neighborhood in Portland, Oregon, Drew offers the account of one black resident, who shares:

This neighborhood used to be ours, the one place I could go to escape the problems of being Black every day. And now when I come home, I am ignored by White adults and harassed by White kids, and I am made to feel like an outsider on my own block (2012, p. 110).

Not thought of, ignored, treated as outsiders: in gentrifying neighborhoods, this results in a blanket silencing of a large portion of residents, and concurrently, a loss of contemporary and historic knowledge.

It is worth noting that newer residents of gentrifying neighborhoods may not be consciously aware that they devalue the knowledge of their long-time neighbors. In fact, given that most people have been socialized into color-blind ideologies and thus trained not to see oppression, it is more likely that they do not recognize themselves as biased (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Nonetheless, studies are conclusive that most Americans—and a vast majority of whites—carry and act on implicit biases against people of color and other marginalized groups (Sue, 2010). In the context of knowledge claims, these biases result in newer residents discounting or dismissing the contributions of their longer-term neighbours.

**Marginalized from participation in civic life.** When some residents are dismissed as legitimate knowers, it follows that these same residents may be marginalized in, or excluded from, participation in civic life. Within the context of the Neighborhood Story Project, this marginalization was evidenced in the transformation of the Cleveland Park Neighborhood Association. During 2015, the association's membership went from nearly 75% black to less than 20% black, and ultimately the group fissured into two: one association focussed on the needs of the neighborhood's low-income, elderly, and predominantly black residents, and the other represented a newer, younger and whiter neighbourhood demographic (Gupta, 2017). A number of studies have documented the limited opportunity for poor people and people of color to be involved in shaping development within their neighborhoods, particularly in the context of public housing redevelopments (Bennett, 2000; Chaskin, Khare & Joseph, 2012; Duke, 2009; Fraser, 2004). When residents are able to participate, their engagement is often limited to giving input rather than having any actual decision-making authority. The more socially marginalized and economically vulnerable the residents—such as tenants of public housing—the more likely they will have to fight to have any role in the

public process (Thurber and Fraser, 2016). Even in settings that have the appearance of being democratically open (such as a neighborhood association), the perspectives of poor residents and residents of color may be so consistently ignored as to render that participation meaningless. Urban studies scholar Derek Hyra finds that this political displacement is not without consequence, cautioning that “the loss of political power among longstanding residents can lead to increased mistrust and civic withdrawal by low-income people, further exacerbating pre-existing social inequalities and isolation” (2013, p,125). In other words, marginalizing long-time residents from civic life threatens the efficacy of American democracy.

**Constrained spatial imaginaries.** As community psychologist Paul Dokecki writes, “...communities derive meaning from the narratives that community members tell themselves and others about their community’s history, traditions, current functioning, and future goals and aspirations” (2001, p.510). These narratives can also be understood as *spatial imaginaries*, which American Studies scholar George Lipsitz describes as a “metaphorical construction that reveals actual social relations” (2007, p. 13). These meanings are particularly important in Black and other communities of color where survival has depended on residents’ abilities to first imagine—and then build—places in which individuals, families, and communities might thrive (Collins, 1990; Lipsitz, 2011). Such has been the case in the Cleveland Park and Edgehill neighborhoods, as well as parts of the Stratford school zone, where collective memories of resilience and continued practices of imagining alternatives have been central to the advancement and uplift of black communities over generations.



Yet, gentrification constrains long-time residents' ability to both honor the memory of, or imagine and act towards alternatives in, their neighborhoods. As noted by Neighborhood Story Project team members who bristled at the neighbourhood "re-branding process," gentrification is frequently accompanied by political and social elites re-narrating historical meanings of the neighborhood (Chidester & Gadsby, 2016). From members' perspective, this rebranding relied on a false narrative of the past, a post facto territorial stigmatization (Wacquant, 2008) of their neighborhoods in order to naturalize redevelopment as beneficial. Other forms of symbolic erasures in gentrifying neighborhoods might manifest as the changing of place-names (Hodkinson & Esson, 2015), or—as described previously—the absence of black people from a promotional video marketing a housing development in a historically black neighborhood (Trageser, 2015).

### **Mapping Affective Harms**

In addition to having material and epistemic dimensions, neighborhoods are affectively charged. Residents attach range of emotions to their neighborhood, including feelings of belonging and connection to people and to the place itself, both of which are central to individual and collective well-being (Manzo & Perkins, 2006). Clearly, many people access social connections outside of their immediate neighborhoods. However, the less financial resources, transportation, or technology access one has, the more important proximal relations are to well-being. The significance of these relationships was introduced in Chapter 1, as it formed the theoretical basis for the design of the Neighborhood Story Project. Gentrification can damage social ties and place attachments.

**Diminished social bonds and sense of belonging.** Echoing the strong ties reported by members of the Neighborhood Story Project, a number of case studies of low-income

communities find that residents often have strong interpersonal networks within their neighborhoods (Darcy, 2013; Hodkinson, 2015). Yet, as low-income residents are priced out of neighborhoods, gentrification disrupts these relationships, increasing social isolation, and limiting the possibilities of collective action (Clampet-Lundquist, 2010; Marcuse, 1985). While in theory, new social ties could be established between older and newer residents, in practice they rarely do.

The concerns expressed by Neighborhood Story Project members over diminished social ties are supported by a significant body of research on social interactions within mixed-income developments. A review of this research found that proximity alone does not foster interaction across group lines (Thurber, Boehmann & Heflinger, 2017). Further, intergroup relationships are hampered by the biases of higher income residents and/or property managers toward low-income neighbors (Fraser, Burns, Bazuin & Oakley, 2013). In a survey of 31 mixed-housing developments across the U.S. and Canada, 61% of property managers (or respondents with comparable knowledge of the development) expressed high agreement with the statement “Effectively managing the social relations is an important issue for the long-term future of this development,” with only 6% strongly agreeing that “social relations at this development will take care of themselves” (National Initiative on Mixed-Income Communities, 2013). Although prejudices may be multi-directional (older residents may carry assumptions about newer residents, for example), newer, wealthier, and whiter residents often wield greater power to translate their beliefs into behaviors that can harm their neighbors.

As described previously, these behaviors might manifest institutionally in the marginalization of poor neighbors from participation in the civic life of the neighborhood.

On the level on individual interactions, biases may manifest as micro-aggressions—such as receiving suspicious looks from white residents while walking in the neighborhood (as described by Neighborhood Story Project members). As another example, a recent analysis of one gentrifying neighborhood in Nashville, Tennessee found a significant uptick in residents reporting their neighbors to the city for codes violations, such as having high grass, or cars parked on lawns (Gupta, 2015). More concerning are calls to the police in gentrifying neighborhoods (Cahill, 2007; Smith, 2002), which, as previously discussed, can put residents of color at greater bodily risk. Yet, in addition to the material consequences, these ostensibly singular acts—suspicious looks, reporting code violations, calls to the police—compound to create hostile climates for long-time residents, and can have measurable physical and mental health effects on people of color (Sue, 2010).

**Lost sense of place.** When Ms. Mary of the Edgehill Story Project painfully described feeling like her neighborhood was becoming “an empty shell,” she was speaking of a lost sense of place. Psychiatrist Mindy Fullilove, who studies the relationship between the environment and mental health, poignantly describes the individual and collective trauma black communities experienced as a result of the Urban Renewal projects that decimated their neighborhoods in the 1950s, writing:

...buildings, neighborhoods, cities, nations—are not simply bricks and mortar that provide us shelter. Because we dance in a ballroom, have a parade in the street, make love in a bedroom, prepare a feast in the kitchen, each of these places becomes imbued with sounds, smells, noises, and feelings of those moments and how we lived them (2004, p. 10)

Fullilove finds that black communities targeted by Urban Renewal experienced *root shock*, a “traumatic stress reaction to the destruction of all or part of one’s emotional ecosystem” (2004, p.11). Her research suggests this trauma is experienced inter-generationally, and whether or not black residents of gentrifying urban communities lived through Urban Renewal, they may remain affected by the shock of earlier displacements.

In this context, outrage over gentrification as a perceived threat to the well-being of communities of color can be understood as historically accurate and psychologically predictable: a trauma-response to the prospect of another uprooting. Though Fullilove focussed her study on historically black neighborhoods, case studies in other settings echo the conclusion that history and context powerfully shape residents’ experiences of gentrification. For example, Blomley (2015) finds that indigenous activists in Vancouver, B.C. draw on the legacies of colonization and land theft in protesting gentrification. Similarly, and in a study of Huntington Park, Chicago, a historically Puerto Rican neighborhood, Nam concludes that:

gentrification was regarded as a serious attempt to demolish their ethnic identity and presence in U.S. mainstream society...preserving Huntington Park was about more than simply occupying a physical space. It strongly symbolized resistance to U.S. colonialism and actualization of Puerto Rican independence in the community (2012, p. 69).

As these examples illustrate, places are affectively charged, and gentrification can harm long-time resident’s place attachments, even when they remain in place as the neighborhood around them changes (Drew, 2012; Hodkinson & Essin, 2015; Marcuse, 1985; Shaw 2015; Stabrowski, 2014).

Clearly not all long-time residents have strong ties to their neighbors and/or their neighborhood, nor are those ties always positive (see Martin, 2005). Cahill (2007), for example, finds that young women of color in a gentrifying New York City neighborhood were attached, though not sentimental, toward the often-challenging conditions of their childhood. Yet place attachments need not be positive to be powerful, and it is critical to not underestimate the affective impacts of neighborhood change for those whose roots are laid in place.

### **The Hands, Head, and Heart of Neighborhoods**

In bringing the material, epistemic, and affective dimensions of neighborhoods back together (See Figure 17), several points are worth underscoring. First, these three dimensions are mutually constituted: what we materially experience, know, and feel are bound together, held, like the hands, heads, and hearts, in one body.<sup>43</sup> The material experience of having (or not having) a secure place to live cannot be disconnected from what we know about that place, and how we feel about ourselves, our neighbors and our neighborhood.

Second, gentrification can cause harms in any of these dimensions, in combination or in isolation. Residential displacement is clearly one of gentrification's most serious harms, yet it is not the only harm. Residents may mourn the loss of housing *as well as* a loss of relationships and sense of community. Further, residents do not have to be physically

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<sup>43</sup> Note, though this metaphor has been used by a number of scholars, I first encountered it in a reference to a text written by Anthony Kelly and Sandra Sewell (1988), titled "With head, heart and hand: Dimensions of Community Building," now out of print.

displaced to be epistemically or affectively harmed, to lose their place as knowledgeable and known, or to lose their relationships to neighbors and their sense of place.

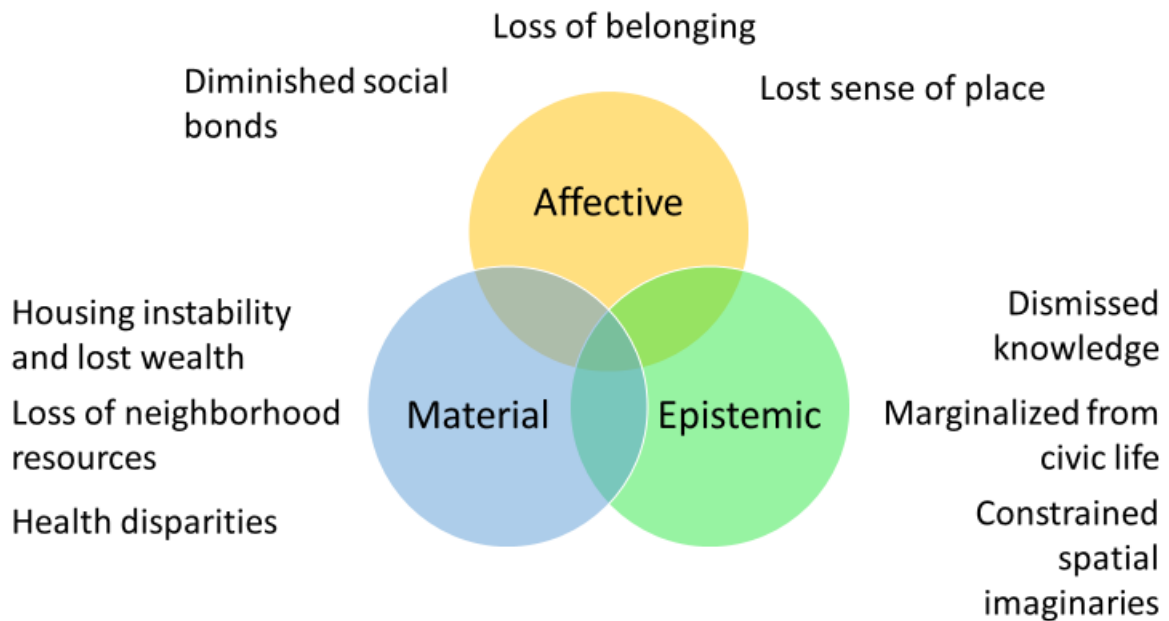


Figure 18. Mapping possible consequences of gentrification

Third, residents are differentially impacted by, and they differentially rely upon, their neighborhoods. As such, not all long-term residents of gentrifying neighborhoods will experience *all* of these harms explored above, or *only* these harms, or experience these harms *in the same way*. Thus, I am not contending a set of universal effects of gentrification, but rather suggesting that when we do not reduce gentrification's effects to a loss of housing, we open up the conceptual space to inquire more broadly into how residents *might* be experiencing gentrification.

Finally, in highlighting the material, epistemic, and affective dimensions of neighborhoods, I am not suggesting these are the only dimensions.<sup>44</sup> My broader contention is that we apply a “more than material” framework to understand and intervene in neighborhoods, particularly those experiencing or vulnerable to gentrification. While I traced some of the practice and policy implications of taking a more than material perspective in the preceding chapter, suffice it to say that broadening the sphere of inquiry opens new possibilities for how we might respond to gentrification’s effects.

Given the affordable housing crisis gripping much of the country, some might find it unwise to broaden theorizing of gentrification’s harms beyond the scope of housing needs. There may be concern that doing so distracts attention away from meeting the basic needs of shelter for the most vulnerable among us while offering an ‘easy out’ by suggesting what some might cast as superficial feel-good alternatives to building affordable housing, such as interventions directed at strengthening relationships. In response, I would reinforce that the more than material framework proposed here is additive in nature. I am suggesting that we widen the lens of what is seen in gentrifying neighborhoods—to take seriously the concerns of residents like Ms. Betty, Ms. Andrea, and Jaime—in addition to, not in the place of, the need for housing. Furthermore, the affective and epistemic work required in gentrifying neighborhoods may be less financially costly than building housing, but it would be naïve to consider the work easy. Intergroup biases and deeply embedded relationships of inequality are among the most pernicious problems of our time. Challenging the legacies of systemic racism and classism which continue to shape the material, epistemic and affective terrain of

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<sup>44</sup> For example, I considered including a social dimension, and concluded that the material, epistemic and affective dimensions of neighborhoods are enacted through social practices—the social is not distinct from, but rather an expression of, the other dimensions. One might also consider adding the political, which closely relates to how I construct the epistemic dimension, and/or the cultural, which relates to how I construct the affective dimension.

gentrifying neighborhoods will take investment and innovation. Finally, just because we have not yet met the need for shelter does not mean we should refrain from advocating for something more than housing. Geographer David Pinder encourages us to continue imagining “a better way of being and living” while also using these utopian visions as “social and political criticism, questioning aspects of the present, bearing witness to and pressing home the sense that something is missing from conditions and should be the basis for struggles” (2002, p. 237). Thus, I am intentionally aspirational when suggesting that we attend to more than material dimensions of well-being, while recognizing that, in Nashville alone, 118 homeless people died in 2017 (Marshall, 2017), and a loss of affordable housing displaced countless others. The need for housing is urgent, and for far too many, does not come soon enough.

A holistic understanding of gentrification does not subjugate the need for housing, but it does require that we more fully consider the humanity of those inhabiting gentrifying neighborhoods. Critical race theorist Christopher Lebron considers this a matter of justice, arguing for a “mode of ethical inquiry...that is motivated by the moral urgency of *experienced* injustice” (emphasis added, 2008, p. 127). Indeed, the injustice of gentrification is not simply a matter of an unfair distribution of material goods (Young 1990). Gentrification is experienced—materially, affectively, and epistemically—by human beings. When we understand that the experience of injustice may be in part, though never exclusively, ‘material’, we are compelled, in Lebron’s words:

to be attentive to the moral salience of persons’ shared capacity for pain, love, longing for respect, for experiencing destabilizing disappointment, and a wide range of other fundamentally human responses to the world (2014, p. 127).



Although Lebron's work is driven by a particular concern for an ethical framework that addresses the fullness racial inequality, his call for a more deeply humanistic ethics has resonance within a love-driven politics that is woven across history, faith traditions, social movements, and throughout many caring professions (Dokecki, 1992; Freire, 1998; Palmer, 2007). Love-driven politics seek justice by increasing our collective capacity to recognize and respond to one another's humanity. As sociologist Mordechai Rimor explains:

because we do not act lovingly toward one another, we use laws and constitutions as obligatory road signs, which guide our behavior towards our fellow persons. We endlessly pile laws upon laws in order to catch the ever-flowing varieties of our behaviors in a positive fashion...They direct us to behave toward our neighbors 'as if we love them. However, intimate friendship makes justice redundant, and generosity makes justice unnecessary. If we were to love our fellow persons, no laws, judging, police, jails, or armies would be necessary. Justice would necessarily prevail (2003, p. 170).

Put simply, we protect, nurture, and invest in what we value deeply. Recognizing that just social arrangements naturally follow from care, a love-driven politics takes seriously the challenge to create opportunities for people to come to know and care for one another and the places they live.

Although a love-driven politics has not fully found its way into the gentrification literature, traces have appeared within urban planning. In 2012, the *Journal of Planning Theory and Practice* carried a provocative collection of essays under the title, 'What's love got to do with it?' within which urban scholars Zitcer and Lake asked, "what might it mean for a planner to love the people and communities that are the subject of planning?" (2012,

p.606). At the very least, to love people and communities that are experiencing or vulnerable to gentrification is to care for all aspects of their well-being, and to honor residents' desire to keep more than just their homes.

### **Integrating the Who and How of Theorizing Gentrification**

Residents of gentrifying neighborhoods have a right to produce knowledge about their lives. This is what Appaduri (2006) has called 'a right to research', and what Freire termed, "a right to know more better what they already know" (1990, p.157). Engaging in inquiry into and analysis of social problems can be empowering. A year after the Neighborhood Story Project ended, I sent a draft of this manuscript for team members to read, provide comment on, or review with me in person. Ms. TK opted to meet with me and read through the text together. Before we had cracked open the binder to begin, Ms. TK asked, "You're gonna tell them about everything we figured out, about everything we're losing over here, right? About how I'm having to *know* my neighborhood all over again?" Long after the project had ended, the *theorizing* endured, it mattered to Ms. TK, and continued to motivate her to stay involved in her community. The process of theorizing can be an intervention in and of itself, both individually—as reflected by Ms. TK—and collectively, as it was leveraged by the Edgehill Story Project to mobilize communities, by the Cleveland Park Story Project to foster relationships of care for people and places, and by the Stratford Story Project to transform narratives of place.

I am not (yet) suggesting that every research question must be answered collaboratively, or that all theorizing must be a joint venture. However, it seems to me that if the question is related to how gentrification is experienced and the possibilities for mitigating/resisting/thwarting gentrification in neighborhoods, to proceed in the absence of

meaningful collaboration with those directly affected is unethical. This is not to say that academic researchers do not have important tools to bring to bear. We invariably do, including: training in methods of inquiry that can assist communities in investigating social problems, content expertise that may help residents make connections between local experiences and broader patterns and trends, and institutional resources to invest in community change efforts. Nonetheless, those who study gentrification's effects are obligated, as a matter of research validity and a matter of justice, to meaningfully engage with the people living those effects.

Engaged scholarship took a particular form with the Neighborhood Story Project, but it is certainly not the only form. There is a rich tradition to draw from historically and globally, and a preponderance of new analytics and technologies emerging daily. Most importantly, let us reimagine research as a process for residents to coproduce knowledge about, and take action in, the places they call home. And let researchers reimagine our role as facilitators in processes of social inquiry which help communities become curious about social conditions, study their environment, and better their neighborhoods. Ultimately, democratizing spaces of knowledge production will help us to better understand and more effectively intervene in gentrifying neighborhoods.

## EPILOGUE

As the facilitator of the Neighborhood Story Project, I was frequently struck by how little team members needed from me to achieve their goals: they did not need a facilitator to spark their curiosity or desire to affect change; most team members entered the project already invested in their neighborhoods, and compelled to make a difference. Yet members highly valued being part of a facilitated process. Broadly, the Neighborhood Story Project facilitated engagement by offering an intervention that was accessible to residents with varying skills and abilities, required a manageable investment of time, and was action-oriented. The overall project curriculum facilitated goal-accomplishment by providing the necessary scaffolding for each team to move from ideas to action, while being flexible enough to be adapted to each group's distinct interests. And the finer grain aspects of facilitation—the micro activities and prompts—created a learning, caring and empowering environment within which participants were able to educate themselves and others, build meaningful relationships, and intervene in their neighborhoods.

Although all neighborhoods need facilitation to organize for change, not all need outside facilitators to do so. One evening soon after the Neighborhood Story Project wrapped up, I happened to tune my radio into The Moth—true stories told live—to hear Aaron Naparstek recount the story of honku (<https://themoth.org/stories/honku>). After months of working from his home-office on the third floor of a Brooklyn apartment, Aaron lost his cool over the incessant honking from the intersection below. Realizing the need to find a productive outlet for his increasing distress, he made a decision. Whenever he found himself agitated by the honking, “I decide to sort of sit down, take a deep breath, and observe the honking on Clinton Street. And then I take those observations, and I start

boiling them down into three-line, twelve-syllable, 5-7-5 haiku poems. And I call them honku.” He found the process therapeutic, and then began to share his honku, sneaking out one night each week to tape copies of honku to lampposts up and down Clinton Street. A month into what he calls his “honking therapy regimen,” he was greeted late one night by a neighbor who excitedly referred to him as “the bard of Clinton Street.” She shared that her family—also exasperated by the honking—loved his work, and that her daughters had started writing honku. Indeed, seeing other honku taped to lampposts, Aaron realized there were others in his neighborhood with shared concerns.

Aaron decided to add a website to the bottom of his next honku—[www.honku.org](http://www.honku.org)—on which he created a message board called ‘the lamppost.’ Within days, dozens of neighbors had posted—sharing concerns, trading honku, suggesting solutions—and Aaron invited them to an in-person meeting. One Saturday, a dozen neighbors who had never met before gathered on his stoop. Realizing the city had a ‘no honking’ ordinance, they decided to take action. Aaron made up letterhead for ‘the honku organization,’ and they sent letters to their city council leaders and attended community meetings. Eventually Aaron’s city council representative took the group’s case to the local precinct, and the police agreed to a three-week blitz enforcement of the no-honking ordinance. Officers took to the streets, talking to people in cars, and alerting them of the neighborhood concerns about honking.

Aaron acknowledges, tongue in cheek, “the honku organization—I’ll just be honest with you—we did not accomplish our ultimate mission of ending horn-honking in New York City. Like, that battle is still there to be fought for someone else.” But, they did stay involved—with each other and with their neighborhood—and went on to make tangible improvements for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users. As he concludes:

the real success though, of honku...was just that, when I was walking down Clinton Street, and when my neighbors were walking down Clinton Street, instead of sort of being in our little bubbles of honk-anger, we started talking to each other, we were really trying to fix something. Clinton Street wasn't just a street anymore; it was a neighborhood.

Though the concerns on Clinton Street are a bit afield from those of the Neighborhood Story Project, aspects of the intervention are the same—bringing people together to give and receive support, build a collective understanding of their problems, and organize for solutions. And, Aaron's story serves as a reminder that neighborhoods are full of people with creativity and frustrations and skills to contribute. Clinton Street did not need a social worker, community psychologist, community organizer, or neighborhood association to facilitate their work together—they had the Bard of Clinton Street. But there are neighborhoods where outside facilitators can be helpful—neighborhoods that are also full of people with creativity and frustrations and skills, though perhaps not the skill of facilitation. And these are important places for those of us working in communities to engage, particularly when issues of equity and well-being are at stake.

There is no doubt that neighborhoods are often the landscape within which racial and economic disparities take root. Gentrification exacerbates these injustices, disproportionately making poor people and people of color vulnerable to a wide range of losses that threaten well-being. Yet, these neighborhoods can also be viewed as sites of resistance and positive transformation. When community practitioners explicitly engage the more than material—through a Neighborhood Story Project, honku, and more—we open up possibilities for responding to place-based injustice, including those related to

gentrification. As I learned from Larry, with whom I began my journey through the Neighborhood Story Project, “every neighborhood has a soul, and we’re all part of that soul, part of keeping it alive. If I know you, and I care about you, then I can’t let something bad happen to you and not respond.” Ultimately, it is up to all of us to expand the ways that community members might come to know, care for, and fight on behalf of one another, and the places we call home.

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Appendix A. National policy reports on gentrification: Identified harms and recommended strategies

	The Brookings Institution (2001).	The Urban Institute (2006).	Mallach (2008). National Housing Institute.	Urban Land Institute (2007).	Neighbor-Works America (2005).
<b>Identified Harms of Gentrification</b>					
Resident displacement					
Loss of future affordable housing					
Cost burden current residents					
Loss of local businesses					
Decreased civic participation					
Conflicts over history, values and meaning					
Social conflicts					
<b>Primary Strategies Recommended</b>					
Affordable housing production					
Affordable housing retention					
Asset-building					
Inclusive planning					
Community organizing					
Conflict resolution					
Community building					

## Appendix B. Neighborhood Story Project: Curriculum summary

### **Week 1:** Introduction to project, group and neighborhood

- Introduction to project
- Participatory mapping of neighborhood boundaries (group brainstorm and charting)
- Asset mapping of members (personal reflection and group brainstorm)

### **Week 2:** Mapping the neighborhood

- Creation of neighborhood timeline (group brainstorm and charting)
- Reflections on personal experience of neighborhood (personal reflection handout)
- Analysis of dominant narratives of neighborhood (pairs news article analysis)

### **Week 3:** Developing research agenda

- Generating questions about neighborhood (individual reflection, pairs, group brainstorm)
- Developing research identities (group discussion)
- Selecting guiding questions (group decision-making)

### **Week 4:** Building research plan and skills

- Developing research plan (small group work)
- Peer interviews (pairs)

### **Week 5-8:** Concurrent data collection, analysis, and imagining action

- Data Collection: walking tours, visit to archives, interviews, photovoice, etc. (Individual and group work)
- Data analysis (pair and group work)
- Brainstorm actions and disseminations (group brainstorming)

### **Week 9:** Action decision-making

- Select final actions and disseminations (group decision-making)

### **Weeks 10-12:** Action planning and implementation

- Create needed materials
- Identify additional resources and expertise
- Promotion and outreach

### **Public, culminating community event**

## Appendix C. Focus group guide

1. It seems important for us to come back together to celebrate and reflect on our work together, and to take note of key learnings from the process. Let's start with talking about what worked best. What were the successes from our action?
  - a. Were there any surprises?
  - b. What would you have liked more or less of?
  - c. If we were going to do something similar in the future, what would you recommend doing differently?
2. Thinking back on the project overall, what-if anything- do you think you gained?
3. What was most rewarding about the process?
4. What was most challenging?
5. What would have strengthened the project overall?
6. Coming out of this work together, are there ways you want to keep any of this learning, relationships, or action moving forward? If so, what might that look like?
7. Is there anything else you all think we should reflect on together?

## Appendix D. Interview guide

1. Why did you choose to participate in the Story Project?
2. What did you expect or hope to gain from participating?
3. Was there anything you hoped to be able to give or share through your participation?
4. Did you have any concerns about participating?
5. Did you know other participants before the project started?
  - a. What were your relationships like before the project started?
6. Thinking back on the project, are there specific moments that jump out as significant to you personally – in terms of your own experience or the work of the group?
7. What was most rewarding about the project for you personally?
8. What was most challenging?
9. When you think back on the group of neighbors that participated, do you think that being part of the project effected people’s sense of their neighbors and/or neighborhood?
  - a. If so, how? If not, why might that have been?
10. What about for you personally - do you think participating changed the way you think or feel about your neighborhood?
  - a. If so, how? If not, why might that have been?
11. When you were part of the Story Project, what did you hope the broader neighborhood would gain from your work?
12. What is your sense of the actual effects - intended and unintended?
13. Have you had any contact lately with other members of the project?
  - a. What are your relationships like these days?
14. Do you think that being part of the project effected the way people’s behaviors – the way they interact with one another, participate in neighborhood activities, or other kinds of behaviors?
15. Has the work you all started led to any other kinds of activity or plans in the neighborhood?
16. Is there anything else you’d like to add?

## Appendix E. Codebook

### Code frequencies

1 Affective codes	
1.1 limited agency/hope	2
1.2 heavy/angry	3
1.3 sad	12
1.4 enjoyment/pleasure	36
1.5 excited	117
2 Project limitations	
2.1 conflicting views of place	4
2.2 length of project	2
2.3 CBO partner expectations	6
2.4 missing stories	9
2.5 limited ongoing contact- members	6
2.6 limited ongoing contact -neighbors	1
2.7 limited reach of project	9
3 What members brought	
3.1 limitations	
3.1.1 follow through	1
3.1.2 learning new terms and concepts	1
3.1.3 getting there	1
3.1.4 technology access	3
3.1.5 difficulty reading	6
3.1.6 dominance	7
3.1.7 limited time	15
3.1.8 limited past involvement	2
3.1.9 reticence	2
3.1.10 anxiety working with adults	2
3.2 strengths	
3.2.1 historian	1
3.2.2 desire to take action	5
3.2.3 experience with other organizing	9
3.2.4 responsibility	28
3.2.5 Place attachment	58
3.2.6 Place history	37
3.2.7 desire to learn	12
3.2.8 social ties	22
3.3 concerns	
3.3.1 Epistemic	
3.3.1.1 misrepresentation	22
3.3.1.2 lost place knowledge/history	13
3.3.2 Affective	
3.3.2.1 lack of community cohesion	32

3.3.2.2 lack of place attachment	8
3.3.2.3 humanity/interdependence	13
3.3.2.4 disrespect from new residents	5
3.3.3 material	
3.3.3.1 exclusion	5
3.3.3.2 privilege certain social class	4
3.3.3.3 homelessness	5
3.3.3.4 need for opportunity	1
3.3.3.5 changes to built environment	15
3.3.3.5.1 gathering places	3
3.3.3.6 loss of housing	28
3.3.3.7 profit driven development	15
3.3.3.8 corporate landlords	2
3.3.4 youth well-being	12
3.3.4.1 school quality	6
3.3.5 participation	10
3.3.6 inheritance/legacy	5
3.3.7 racial struggle	11
3.3.8 safety	12
3.3.9 elders' well-being	16
4 project design and facilitation	
4.1 activities	
4.1.1 appreciations	19
4.1.2 listening	24
4.1.3 final product creation	3
4.1.4 mapping neighborhood	1
4.1.5 small group work	2
4.1.6 mapping concerns	2
4.1.7 new and goods	5
4.1.8 member asset mapping	10
4.1.9 contrasting narratives	4
4.1.10 timeline	6
4.2 design and facilitation strengths	
4.2.1 provide structure	9
4.2.2 foster relationships	7
4.2.3 member self-check	2
4.2.4 tapping existing knowledge	9
4.2.5 considering other perspectives	2
4.2.6 critical reflection	32
4.2.6.1 equity lens	15
4.2.7 encouraging participation	5
4.2.8 synthesis	2
4.2.9 facilitator transparency	1
4.2.10 member encouragement	5
4.2.11 Different from other groups/mtgs	13



4.2.12 snacks	1
4.2.13 bringing in expert	2
4.2.14 financial incentive	5
4.2.15 diverse participants	2
4.2.16 press coverage	1
4.2.17 closure/termination	1
4.2.18 building shared analysis	26
4.2.19 preparing materials/systems	28
4.2.20 encouraging leadership	26
4.2.21 building research skills	19
4.2.22 co-researcher	5
4.3 design and facilitation challenge	
4.3.1 facilitator bias	3
4.3.2 healthy skepticism of project	6
4.3.3 time constraints	7
4.3.4 managing conflict	2
4.3.5 too ambitious/unclear facilitation	12
4.3.6 balance leading and seeding	15
4.3.6.1 Facilitator dominance	6
4.3.7 independent v. collaborative	6
4.3.8 inconsistent membership	9
4.3.9 dominant behaviors	6
4.4 turning point	5
5 member outcomes	
5.1 racial equity lens	3
5.2 improved mental health/wellbeing	6
5.3 sense of responsibility to community	6
5.4 hope	9
5.5 learning	149
5.5.1 group facilitation skills	7
5.5.2 place learning/knowledge	75
5.5.2.1 past/present	17
5.5.2.2 reframe	4
5.5.3 learning about spatial processes	33
5.5.4 learning process for research & action	44
5.6 belief project will spark change	43
5.7 increased stress/crisis	14
5.8 increased self-efficacy	88
5.8.1 mastery	9
5.8.2 pride	38
5.9 Project-based collective action	143
5.10 commitment long-term collective action	37
5.11 engaged elders	7
5.12 capacity for individual action	34
5.12.1 desire to continue research	6

5.13 desire for more community building	8
5.14 Social cohesion	158
5.15 fostered place attachment	36
6 community outcomes	
6.1 tool for education	5
6.2 awareness of resources	1
6.3 empowered others	3
6.4 strengthened community collaboration	2
6.5 social responsibility	4
6.6 change narrative	2
6.7 tool for organizing	12
6.8 fostered place education/attachment	20
6.9 Community cohesion	15

### Code descriptions

#### 1 Affective codes

codes when feeling words used to describe group experience

##### 1.1 limited agency/hope

limited agency of residents to affect change in face of development

##### 1.2 heavy/angry

heavy

##### 1.3 sad

sad

##### 1.4 enjoyment/pleasure

members express nonspecific enjoyment in participation

##### 1.5 excited

excited

#### 2 Project limitations

Intervention limitations

##### 2.1 conflicting views of place

conflicting views of place

##### 2.2 length of project

project too short

##### 2.3 CBO partner expectations

Tension between project goals and CBO partner expectations

##### 2.4 missing stories

Story Project not exhaustive or complete.

2.5 limited ongoing contact- members

Story Project members do not sustain relationships after project

2.6 limited ongoing contact -neighbors

Story Project members do not have increased contact with neighbors after project

2.7 limited reach of project

Story Project may not reach people beyond members

### 3 What members brought

Strengths, concerns, resources, limitations members brought to project

3.1 limitations

Member identified limitations/challenges in participating

3.1.1 follow through

follow through

3.1.2 learning new terms and concepts

learning new terms and concepts

3.1.3 getting there

challenge getting to mtg

3.1.4 technology access

no computer access, limited skills

3.1.5 difficulty reading

difficulty reading

3.1.6 dominance

patterns of internalized dominance

3.1.7 limited time

Limited time to participate/contribute

3.1.8 limited past involvement

Limited past involvement in community

3.1.9 reticence

Member reticence to get involved

3.1.10 anxiety working with adults

youth anxiety working with adults

### 3.2 strengths

#### Member strengths

3.2.1 historian  
historian

3.2.2 desire to take action  
orientation towards action

3.2.3 experience with other organizing  
experience with other community organizing, neighborhood leadership

3.2.4 responsibility  
sense of responsibility to community/desire to help community

3.2.5 Place attachment  
member attachment to place

3.2.6 Place history  
Member knowledge of place history

3.2.7 desire to learn  
member desire to learn

3.2.8 social ties  
member existing social ties

### 3.3 concerns

#### member expressed concerns about community

3.3.1 Epistemic  
concerns related to what is known about neighbors/neighborhood, civic knowledge (and action)

3.3.1.1 misrepresentation  
concern about stigma/representation of community

3.3.1.2 lost place knowledge/history  
Concern with loss of place knowledge

3.3.2 Affective  
Concerns related to feelings about people, place

3.3.2.1 lack of community cohesion  
concern with weak social ties within community

### 3.3.2.2 lack of place attachment

Lack/lost sense of community and responsibility to place

### 3.3.2.3 humanity/interdependence

concern that losing sense of responsibility and care to collective, sense of humanity

### 3.3.2.4 disrespect from new residents

newcomers don't share place history, values

## 3.3.3 material

changes related to housing and the built environment

### 3.3.3.1 exclusion

being left out of development, neighborhood, community

### 3.3.3.2 privilege certain social class

building for certain group

### 3.3.3.3 homelessness

homelessness

### 3.3.3.4 need for opportunity

opportunity for work, personal advancement in neighborhood

### 3.3.3.5 changes to built environment

concerns about the built environment

#### 3.3.3.5.1 gathering places

concern about maintaining community spaces

### 3.3.3.6 loss of housing

concern of people being displaced-by loss of affordable housing, in past by urban renewal,

### 3.3.3.7 profit driven development

working with developers, process of development

### 3.3.3.8 corporate landlords

corporate landlords

## 3.3.4 youth wellbeing

Well being of youth in community

### 3.3.4.1 school quality

desire to see school quality improve

3.3.5 participation

desire to see increased community member participation

3.3.6 inheritance/legacy

concern with preserving the legacy of a place, idea of inheritance to pass on

3.3.7 racial struggle

concern about racial inequities, biases, and divides

3.3.8 safety

concern regarding safety of neighborhood

3.3.9 elders' well being

concern for impact of changing neighborhood on elders

4 project design and facilitation

strengths, challenges, and lessons learned re: facilitation of the project

4.1 activities

key activities

4.1.1 appreciations

appreciation activities

4.1.2 listening

listening activities

4.1.3 final product creation

final product creation

4.1.4 mapping neighborhood

mapping neighborhood

4.1.5 small group work

small group work

4.1.6 mapping concerns

mapping concerns

4.1.7 news and goods

news and goods

4.1.8 member asset mapping

mapping skills, talents, resources members bring

4.1.9 contrasting narratives  
contrasting narratives activity

4.1.10 timeline  
timeline activity

4.2 design and facilitation strengths  
strengths in facilitation

4.2.1 provide structure  
provide structure

4.2.2 foster relationships  
practices to build relationships

4.2.3 member self-check  
member self-check on participation to create space for others

4.2.4 tapping existing knowledge  
mapping/tapping existing knowledge

4.2.5 considering other perspectives  
considering other perspectives, reevaluating assumptions

4.2.6 critical reflection  
fostering critical reflection re: self, neighbors, neighborhood; making  
connections between personal experience and patterns/trends

4.2.6.1 equity lens  
bringing racial equity lens into dialogue

4.2.7 encouraging participation  
encouraging member participation

4.2.8 synthesis  
bringing threads of ideas together, restating participants' comments

4.2.9 facilitator transparency  
sharing own commitments, values, struggles

4.2.10 member encouragement  
member encouragement of facilitation

4.2.11 Different from other groups/meetings

difference of NSP

4.2.12 snacks

snacks

4.2.13 bringing in expert

bringing in expert

4.2.14 financial incentive

financial incentive

4.2.15 diverse participants

diverse participants

4.2.16 press coverage

press coverage

4.2.17 closure/termination

preparing for group to end

4.2.18 building shared analysis

co-educational process of building a shared analysis , popular education

4.2.19 preparing materials/systems

facilitator outside work preparing materials and/or systems for group

4.2.20 encouraging leadership

practices that encourage member leadership within group

4.2.21 building research skills

activities to develop research skills and comfort

4.2.22 co-researcher

impact of co-researcher on project

4.3 design and facilitation challenge

facilitation challenges

4.3.1 facilitator bias

bias toward group members

4.3.2 healthy skepticism of project

healthy skepticism of project

4.3.3 time constraints

not enough time for research



4.3.4 managing conflict  
managing conflict among members

4.3.5 too ambitious/unclear facilitation  
planning too much material

4.3.6 balance leading and seeding  
balancing taking leadership/making decisions/creating materials, and  
facilitation discussion, decision making and creation by members

4.3.6.1 Facilitator dominance  
Facilitator privilege, internalized dominance, bias

4.3.7 independent v. collaborative  
managing members pull towards working independently

4.3.8 inconsistent membership/engagement  
keeping missing members engaged

4.3.9 dominant behaviors  
responding (or not) to silencing, marginalization, etc. within group

4.4 turning point  
turning point in work of group

5 member outcomes  
outcomes for Story Project participants

5.1 racial equity lens  
racial equity lens

5.2 improved mental health/wellbeing  
improved mental health/wellbeing

5.3 sense of responsibility to community  
fostered greater responsibility to people in community

5.4 hope  
increased hope

5.5 learning  
significant member-identified learning outcomes

5.5.1 group facilitation skills  
group facilitation skills

5.5.2 place learning/knowledge  
learning about place/neighborhood

5.5.2.1 past/present  
understanding present through past

5.5.2.2 reframe  
reframing dominant narrative of place

5.5.3 learning about spatial processes  
fostered learning about spatial processes (ie. gentrification, development,  
etc.)- rather than knowledge about a specific place

5.5.4 learning process for research and action  
members appreciate process to research and action

5.6 belief project will spark change  
belief project will spark change

5.7 increased stress/crisis  
project-induced crisis, increased stress, vulnerability, hopelessness

5.8 increased self-efficacy  
Member identified personal growth/leadership development through participation

5.8.1 mastery  
skill development

5.8.2 pride  
member reported pride in project

5.9 Project-based collective action  
member taking action outside of group time

5.10 commitment to long-term collective action  
member identified increased capacity and/or desire for collective action

5.11 engaged elders  
engaged elders

5.12 capacity for individual action  
member identified increased capacity and/or desire for additional individual action

5.12.1 desire to continue research  
member expressed desire to continue research as a mode of action

5.13 desire for more community building  
member expressed desire for more social cohesion

5.14 Social cohesion  
intra-group relationships

5.15 fostered place attachment  
fostered place attachment among members- sense of commitment and tie to place

6 community outcomes  
outcomes beyond members

6.1 tool for education  
tool for education

6.2 awareness of resources  
awareness of resources

6.3 empowered others  
empowered those interviewed

6.4 strengthened community collaboration  
strengthened community collaboration

6.5 social responsibility  
fostered sense of social responsibility, social action

6.6 change narrative  
changing community perception of place

6.7 tool for organizing  
project recognized as tool for organizing

6.8 fostered place education/attachment  
project fostered place education/attachment among other community members

6.9 Community cohesion  
fostered neighborhood level relationships between members and neighbors and/or  
among neighbors

Appendix F. Sources and processing of geographic and demographic data

**Determining changes in housing values:** To determine changes in housing values, I analyzed GIS layers provided by the Nashville Metro Planning Department (which include Tax Assessor data for 2002 and 2016, and neighborhood boundaries). First, I created a layer for each Neighborhood Story Project Area using boundaries from the ‘neighborhood’ shapefile. The neighborhoods included in each project are as follows:

Cleveland Park Story Project	Edgehill Story Project	Stratford Story Project
Cleveland Park McFerrin Park	Edgehill	CWA Apartments Edgefield Manor Cayce Historic Edgefield Parkway Terrace Maxwell Heights East End Shelby Hills Lockeland Springs Eastwood Rolling Acres Rosebank Porter Heights South Inglewood Inglewood

Using the selection feature in ArcGIS, I then compared home values from 2002 and 2016 for each of the Neighborhood Story Project areas, as well as for the county as a whole. I excluded properties appraised at zero and those having zero dwelling units, and determined an average total appraisal of all remaining properties. I then calculated the percent change in average appraisal value, unadjusted, and adjusted for inflation.

<b>Average Total Appraisal Value</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>% Change</b>
All Davidson County	150,510	231,397	54%
Cleveland Park	55,792	117,083	110%
Edgehill	107,399	251,936	135%
Stratford Cluster	92,201	189,615	106%
<b>Average Total Appraisal Value Adjusted for CPI</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>% Change</b>
All Davidson County	213,012	231,397	9%
Cleveland Park	67,052	117,083	75%
Edgehill	141,487	251,936	78%
Stratford Cluster	122,494	189,615	55%

**Determining changes in racial demographics:** I analyzed demographic data from the U.S. Census at the level of census tracts. The Tracts included in each project are as follows:

<b>Cleveland Park Story Project</b>	<b>Edgehill Story Project</b>	<b>Stratford Story Project</b>
Census Tract 118	Census Tract 162 Census Tract 163	Census Tract 111 Census Tract 112 Census Tract 117 Census Tract 121 Census Tract 122 Census Tract 114 Census Tract 115 Census Tract 116 Census Tract 119 Census Tract 120 Census Tract 123 Census Tract 192

Using racial demographic data drawn from the 2000 Census (NP003A, Population by Race) and 2010 Census (P1, Race), I calculated a percent change in black and white residents for Davidson County overall, and within each of the three areas:

	<b>All Davidson County</b>	<b>Cleveland Park</b>	<b>Edgehill</b>	<b>Stratford Cluster</b>
<b>2000 Total</b>	569,891	7,782	8,504	40,642
<b>2000 White</b>	381,783	241	936	24,222
<b>2000 Black</b>	147,696	3,672	4,588	14,301
<b>2010total</b>	626,681	2,673	5,488	37,447
<b>2010 White</b>	385,039	365	1,537	23,441
<b>2010 Black</b>	173,730	2,192	3,598	11,871
<b>% Change Total</b>	9%	-191%	-55%	-9%
<b>% Change White</b>	1%	34%	39%	-3%
<b>% Change Black</b>	15%	-68%	-28%	-20%
<b>N Change White</b>	3,256	124	601	-781
<b>N Change Black</b>	26,034	-1,480	-990	-2,430

Appendix G. Summary of studies included in review

Project Name	Article Title	Author (Year)	Location	Purpose of paper	Project Design			
					Creative Placemaking	Public Pedagogy	Public Science	Community Organizing
1. Mission Wall Dances	Citizenship, Civic Memory and Urban Performance: Mission Wall Dances	Somdahl-Sands (2008)	San Francisco, CA (USA)	To explore experiences and impacts of Mission Wall Dances				
2. Restorative Listening Project	Listening Through White Ears	Drew (2012)	Portland, OR (USA)	To explore the impact of racial dialogues and the possibility for antiracist placemaking				
3. Rebuild Foundation	Theaster Gates's Dorchester Projects in Chicago	(Reinhardt, 2014)	Chicago, IL (USA)	To describe the placemaking projects of the Rebuild Foundation				
4. Toronto Free Gallery	Digging into the creative city: A feminist critique	(McLean, 2014b)	Toronto (Canada)	To explore the contradictory roles artists play in gentrification				
5. Manifesto Community Projects: Streetscape	Cracks in the Creative City: The Contradictions of Community Arts Practice	(McLean, 2014)	Toronto (Canada)	To explore the contradictory roles artists play in gentrification				
6. Pedestrian Sunday's Kensington (P.S. Kensington)	The Exclusionary Politics of Creative Communities: The Case of Kensington Market Pedestrian Sundays	McLean & Rahder (2013)	Toronto (Canada)	To unpack contradiction between goals and effects of artistic and activist led intervention				
7. !Huntington Park NO SE VENDE! (project)	Implications of Community Activism among Urban Minority	Nam (2012)	USA (Chicago)	To explore praxis-based citizenship				

Project Name	Article Title	Author (Year)	Location	Purpose of paper	Project Design			
					Creative Placemaking	Public Pedagogy	Public Science	Community Organizing
	Young People for Education for Engaged and Critical Citizenship							
8. Over-the-Rhine People's Movement	Affiliated Practices and Aesthetic Interventions: Remaking Public Spaces in Cincinnati and Los Angeles	Dutton & Mann (2003)	USA (Cincinnati)	To describe agit-prop interventions				
9. Residents Voices Project	From high-rise projects to suburban estates: public tenants and the globalised discourse of deconcentration	Darcy (2013)	Australia (Sydney) and USA (Chicago)	To reveal transnational elements of poverty deconcentration agenda, call for resident-led research				
10. Myatts Field North	Grounding accumulation by dispossession	Hodkinson & Essin (2015)	UK (London)	To ground Harvey's concept of accumulation by dispossession in specific case				
11. We Call These Projects Home	Inserting community perspective research into public housing policy discourse: The right to the city Alliance's "We call these projects Home"	Sinha & Kasdan, (2013)	US (7 cities)	Present findings of PAR project				
12. Cayce United-	Disrupting the Order of Things	Thurber & Fraser (2016)	USA (Nashville)	To analyze material, political and epistemological work of tenant organizing.				

Project Name	Article Title	Author (Year)	Location	Purpose of paper	Project Design			
					Creative Placemaking	Public Pedagogy	Public Science	Community Organizing
13. The Fed up Honeys	Negotiating Grit and glamour	Cahill (2007)	USA (NYC)	To fill ethnographic void in gentrification literature				
	The personal is political: developing new subjectivities through participatory action research	Cahill (2006)		To explore the development of new subjectivities among participants				
	"AT risk" The Fed up Honeys	Cahill (2006)		To analyze spatial and social exclusions of women of color, explore political possibilities of PAR project				
14. Hamden Community Archeology Project	One Neighborhood, Two Communities: The Public Archaeology of Class in a Gentrifying Urban Neighborhood	Chidester & Gadsby (2016)	USA (Baltimore)	To describe process, successes and challenges				