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# “I STAY TO MYSELF”: RELOCATED PUBLIC HOUSING RESIDENTS’ NEIGHBORING STRATEGY

by

RENÉE SKEETE ALSTON

Under the Direction of Dr. Adia Harvey Wingfield

## ABSTRACT

The Atlanta Housing Authority’s decision to turn exclusively to Housing Choice vouchers to house its tenants has had significant consequences for the geographic and social landscape of the city. Policymakers largely advocate for relocation of public housing residents to private-market housing in mixed-income neighborhoods with the proposed benefit of interaction with middle-class neighbors that will facilitate improvements in residents’ lives. Prior research suggests that meaningful interaction between voucher holders and middle-class neighbors is unlikely. Through in-depth interviews (N=20) this study explores the relationships relocated residents have with their neighbors and strategies to deal with exclusionary boundary work. Results confirm that relocaters had little interaction with higher-income neighbors and reveal that relocaters use destigmatizing strategies, specifically employing the strategy of *staying to self*. Staying to self is described as *destigmatizing boundary work*, a concept introduced to capture relocaters’ neighboring strategy in response to general stereotypes of public housing residents.

INDEX WORDS: Public housing, Relocation, Black neighborhoods, Neighbors, Neighboring, Boundary work, Destigmatization strategies, Middle class blacks, Poor blacks, Section 8, Housing Choice vouchers

"I STAY TO MYSELF": RELOCATED PUBLIC HOUSING RESIDENTS' NEIGHBORING STRATEGY

by

RENÉE SKEETE ALSTON

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2013

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2013

"I STAY TO MYSELF": RELOCATED PUBLIC HOUSING RESIDENTS' NEIGHBORING STRATEGY

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## DEDICATION

*To my parents, Warren and Sandra Skeete:*

This and every other accomplishment in my life are a direct result of your love, support, effort, and sacrifice.

*To my Granny:*

Thank you for your prayers and unyielding support.

*To Roderick:*

I hope that witnessing this process has cleared the path for you.

*To My Village:*

My big sister Taura: I can't truly express how much your friendship has meant to me, but thank you for everything. Ranell: You've saved me from myself a number of times – thank you for making sure I had a "village" and for being a great friend. Precious: gaining your friendship while watching you complete the process with diligence has truly been a blessing. Angela: thank you for being such a great friend and for being an example and an encourager. Victor: thank you for doing you and always being honest about your process.

*And*

*To my favorite person:*

Thank you for the digital recorder to get me started and the million other things you have done to help me get through this. I am honoured to be able to sign our family name on this project.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

In 2007 the Atlanta Housing Authority (AHA) made an announcement that would significantly alter the geographic and social landscape of the city: AHA would demolish nearly all of its remaining public housing projects by 2010 and turn exclusively to housing vouchers to meet the housing needs of its public housing tenants. Atlanta was a key city in the formation of housing policy in the United States. It was among the first to introduce project-based housing for low-income families, and has been noted for its efforts to address the problems associated with project-based housing (Brown 2009). Other housing authorities are watching AHA closely as a potential model for public housing in other cities. The decision to demolish the remaining family housing projects and two senior high-rise projects is in line with the ongoing national public housing transformation and reflects AHA's tradition of being at the forefront of housing policy trends.

The public housing transformation occurring across the United States is an ideal setting in which to study cross-class social interaction because it involves the abrupt incorporation of an easily tracked group of very-low-income people into middle-class and mixed-income neighborhoods. This study explores neighborhood social interaction from the perspective of relocated public housing residents in the context of public housing transformation in Atlanta, Georgia. Through interviews of former Atlanta public housing residents who have moved to new neighborhoods using Housing Choice vouchers, the study collects narratives of their experiences in their new homes, queries the extent to which they perceive exclusionary boundary work on the part of their neighbors, and explores strategies respondents use to mitigate the negative impact of any potential exclusion by neighbors. It investigates whether and how they have been able to effectively build good, beneficial relationships with their neighbors, thereby potentially mitigating the effect of exclusionary boundary work by more affluent neighbors, achieving the social capital improvement goal of the relocations.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Public Housing in the United States

Public housing was born out of late-nineteenth century overcrowding in cities resulting from the twin processes of industrialization and urbanization. Housing reform movements based on the belief that the environment influences social life sprang up in cities across the nation. Early urban sociologists like Louis Wirth (1928; 1938) heavily investigated this belief, called environmental determinism. Reformers' extension of this idea was that a clean, orderly, uncrowded environment would eventually result in a healthier, moral, utopian society (Mah 1999). Slum clearance and city rebuilding were inextricably linked to housing reform efforts.

The United States' first foray into public housing came with the creation of the Emergency Fleet Corporation and the United States Housing Corporation. These federal housing institutions were created during World War I to address the lack of housing for workers in military industry towns. The two corporations built 176,000 low-cost, attractive, modern housing units; and although the project was a success, many politicians were adamant that such developments not set a precedent for low-cost public housing for fear that it would constitute a step toward socialism (Baxandall and Ewen 2000). Federal public housing programs did not come about until the 1930s, when the Great Depression, heavy immigration, and a widespread housing shortage combined to render many working class families homeless. The Housing Law of 1933, part of the National Industrial Recovery Act, established the Public Works Administration (PWA) Housing Division to provide funding for public and private projects to clear slums and build new housing. The new housing agencies were originally created to provide working-class families with temporary housing relief. However, the need for a more sustained effort to address homelessness and housing scarcity quickly became obvious as the Great Depression continued.

Atlanta's Techwood Homes and Manhattan's First Houses, both built in the mid-thirties, were the archetype for public housing in the United States. Both projects were historically significant in that

they represented the first demonstration that the government could provide low-cost mass housing for the public. While the Atlanta Housing Authority claims that Techwood Homes was the “first public housing project in the nation”, it was completed in August of 1936, fully 9 months after First Houses opened its doors to tenants (AHA 2009b; Gray 1995). Techwood Homes consisted of 457 row house units, and First Houses had 122 flats (Salama 1999; Gray 1995) The two projects were quite successful. At the end of the first year, First Houses was reported to have had no delinquencies and none of its families was on relief (Gray 1995). Several similar projects were constructed in this time period across the United States. With the success of these first projects, the Wagner-Steagall Act of 1937 instituted public housing as a permanent national program, establishing the United States Housing Authority and other key features of the public housing landscape.

Since federal public housing was implemented mainly as a solution to a shortage of appropriate housing, there was no specific stigma attached to residents. Public housing was marketed and, largely, viewed as a temporary housing solution for hardworking families. The first tenants of First Houses were barbers, taxi drivers, garment workers and other working-class occupations (Baxandall and Ewen 2000; Gray 1995). The working-class professions and other characteristics of the tenants were not coincidental. Interviewers carefully screened out those families who they felt were too poor, too rich, too big, too small, too lazy and too dirty. May Lumsden, who was in charge of the screening, was quoted in the magazine *Survey Graphic* in 1936, saying she got only “the very finest types” for tenants (Gray 1995). The perceived potential for upward mobility figured prominently in the selection of tenants. The screening process also excluded applicants based on race such that non-white families were denied, regardless of their potential and other characteristics.

Friedman (1978) argues that the concepts of the potential middle class and the submerged middle class are key to understanding the history of housing in the United States. He goes on to define the submerged middle class as people who are culturally members of the middle class, but who have been

prevented from taking their place in the middle class by unfortunate circumstances, or who have fallen from the middle class through no fault of their own. Mah (1999) highlights the selection process in San Francisco's first project Holly Courts, noting that the descriptions of the tenants matched assumptions about the middle class in every way except for income, which suggested that income mattered less than being white and accepting what were touted as middle-class values. In short, "Housing projects are conceived of as places where the potential middle class can profit from a change in environment, or where members of the submerged middle class can be helped back on their feet" (Friedman 1978:20), not necessarily a place where structurally disadvantaged groups could be guaranteed safe, decent housing. The distinction in intention is vital to understanding housing policy's changes over time.

After World War II, various factors merged to transform the design, population and reputation of public housing. What had begun as respectable, temporary, low-rent apartment communities for white working- and lower-middle-class families became large, run-down, crime-ridden complexes occupied predominantly by black, very-low-income, single-parent families. The end of the war meant that the wartime restrictions on housing construction that had inflated public housing demand among the middle class were lifted, enabling more advantaged public housing residents to find private market housing (Gormley 1991). The GI Bill played a critical role in the creation of the suburban white middle class and the systematic exclusion of blacks from homeownership and other middle-class benefits. Katznelson argues that "no other New Deal initiative had as great an impact on changing the country" and that there was "no greater instrument for widening an already huge racial gap in postwar America than the GI Bill" (2006:552, 553). Increasing cultural pressure and unprecedented government incentives to suburbanize drove housing production up, prices down, and made home-ownership attainable for a much broader range of people than before in terms of income. Section 235 of the 1968 Housing Act was created to shift funding for local housing authorities toward providing supply-side subsidies to the private sector in order to stimulate home ownership for minorities and the poor, but it actually facilitated

segregation in its implementation. Gotham (2000) found that as a result of Section 235, whites were able to purchase new suburban housing, while black families were mostly restricted to purchasing existing housing in the inner city.

As a result of these post-war changes many working- and middle-class white residents of public housing were able to flee the city and achieve their dreams of suburban living. The formerly “submerged” middle class residing in public housing was then able to emerge, to what policymakers determined to be their true middle class statuses (Mah 1999, Friedman 1966). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 also encouraged white flight when it ended legal discrimination by forcing integrated housing projects (Stoloff 2004). Public housing’s remaining residents were those unable to take advantage of the new federally subsidized homeownership opportunities. Mah (1999:121) observed that public housing’s value as a means of upward mobility declined as home ownership opportunities expanded, and that the use of public housing as a measure of social uplift was abandoned for its current function as “housing of last resort for a devalued population”.

The most devalued population in public housing is low-income blacks. Housing market discrimination, discrimination in lending practices, and the norm of racial residential segregation made homeownership largely unattainable for most blacks (Shapiro 2004, Johnson 2006). Discrimination against blacks and other minorities in employment and education compounded this issue and contributed to disproportionately low income and high poverty rates among these groups, thereby causing them to make up a significant portion of public housing residents. According to Shapiro (2004), blacks are also more likely to experience intergenerational poverty than other groups, which has led to multiple generations of families receiving federal assistance and living in public housing (Huberfeld 1998, Rosenbaum et al. 1991). Mah (1999) argues that the devaluation of public housing’s uses as a means for social uplift compounded the stigma attached to blacks in an era where they were believed to have a generally negative effect on property values.

Beginning in the 1960s, federal housing policy began to restrict the eligibility for public housing to low-income populations (Gormley 1997), compounding the increasing racial segregation with income segregation. Various factors, including requests by advocates for the poor that preferences on waiting lists be given to the most disadvantaged, income limits, and the temporary elimination of rent ceilings in 1981, all contributed to making public housing less attractive to those who could afford to live elsewhere (Stoloff 2004). The reduction of moderate-income residents and decrease in federal funding for assistance programs in the 1970s and 1980s severely reduced the budgets of the housing authorities, which precipitated lower-quality construction, scant maintenance and poor management.

The design of public housing projects has figured prominently in the debates surrounding reform. In the early 1940's, many planners felt that high-rises would provide a healthier, unique living environment to contrast favorably with surrounding slum areas. Projects were often deliberately designed to stand out from the existing community with the anticipation that the separation would benefit residents because it distinguished projects from the surrounding slum. Some distinguishing design features are diagonal placement on the street, "superblocks" composed of two to three regular city blocks, modern architecture, and uniform buildings. Designs from the 1950s and 1960s were more likely to be high-rises and superblock projects. This pattern of development, though at the time thought to have positive symbolic value for its residents, actually had the opposite effect of being easily identified as public housing and subject to stigmatization (Stoloff 2004; Franck and Mostoller 1995).

The public housing transformation began with widespread recognition that the established housing projects, particularly inner-city high-rises, essentially warehoused the very poor and were difficult to maintain and manage. The climate of political unrest in the 1960s brought protests about the conditions of inner city blacks, especially those left behind in public housing, abandoned by upwardly mobile whites, and, to some extent, upwardly mobile blacks. Several changes to housing policy grew out of this unrest, including desegregation projects. However, changes in funding had a dramatic impact

on the public housing landscape. HUD restricted funding for the construction of high-rise projects for families in 1968 (Biles 2000; Choldin 2005). This was the beginning, but the main thrust of disinvestment took place a little later.

There was a break in funding for new projects and a strong emphasis on tenant-based assistance with the new conservative and neoliberal political regimes of the 1980s and 1990s. The 1992 report to Congress by the National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing was a catalyst for the public housing transformation, finding that most of the nation's stock of public housing units was in dire condition after years of poor maintenance, mismanagement and a high concentration of very low-income residents (Reed 2007). The concentration of very-low-income residents as one of the causal factors contributing to public housing units' dire condition is an important part of the arguments supporting the transformation of public housing.

Dispersal programs, designed to mitigate segregation by distributing public housing residents more evenly across a metropolitan area in scattered-site housing, began to be implemented in the mid-1960s. The Section 23 program of 1965 allowed local public housing authorities (PHAs) to lease private homes on a scattered-site basis to public housing tenants, but not many PHA officials were willing to use their programs to support desegregation (Goetz 2003). The impetus to move forward with scatter-site strategies was brought about by *Gautreaux et al. v. Chicago Housing Authority et al.*, a 1967 class action lawsuit against the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA) claiming that it was racially discriminating against its public housing residents by forcing them to live in segregated areas of the city through tenant assignment and site selection.

Named for Dorothy Gautreaux, a CHA tenant, *Gautreaux* was ruled in favor of the plaintiffs in 1969. The Gautreaux program began as a result of that ruling. It sought to remedy what was shown to be racial segregation in Chicago's public housing by moving residents to white neighborhoods and creating scattered-site housing in white neighborhoods, mainly in the suburbs. These scattered-site projects



were the preferred alternatives to the enormous high-rise projects, notorious for crime and other social ills. Studies of the Gautreaux program (Rosenbaum et al. 1991, Rosenbaum 1995, DeLuca and Rosenbaum 2003) focused on the success of the tenants' transition to suburban communities (highlighting improved safety, school performance, and relationships with neighbors), but largely ignored relocation to city neighborhoods (Reed 2007). The focus on suburban communities may be explained by the fact that suburban moves were more likely to provide a drastic change in environment, and presumably opportunity. Chicago was (and still is) a very segregated metropolitan area, with the majority of blacks living in the city proper, while suburban neighborhoods were mostly white. In order to fulfill the goals of the program, residents needed to move to neighborhoods with more whites, mostly in the suburbs.

After the apparent early successes of the Gautreaux program policymakers and academics alike adopted the successful study results as evidence that vouchers would be the best means of administering housing assistance, and the success could be replicated with public housing tenant relocation (Reed 2007; Popkin et al. 2000). Housing vouchers were originally considered as an alternative to building public housing units as early as 1937, but did not receive much support until the mid-1960s, when problems with traditional public housing began to be recognized by policymakers (Gormley 1991). The Experimental Housing Assistance Program (EHAP) was authorized in 1970 to test the effects of direct, tenant-based housing assistance (Gormley 1991). The results of EHAP were used as justification for the Section 8 program, which was authorized in 1974. The Section 8 program originally had two products, the Section 8 Certificate and the Section 8 Voucher, but the Certificate program was absorbed by the voucher program in 1998 and renamed the Housing Choice Voucher.

Researchers have attempted to temper enthusiasm about the projected success of Housing Choice Voucher relocations. Turner (1998:390) declares that "On it's own, this [Section 8] program does not automatically ensure access to low-poverty neighborhoods – particularly for minority families," adding that supplementing the Section 8 program with housing counseling and search assistance had the

potential to significantly improve the program's performance. James Rosenbaum, the lead researcher of the Gautreaux studies, was sure to note that vouchers would be unlikely to replicate the positive results of the Gautreaux program on their own because Gautreaux indicated the value of having real-estate staff and housing counselors facilitate the public housing residents' moves (Reed 2007; Rosenbaum 1995). Reed (2007) also notes that the Gautreaux program specifically limited participant relocation to areas that were either predominantly white or were determined by the presiding judge to be revitalizing, whereas Housing Choice Vouchers can be, and often are, used for homes in segregated black neighborhoods.

Mobility programs were designed as another strategy to address segregation and poverty concentration. They combine Section 8 assistance with mobility counseling and other special efforts or program requirements to deconcentrate homes receiving assistance (Goetz 2003), and therefore address many of the concerns mentioned by critics of the Gautreaux program. Goetz (2003) identifies five categories of mobility programs: recent efforts by the federal government to make project-based subsidies tenant-based subsidies (called "vouchering out"), litigation-based programs like Gautreaux, the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) demonstration program, Regional Opportunity Counseling programs, and a variety of local programs that combine elements of counseling and placement. Since the mid-1990s there have been more than 50 HUD-funded Regional Opportunity Counseling, Vacancy Consolidation, and litigation-based voucher programs in 35 metropolitan areas (Briggs 1997; Goetz 2003). HOPE VI is another public housing transformation program that takes a slightly different approach from other programs. Designed to address severely distressed public housing, HOPE VI "combined physical revitalization with management improvements and supportive services to promote resident self-sufficiency" (Popkin et al. 2002: 1-2). In 1996, emphasis shifted toward demolishing existing complexes and replacing them with mixed-income communities that included public housing units, tax credit, and market-rate units (Popkin

et al. 2002). This emphasis has continued to this day, as mixed-income communities have become a popular policy solution to the problems of traditional public housing complexes.

Atlanta's plan for public housing transformation is a vouchering out program. AHA tenants who lived in the family communities were notified that they would be relocated using Housing Choice Vouchers. The Good Neighbor Program and "human development case management services" were promised to AHA families to help them relocate (AHA 2009a). Mathew Reed (2007) points out that relocating public housing residents using vouchers is significantly different from what he calls traditional Section 8 programs in that the relocation process is mandatory and not voluntary, and many public housing tenants have little or no experience living in private market homes because of the tendency toward intergenerational poverty. These differences likely have a profound impact on the success of the relocation and the relocated resident experience, and have implications for this study in terms of what kinds of interactions relocated public housing residents have with new neighbors.

## **2.2 Concentrated Poverty and the Culture of Poverty**

The most commonly cited reason for demolitions and vouchering out is concentrated poverty. The concept of concentrated poverty has become common in discourse on poverty and neighborhoods, and is frequently found in housing authority documents. For most of its history, public housing was primarily project-based, meaning that housing assistance was delivered through the construction of very low cost housing units for which individuals applied, rather than being tenant-based, where rental assistance was provided to individuals directly. The projects were located in areas in which the population mirrored the public housing residents in terms of socioeconomic status. The population residing in public housing became increasingly poor, and the neighborhoods in which projects were located were nearly always poor themselves. This condition has become known as "concentrated poverty."

There are several definitions and interpretations of concentrated poverty. William Julius Wilson first coined the phrase "concentrated poverty" in 1987's *The Truly Disadvantaged* as a metaphor to de-

scribe complex social and spatial processes. Quantitatively, it is generally defined as census tracts in which at least 40 percent of the population is at or below the poverty line (Crump 2002, Jargowsky and Bane 1990).

Former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Henry Cisneros lamented that public housing lumped together the very poor in high poverty neighborhoods, and that these issues were aggravated by the federal method of managing public housing (Crump 2002). He explains that “The concentration of the poorest families creates problems that predictably become unmanageable, and the larger the public housing development, the more complex the problems” (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 1995). Inherent in this assertion is the assumption that poverty creates social problems, rather than the possibility that social problems and social policy create and maintain poverty. The word “unmanageable” makes the statement particularly prejudicial if we continue to decode the underlying assumptions. Plainly, poor people are dysfunctional and need to be managed, and when they are concentrated, they so influence each other that their communities become unmanageable.

It is important to note that the term concentrated poverty is not widely used to describe areas in which 40 percent of the population is at or below the poverty line in contexts other than the specific type of inner-city poverty that has received a great deal of media attention. It is very likely that “the spatial metaphor of concentrated poverty is deracialized, coded shorthand for urban ghettos populated mainly by African-Americans” (Crump 2002: 586). Crump (2002) argues that widespread usage of concentrated poverty to explain urban ghetto formation has led to the theoretical slippage responsible for the conclusion that problems in the urban ghetto are actually caused by spatial structure in the urban ghetto and not social structure in the United States as a nation. Understanding that this theoretical slippage may be occurring in the minds of housing policymakers helps in understanding the resolute support for mixed-income communities and voucher programs among many housing policymakers.

Whereas elimination of concentrated poverty is the most frequently used justification for project demolition and relocation, implicit in the justifications is the conceptually distinct issue of a culture of poverty. The “socially detrimental conditions of concentrated poverty” (AHA 2009a), dominate the discussion of public housing policy. The culture of poverty thesis is a key assumption of the public housing transformation. Oscar Lewis coined the phrase the “culture of poverty” to describe the phenomenon he observed in the subjects he studied in his 1961 work *The Children of Sanchez*. Lewis spent time studying a family in Mexico and found a particular set of behaviors he attributed to generational poverty. These traits include: a predilection toward instant gratification, lack of class-consciousness, and feelings of marginality, dependency, helplessness, and inferiority (Lewis 1998). Bennett and Reed argue that “Lewis’s culture-of-poverty formulation gave those who were uncomfortable with frankly racial stereotypes a way to embrace a fundamentally racialized theory of the defective poor while avoiding the stigma of racism” (1999:189).

Of course, Lewis simply coined a phrase for a concept that has been ingrained in American society, since its inception. In fact, that there is a set of behavioral characteristics and supposed immorality associated with the poor is an idea found in ancient societies. The rise of Darwinism and genetic determinism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century inevitably lead to genetic arguments for poverty. In the early 1900s, liberal economists rejected the widely accepted genetic inferiority argument in favor of a culture of poverty argument to explain economic differences between European immigrants and native white American workers. The sociological argument that the transition to an urban culture creates disorganization in those who migrate from rural areas was an important building block of the culture-of-poverty thesis (Cherry 1995). Sociologists Louis Wirth and Edward Ross were major proponents of this urbanization argument, as evidenced by their work on Polish-Russian Jewish immigrants (Cherry 1995).

The culture of poverty thesis often emerges in public housing discourse in subtle ways. The executive director for the Hartford Housing Authority, John D. Wardlaw said of the public housing resi-

dents he served, "These people need others to associate with who don't have the same types of problems. In those situations they tend to do one thing: draw on each other's weaknesses" (Bass 1989). Implicit in Wardlaw's statement is that association with people who do not have the same types of problems, presumably issues stemming from a chronic lack of finances, will improve the chance for upward mobility. It is also likely that Wardlaw was referring to the behavior issues associated with the culture of poverty.

Spurred by the acclaimed research of William Julius Wilson (1978, 1987), the 1980s introduced a body of research on the urban "underclass". The underclass is a term to describe a specifically urban, very-low-income population characterized by joblessness, geographic concentration, and isolation from the middle class. Gunnar Myrdal coined the term "underclass" in 1962, to describe people who were extremely economically marginalized as a result of changes in the post-industrial economy. Wilson (1991) reports that Myrdal's original definition was used by other scholars until the late 1970s when the term came to express acute or persistent poverty rather than joblessness as the defining characteristic. Wilson later (1991) repudiated the term underclass, abandoning it for the term "ghetto poor", however the term underclass, and Wilson's argument, continued to be used extensively in academic and policy circles.

Wilson's argument was essentially that the reduction of legal racial discrimination as a result of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other societal changes have increased the social isolation of low-income blacks from middle-class role models by allowing upwardly mobile blacks to leave the inner city. He argues that without role models and community institutions provided by these more affluent African Americans, the vicious cycle of poverty grows and pathological behaviors are intensified (Cherry 1995, Wilson 1987). Pathological behaviors Wilson (1987) identifies include teenage pregnancy, promiscuity, drug addiction, and lack of participation in the formal economy and/or participation in the illegal informal economy. The most notorious of these behaviors is teenage childbearing. However, Bennett and

Reed (1999) point out that the empirical evidence shows that teenage childbearing among blacks declined steadily from 1960 through the mid-1980s.

The concept of the underclass has by no means gone uncontested. Jencks (1992) argues that the underclass term mistakenly gives the impression that urban problems are worsening. Peterson notes that "...some of the most celebrated instances of an underclass style of life – laziness, unreliability, unrestrained attachment to fancy clothes and high fashion, episodic romantic attachments, drug addiction, and alcohol abuse – are to be found among the very rich" (1991:622). However, despite detractors, the theory of the underclass pervaded the discourse on race and poverty throughout the 1990's and persists to some degree presently.

The neighborhood effects literature illustrates that the culture of poverty idea is not only assigned to individuals and families, but to neighborhoods. Bauder (2002:85) claims that "the idea of neighbourhood effects implies that the demographic context of poor neighbourhoods instills 'dysfunctional' norms, values and behaviours into youths, triggering a cycle of social pathology" (85). Three mechanisms explain how neighborhood effects operate: Through peer groups, via concentrated poverty and adult role models, and within physical infrastructure and institutional networks. Bauder (2002) argues that the idea is problematic for various reasons, including implied causality. Residential segregation has created and maintained the inseparability of neighborhood and race. Neighborhoods play an important role in perceptions of class and advantage. Simultaneously considering the neighborhood effects literature and the culture of poverty literature helps us to more thoroughly understand the impact of these ideas on housing policy.

The Atlanta Housing Authority announced that "Despite the revitalization of more than a dozen AHA communities, the privatization of property management, and implementation of organizational efficiencies, more than 5,000 AHA families still live in the economically and socially detrimental conditions of concentrated poverty" (AHA 2009a). It moved with the trend in housing policy by demolishing

its public housing communities, opting to construct new mixed-use and mixed-income communities to house some residents and relocate other residents to private market housing. Income mixing on a neighborhood level is the most popular policy solution to concentrated poverty and the culture of poverty assumed to grow out of poverty concentration. Residents of these communities are theorized to be likely to interact with each other due to proximity, thereby providing low-income residents with social capital and access to resources. However, research clearly demonstrates that social interaction across class is limited (Brophy and Smith 1997, Buron et al. 2002, Joseph 2006, Kleit 2005). In fact, Tach's (2009) study of a HOPE VI redevelopment site found that while public housing residents worked to establish and maintain social ties, the middle-class homeowners in the community "actively resisted the formation of social ties with their neighbors and adopted daily routines that minimized their own and their children's contact with neighbors and neighborhood space" (p. 291).

Unlike mixed-income development residents, Section 8 renters and their unsubsidized neighbors do not enter the community at the same time, thereby potentially having an equal claim to the space, and they may not have the knowledge that they will be living with people of a different socioeconomic status, and thus do not necessarily deliberately opt-in to such a situation. The lack of prior knowledge and agreement may intensify negative reactions on the part of unsubsidized neighborhood residents. A key difference between the two forms of deconcentration is that mixed-income communities are planned and often include built-in follow-up mechanisms and social services, as well as projects and events specifically designed to foster interaction. In a market-rate neighborhood in which Section 8 vouchers are accepted, former public housing residents are expected to integrate into the neighborhood, rather than exist as a subgroup within a neighborhood. Chaskin and Joseph (2010) explain that the expectation of policymakers is that the tenor of public sentiment and the exercise of collective efficacy will shape public behavior toward "acceptable" norms, particularly with regard to safety and public order. "In keeping with the 'underclass' orientation noted earlier, informal social control in this regard is



generally focused on changing the behavior of some relocated public-housing residents to behave differently than they did in ‘the projects’” (Chaskin & Joseph 2010).

In her (2009) study of relocaters from the Maverick HOPE VI site in East Boston, Massachusetts, Alexandra Curley (2009) found that the majority of her respondents had made no new social ties two-years post-relocation. Curley (2009) offers three types of ties – supportive, leveraging, and draining – to capture the nature of her respondents’ social ties more fully than what previous dichotomous frameworks (strong vs. weak (Granovetter 1973), bonding vs. bridging (Putnam 2000), and supportive vs. bridging (Briggs 1998)) were able. Supportive ties were relationships that provided access to material and emotional support. Leveraging ties assisted relocaters with finding employment, gaining access to educational resources, and provided other support that enabled relocaters to move toward economic self-sufficiency. Finally, draining ties were those that weighed on relocaters emotionally and/or drained their households of already scarce resources like food and money. The desire to avoid draining ties was one of the reasons Curley’s respondents gave for limiting their social ties to neighbors. There were some key differences between Curley’s and the respondents of this study in terms of demographics and relocation circumstances. Curley’s sample was racially and ethnically diverse, and included non-English speakers, which may have impacted their ability to make new ties post-relocation. Also, some of Curley’s (2009) respondents relocated to other public housing communities, some with Section 8, and some back to the HOPE VI site, while my entire sample, and the vast majority of Atlanta public housing residents, relocated using vouchers.

In Atlanta, the majority of public housing residents are black, and live in female-headed single-parent families, compounding the stigma of their low class status, and likely making mostly white suburban residents more resistant to accepting the residents in their neighborhoods. The stereotypes and controlling images of poor black women, and public housing residents in general, contribute to hostility toward relocation among middle-class residents. A “not in my backyard” attitude among suburban

whites toward Section 8 vouchers and the construction of scatter-site public housing in their neighborhoods has been well-documented in the housing policy literature (see Danielson 1976). Goetz (2000) argues that the idea that concentrated poverty is unhealthy for neighborhoods causes alarm in suburban communities rather than reassurance that deconcentration is necessary. The supposed effects of concentrated poverty outlined by policymakers in order to promote deconcentration, including crime, social problems, and behavioral pathologies, are the very reasons why many communities refuse entry to the poor. Goetz refers to this problem as “the paradox of deconcentration as a motive for mobility” (2000:170).

Unsurprisingly, research suggests that the best predictor of where relocaters will move is where Section 8 tenants have moved in the past (Reed 2007; Metropolitan Planning Commission 1999; Fischer 1999; Oakley and Burchfield 2009; Oakley et. al 2010). Fischer (1999) found that most relocated families in Chicago were moving to areas that are racially and economically segregated. Oakley and Burchfield (2009) came to the same conclusion. Investigating relocations in Atlanta, GA, Oakley et al. (2011) highlighted the fact that relocaters moved to neighborhoods with moderately less poverty than the public housing neighborhoods, which leads to questions about the effectiveness of relocation policies purported to encourage poverty deconcentration.

Although most vouchers are accepted in areas of concentrated poverty, or similar low-income black neighborhoods, some vouchers are accepted in neighborhoods that are mostly black, but mostly middle-class. Resistance by white suburbanites makes it much more likely that former public housing residents relocate to areas in the central cities with higher black populations. This occurs for a number of reasons, including the fact that the geographical areas in which landlords are willing to accept Section 8 vouchers tend to be in black neighborhoods, and that blacks in these neighborhoods may not have as much political clout as suburban whites to use to resist vouchers. However, black residents of the receiving neighborhoods do not necessarily welcome voucher housing with open arms. In fact, there is a grow-

ing body of literature on middle-class blacks and their relationship to working-class and poor blacks, as well as on class conflicts within the black population. The interaction between middle-class and working class and poor residents is the crux of this study.

### **2.3 Boundary-Work**

The division between the classes is at once significant and porous. Though the black middle class is charged with abandoning the black poor, Pattillo-McCoy (1998) points out that there is little empirical evidence that that is the case. Conventional wisdom concerning the black middle class after Wilson's *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987) is that the black middle class completely abandoned the black working class and poor blacks as a result of increased residential opportunities in the post-Civil Rights era. However, Pattillo-McCoy (1998) finds that while black middle class out-migration has occurred steadily over time, racial segregation ensures that the black middle class continues to live near and among poor blacks. Rather than geographical and cultural distance created by out-migration, the observed increase in class segregation among African Americans can be accounted for by the numerical increase in the size of the black middle class and a spatial enlargement of their residential enclaves (Pattillo-McCoy 1998).

According to Pattillo (2007), the black middle class has been subjected to considerable scrutiny in the literature on black politics, which has focused on its participation in the marginalization of poor blacks, but in the field of urban policy, such a critique is lacking. The middle class continues to be celebrated in policy literature for its capacity to generate tax revenue, and for the material resources it brings to neighborhoods, but also for role modeling proper ways to live as neighbors. Pattillo (2007) argues that this class bias fuels urban renewal's emphasis on attracting the middle class back to the city and impacts the ways in which middle-class blacks interact with their working-class and poor neighbors. When middle-class blacks move into black poor neighborhoods, they believe their role in the neighborhood is to provide behavioral role modeling and resources to change the environment of the neighborhood, and they presume that their behaviors and resources are superior to the behaviors and resources

of the people who lived in the neighborhood prior to their move (Pattillo 2007). Pattillo (2007:98) argues that “It is commonly assumed that because poor residents, and public housing tenants in particular, have lacked exposure to good schools and orderly civic engagement, they are often not the best representatives of neighborhood demands”.

In the case of poor blacks moving into middle class neighborhoods, the sentiment may be that new neighbors need to assimilate, that is, adopt the behaviors of longtime residents. Non-assimilation could be viewed with resentment and hostility. Pattillo’s (1998, 1999) work and others’ (Adelman 2005; Alba et al. 2000; and Marsh et al. 2007) show that black socioeconomic classes remain in close proximity to one another, as a result of continued economic and residential discrimination. As a result, the distancing tactics employed cannot rely solely on geographic or economic boundaries. This is where exclusionary boundary work comes into play.

Thomas Gieryn first introduced the term boundary work in his 1983 work “Boundary-Work and the Demarcation of Science from Non-Science,” in which he explains how scientists distinguish scientific research from nonscientific intellectual work. However, Lacy (2007) identifies Fredrik Barth’s 1969 study, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, as the foundational concept for boundary work. Boundary work has been operationalized a number of ways, beginning with Gieryn (1983), who describes it as a rhetorical style by which scientists attribute selected characteristics to the institution of science for the purpose of creating a social boundary distinguishing some intellectual activities as not science. Nippert-Eng (1996) broadens the definition to include “the strategies, principles, and practices that we use to create, maintain and modify cultural categories” (p. 7). Lacy (2007) elaborates this concept examining in-group variation among middle-class blacks, defining the concepts of exclusionary- and inclusionary boundary work.

The concept of boundaries has been associated with research on topics as diverse as immigration, hegemonic masculinity, cognition and professional jurisdiction (Lamont and Molnar 2002). It can refer to boundaries between various roles an individual may have, between categories like racial or eth-

nic groups, or social statuses. Boundaries and boundary work have often been applied in the sociology of work, as well as business and management research, to describe ways of differentiating between home and work. For example, Kreiner, Hollensbe & Sheep (2009) found four types of boundary work tactics (behavioral, temporal, physical, and communicative) that individuals utilized to create their ideal home and work balance. The boundary work approach is a perspective sociologists use to examine the relationships between individuals or groups by analyzing the mental boundaries they draw between and among one another, as when the working poor define themselves in opposition to the poor who do not work (Small and Newman 2001:38, Newman 1999), for example.

In *Blue-Chip Black*, Karyn Lacy (2007) examines the ways the black middle class residents of three Washington D.C. suburbs construct specifically middle-class black identities. She builds her argument on Barth's (1969) idea that a group's ethnic identity is formed as a result of contact with different groups, rather than isolation from them. Lacy (2007) argues that Barth's (1969) ethnic boundaries model can be applied to middle-class blacks born in the U.S. because they define and manage their group identity through interaction with whites and blacks from lower classes. Lacy (2007) also draws on Michèle Lamont's (1992) research on boundary drawing work among upper-middle-class white men in the U.S. and France, as well as between upper-middle-class and lower-middle-class men (2000). Lamont (1992) operates from the premise that boundaries drawn by the upper-middle-class are likely to be more firm and impermeable than the boundaries that exist between racial and ethnic groups, which implies that upper-middle-class blacks would use moral boundaries to reinforce their higher social standing (Lacy 2007).

As previously mentioned, most middle-class blacks live in close geographic proximity to the black poor. What is more ambiguous is the degree to which the black middle class is culturally distant from the black poor. Behavior in public spaces is a crucial element of the constructed boundaries between middle-class blacks and the poor. Middle-class blacks associate inappropriate behavior in public

spaces with blacks of a lower social class status. Pattillo found that when middle class blacks move into poor black neighborhoods, “[l]ifestyle differences in the neighborhood are at the core of many conflicts, and new comers are adamant about the need to alter the behaviors of their poor and working-class neighbors” (2007:82). Conflicts included differences of opinion about yard aesthetics, and the volume of outdoor interaction.

Lacy’s (2007) respondents maintained that they would not be concerned if their children had friends from a lower social class background, but many of her upper-middle-class respondents comments reflected concern about the possibility that their children would pick up bad habits as a result of these friendships, and sought to limit their children’s interaction with children from less expensive parts of the neighborhood. One of her elite middle-class respondents, Philip, describes the bad habits his daughter picked up in public school as “like an attitude [he changes to a gruff, abrasive tone]: ‘You talkin’ to me?’ or that shakin’ of the head, that ‘Sapphire attitude,’ I call it” (Lacy 2007:177). Philip was describing a stereotypical image of black femininity associated with blacks of lower classes.

Although previous research has addressed boundary work among middle-class Blacks and against working-class and poor blacks, it is unclear how boundary work is performed specifically against the poor. For example, Lacy’s (2007) respondents were able to avoid contact with the black poor, for the most part, because of the particular geography of the Washington, D.C. suburbs, as well as participation in middle-class black social institutions and gatherings. The ways in which boundary work may be enacted when middle-class blacks are in closer proximity to poor blacks is not well-defined in the literature. Prior empirical studies have not focused exclusively on boundary work, instead boundary work emerged as an observation or analytical tool in studies with different research objectives, including identity-construction and child-rearing.

Despite extensive literature surrounding the topic of public housing, deconcentration of poverty, social interaction, and class-differences within the black population, research on the strategies

poor and working class blacks enact to overcome boundary work performed by the middle-class has been neglected. As a result of the construction of the culture of poverty idea, and all of its iterations, in popular culture as well as in housing policy, relocaters are likely prime targets for exclusionary boundary work. Characteristics associated with poor blacks, especially those who have lived in public housing, are those that black middle class people specifically seek to guard against in their public interactions. This study is based on the premise that the poor are not simply acted upon when faced with exclusionary boundary work; they certainly have reactions to this boundary work, and most likely have strategies with which to deal with boundary work.

This project also seeks to remedy a serious weakness in the literature on public housing, mixed-income neighborhoods, and especially in the literature on middle-class boundary work: these bodies of research tend to cast the poor, including public housing residents and voucher-holders, as victims on the grand stage of housing reform and class discrimination. While it is clear that the expectation of relocated public housing residents is that they will be improved by their new environments and neighbors, what is not clear is that these relocaters have agency in determining what their experiences will be like and the degree to which they form new relationships. Though there is the illusion of a debate between structure and agency in sociology, a balance of the two, which cannot be ignored is observable in empirical research. Relocaters cannot simply be victims of structure with no recourse for attaining social resources of their own initiative. Patricia Hill Collins (2009 [2000]) addresses the myth that the oppressed are not aware of their oppression in *Black Feminist Thought*. Collins argues that the oppressed are indeed aware, and have the ability to theorize about it and develop strategies in reaction to it. The strategies and reactions may not, however, be expressed in a legitimized form accepted by the dominant group.

In their research on stigmatized public housing residents in Australia, Palmer et al. (2004) found that residents of stigmatized neighborhoods maintained perspectives of their neighborhoods that con-

tradict and contest stigmatized representations. Palmer et al. (2004) demonstrated that “residents tended to resist and challenge the problem reputation in one of three ways: (i) by defining and separating themselves as living in a ‘different’ part of the suburb, (ii) by participating fully in a range of social and civic activities that confounded the stereotype of residents who were disinterested and disconnected from their community and (iii) by often simultaneously challenging those who perpetuate the stereotype through resident action and confrontation in conversation” (420). Their study provides a useful example of possible reactions to boundary work, however there are many differences between the Australian context and that of the United States. In Australia, as in the United States, public housing began as a post-war solution to a nation-wide housing shortage, and “...is now seen as housing of the last resort, rather than choice, as was the case in the past” (Palmer et al. 2004:412).

Despite that important similarity, Australia’s population is quite different from that of the United States in terms of racial and ethnic mix, with ninety-two percent white, seven percent Asian, and one percent Aboriginal and other, according to the CIA World Factbook (Central Intelligence Agency 2010). Public housing is also primarily located in the suburbs rather than the city, which further differentiates the experiences of public housing residents in Australia from those in the United States. When these contextual differences are taken into consideration, there remains an obvious gap in research on public housing residents’ management of stigma as it can be applied to Atlanta’s relocaters. This study also seeks to fill this gap in the literature as well by utilizing relocaters’ narratives to assess the ways they manage their neighbor relationships and any stigma associated with their status as former public housing residents.

Lacy (2007) applies Barth’s (1969) ethnic boundaries to middle-class blacks born in the U.S. because they define and manage their group identity as specifically middle-class and black through interaction with blacks from lower classes and whites in general in the same way that Barth argues that ethnic groups define and manage their group identity through interactions with other groups. I argue that the



same boundaries model can be applied in the case of relocated public housing residents because they manage their personal identity through interaction with prior public housing neighbors and new unsubsidized and more affluent neighbors. Lamont (2002) operates from the premise that boundaries drawn by the upper-middle-class are likely to be more firm and impermeable than the boundaries that exist between racial and ethnic groups, which implies that upper-middle-class blacks would use moral boundaries to reinforce their higher social standing (Lacy 2007). Poor blacks living in subsidized housing seeking to avoid stigmatization and maintain an identity separate from that of a public housing resident would use moral boundaries to create and maintain distance between themselves and public housing neighbors.

In a rare study on low-income individuals utilizing boundary work, Margarethe Kusenbach (2009) found that most of her respondents engaged in what she called “distancing” in order to manage the stigma of mobile home residency. Distancing includes what she refers to as “bordering” and “fencing”. Bordering is a strategy that involves “accounts and actions aimed at erecting boundaries between one’s own community and geographically, culturally, and/or structurally distant other,” whereas fencing is subtle and complex, using “accounts and actions that emphasize differences within someone’s community and involves the construction of internal differences within a community”. Although Kusenbach’s (2009) respondents were mostly white and lived in a very different circumstances than relocaters in this study, her study examines the ways boundaries are constructed in reaction to the stigma associated with specifically low-income housing situations. Fencing seems the more likely of the two strategies Kusenbach (2009) introduces to be used by relocated public housing residents in Atlanta because, while they are relocated to a variety of neighborhoods, they carry with them the stigma of coming from a public housing community. This stigma may encourage relocaters to emphasize differences within the group of residents relocating from public housing.

Other work on stigma management is also instructive of the kinds of strategies relocated public

housing residents may use to manage potential exclusionary boundary work by post-relocation neighbors. Destigmatization strategies (Lamont 2009) is an especially useful concept. It includes the ways members of stigmatized groups respond to exclusion through challenging the stereotypes on which exclusionary behavior is based, and challenging the inferior status assigned to members of the stigmatized group. Destigmatization strategies often consist in redefining the symbolic boundaries between groups, essentially altering the standard lines differentiating between “us” and “them” (Lamont 2009). Drawing on Lamont (2009) Palmer et al. (2004) and Kusenbach (2009), and using Lamont’s (2009) concept of destigmatization, Cahuas (2011) focuses on the ways stigma management affects the health and well-being of residents of Regent Park, a redesigned mixed-income community, finding that they use a various counter narratives as destigmatization practices to combat negative characterizations of their community.

Furthermore, Dunn (2012) distinguishes between place destigmatization and personal destigmatization. He differentiates place destigmatization, a quasi-state agency’s efforts to destigmatize public housing sites and residents, as in the case of redeveloping public housing complexes as mixed-income communities, from personal destigmatization, or the everyday destigmatization practices and experiences of the public housing residents themselves. Whereas the Atlanta Housing Authority’s Quality of Life Initiative may be considered an effort at place destigmatization (by eliminating public housing complexes altogether, and purportedly the related stigma), relocated public housing residents would engage in personal destigmatization to manage and/or escape the stigma associated with having lived in a public housing complex. Dunn (2012) identified that public housing residents living in newly constructed mixed-income redevelopments may do boundary work as a destigmatization strategy, however it was yet unclear in the literature what boundary work by public housing residents may look like responding to the stigma of being public housing residents. It is also unknown how the performance of boundary work may differ in the context of voucher relocations.

My study builds on stigma management literature in a number of complementary ways. Examining neighbor interaction in the aftermath of the public housing demolitions and relocations in Atlanta has yielded important information about the ways methods of stigma management affect post-relocation neighborhood social interaction. As the population of the southern United States continues to grow, understanding changing neighborhood dynamics and the ways those dynamics operate in a southern US context is vital. Also important is the knowledge of how stigma management practices operate in essentially uniraical communities, like the neighborhoods in which most relocaters live.

### **3 DATA COLLECTION AND METHOD**

#### **3.1 Purpose and Research Question**

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of relocated public housing residents living in mixed-income neighborhoods, especially concerning their perceptions of and responses to exclusionary behavior by more affluent neighbors. A qualitative method is most appropriate to address this purpose because qualitative methodology is designed to delve deeply into the experiences of a particular group of respondents in order to better understand those in similar circumstances, although not necessarily designed to generalize findings to a larger population. Intensive interviewing involves the use of an interview guide consisting of open-ended questions that direct conversation to elicit rich, detailed information that can be used in qualitative analysis (Lofland et al. 2006). Marshall and Rossman (1995) find interviews to be a useful way to get large amounts of data quickly, and that their format allows for immediate follow-up and clarification. They also argue that interviews allow researchers to understand the meanings people hold for their everyday lives, which makes interviewing an appropriate method for this project. Interviews are able to get at the meanings that people hold by asking respondents to explain and elaborate on the points they raise, encouraging respondents to reflect on their experiences in an intentional way in order to better convey their opinions and arguments.

An assumption of the mixed-income and dispersal strategies for housing assistance, aside from the assumption of positive neighborhood effects for participants is that social interaction between residents of subsidized households and new neighbors will generate benefits for those in subsidized household, but research on interaction in mixed income communities and housing voucher-holders shows that there is not much social interaction of which to speak. Prior research has shown that the likelihood of social interaction with neighbors among public housing residents who move involuntarily is low for various reasons (Buron et al. 2002). One reason for the low likelihood of interaction is the stigma associated with public housing and voucher-based assistance. Taking all of these matters in con-

sideration, my research question was “How do public housing relocaters experience and manage exclusionary boundary work of middle-class blacks post-relocation?”

The main focus of this study was the perceptions, attitudes, and general narratives of relocated public housing residents in Atlanta as they relate to their interactions and relationships with neighbors. These participants were a fitting population to study because they had already been in out of public housing at least two years at the time of interview and potentially had had the opportunity to interact with neighbors, possibly experience exclusionary boundary work, and potentially devise strategies to deal with it. The study utilizes voucher recipients as a proxy for the poor because they are by definition poor/low-income. While relocated public housing residents are in many ways a special population, they arguably represent the larger population of the poor in terms of interaction with the middle- and working-classes.

### **3.2 Respondents and Data**

Respondents were recruited from the list of participants in Georgia State University’s Urban Health Initiative, an interdisciplinary research project spearheaded by three Georgia State University Sociology department professors. The Urban Health Initiative followed over 300 residents from six of the public housing communities for both families and seniors/disabled from which residents have relocated, and one senior community that was not slated for demolition as a control group. The purpose of the study is to follow the cohort of relocaters over time to examine how relocation impacts their lives (Oakley et al. 2009), and a number of important findings have resulted from research on this cohort of relocaters.

Previous studies based on these relocaters have shown that public housing tends to have been a safety net for the very unhealthy poor (Ruel et al. 2010), relocaters viewed their new homes and neighborhoods as an improvement over public housing, and that perceived social disorder and community attachment tend to drive relocation neighborhood satisfaction (Oakley et al. 2013), and that relocation

lead to improved neighborhood satisfaction, improved financial situations, but declines in social support (Oakley et al. 2012). Additionally, Tester et al. (2011) found that many relocated residents expressed place attachment, but residents from senior public housing were much more attached than those who moved from family public housing, and that the relocations precipitated a definite sense of loss among relocated residents. Similarly, Tester and Wingfield (2013) found that residents considered their public housing residences to be “home”, outlining the meaning of home in the ways identified in past literature, but the context of living in public housing modified the way residents used the dimensions of home to construct meaning, as they emphasized the social dimension of home, primarily.

As a researcher working with the Urban Health Initiative, I received permission to recruit participants from the study, and was already included in the Georgia State University Institutional Review Board’s list of researchers for the study. I used the contact information provided by the Urban Health Initiative to call potential respondents and request participation. I interviewed 20 relocated individuals participating in the Urban Health Initiative, beginning in January 2011. I used address data from the Urban Health Initiative database, attempting to select participants who have relocated to middle-income neighborhoods in and around Atlanta. I determined those neighborhoods using zip code-level census data on median family income and visual assessment of housing stock via Google Maps, avoiding zip codes I knew were unlikely to contain a large number of middle class communities. One such example was the 30318 zip code, which contains the Bankhead area, a somewhat notorious section of the city known to contain a large number of lower-income neighborhoods and experience higher crime rates. While there are certainly both established and newly constructed middle-class blocks in this zip code, I chose not to include addresses in this area because of the likelihood of the relocated public housing residents being located in very low-income areas rather than the higher income areas within the zip code boundaries. I contacted all Urban Health Initiative participants who lived in the target areas by phone to request participation in this study, and continued to request participation in the study until 20 respond-

ents agreed and completed their interviews. The limited number of Urban Health Initiative participants who moved to identifiably middle-class areas were largely either unable to be reached at the number they provided or not willing to be interviewed, with some specifically citing the lack of compensation as the reason for their refusal.

Most of my participants, 90 percent, relocated from family projects: seven from Bowen Homes, five from Hollywood Court, four from Bankhead Court, and two from Herndon Homes. Two of my participants relocated from senior high-rises (Roosevelt House and Palmer House). Types of post-relocation housing was divided more evenly among respondents, with 40 percent living in apartments and 60 percent living in single-family homes at the time of interview.

**Table 1: Respondent Demographic Information**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Employment</b>	<b>Household</b>	<b>Housing Type</b>	<b>Public Housing Community</b>
Barbara	Female	51	Disabled	Lives alone	Apartment	Bankhead Court
Alice	Female	53	Cook	Lives alone	Apartment	Bankhead Court
Crystal	Female	29	Personal Service Assistant	2 children	Single-Family Home	Bowen Homes
Nikki	Female	31	Student	Spouse, 6 children	Single-Family Home	Hollywood Court
Tamika	Female	38	Disabled	8 children	Single-Family Home	Bowen Homes
Virginia	Female	63	Retired/Disabled	Lives alone	Home	Roosevelt
Nina	Female	24	Cashier	2 children	Townhome	Bowen Homes
Gail	Female	54	Unemployed	Lives alone	Apartment	Bowen Homes
Michael	Male	64	Retired/Disabled	Lives alone	Townhome community	Palmer House
Jackie	Female	51	Disabled	Lives alone	Apartment	Herndon Homes
Rose	Female	60	Retired/Disabled	Spouse, 1 adult daughter	Single-Family Home	Herndon Homes
Larry	Male	52	Disabled	1 child	Apartment	Bowen Homes
Marcy	Female	53	Disabled	1 Grandchild, other family members	Single-Family Home	Hollywood Court
Sarah	Female	48	Housekeeping	Lives alone	Apartment	Bankhead Court
Latanya	Female	35	Unemployed	3 children, other family members	Single-Family Home	Hollywood Court
Kia	Female	36	Unemployed	1 adult son	Single-Family Home	Bowen Homes
Harriet	Female	66	Retired/Disabled	4 grandkids, other family members	Single-Family Home	Bowen Homes
Alisha	Female	28	Unemployed	2 children, other family members	Single-Family Home	Hollywood Court
Simone	Female	25	Warehouse	1 child	Townhome community	Hollywood Court
Deandra	Female	28	Fast food	4 children	Single-Family Home	Bankhead Court



### 3.3 Interviewing

Interviews took place between January and September 2011, in participants' homes or in a mutually agreed upon, quiet, public location. Interview times varied widely as some participants were extremely concise in their responses, even after being prompted to explain their ideas further, while other respondents were very descriptive. The average length of the interviews was 50 minutes, with the shortest interview at 12 minutes and the longest at 94 minutes. I gathered participants' demographic information at the beginning of the interview by asking for a general introduction, and prompted for demographic information I was looking for when it was left out of the general introduction. Demographic information assisted in organizing the data and recognizing emergent themes. Participants were asked to select a pseudonym and were reminded that their identities will be protected to the fullest extent possible. However, the vast majority of participants did not wish to select a pseudonym, preferring to use their own names. For the sake of confidentiality, I assigned pseudonyms during the analysis phase. The interview guide (Appendix) was followed loosely, with appropriate prompts and discussion, and all content areas were addressed. Interviews addressed several content areas developed from themes found in the literature, including any specific interactions with neighbors, children's friendships, and shopping and entertainment preferences. Although I did not ask about public behavior and any conflicts that may have arisen as a result of contentious public behavior, the topic emerged in responses to various questions.

Since respondents may have found it difficult to understand the concept of boundary work, potentially making it difficult to extract data on their reactions to boundary work, interview questions were designed to address boundary work, without requiring an extensive lecture on the topic during the interview. Participants were asked about their perceptions of their neighbors' thoughts about them and if there has been a change in their neighbors' attitudes over time. Each participant was mailed a thank you card with an individualized note and given an opportunity to state whether he or she wanted a copy of

the finished thesis. One goal of this project was to privilege the ideas and experiences of a marginalized population, therefore, it was important to ensure that respondents had an opportunity to view the finished product if they were interested in doing so.

### **3.4 Data Collection and Analysis**

Interviews were recorded on a digital personal recording device and the audio data organized by respondent and saved in a password-restricted file on my personal computer. Analysis consisted of thematic coding of the raw transcript data. I occasionally made some initial notes while transcribing that would later assist with coding. When all interviews were completed and transcribed, I carefully read each interview transcript, reviewing and adding to initial notes. I then coded each transcript for broad themes, especially as related to interaction with neighbors, like privacy, quiet, borrowing, and “speaking” to neighbors (greeting in passing). The themes discussed in the results section of this manuscript were developed through the frequency of their mention. For example, “I stay to myself” was a direct quote in seven interviews, and was often repeated in respondents’ narratives. Staying to self emerged as the primary theme in this study. Variations on the phrase “I stay to myself,” like “I just keep to myself” and similar statements, occurred in all but one of the interviews. In the one interview a variation on “I stay to myself” did not occur, there were other indications that the participant had a similar orientation. Other major themes were related to I kept an analysis journal file to keep track of ideas that occurred while reading transcripts and organizing the emerging themes.

Data is presented here in an unambiguous form, and written in a manner designed to be accessible to other researchers as well as policymakers, as Marshall and Rossman (2006) recommend. Raw interview data (i.e. transcript excerpts) has been included in the results section in order to clearly demonstrate the connection between those data and interpretations of them. Inclusion of raw interview data also enables the relocaters’ experiences and perspectives to be expressed as directly as possible.

This study was approved by Georgia State University's Institutional Review Board, and complied with all Institutional Review Board regulations. Participants were fully informed on the motives, risks, benefits, and process relating to this study. No harm came to any study participant. Participants signed a copy of the informed consent form and received a copy to keep for their records at the beginning of each interview appointment.

The vast majority of this study's participants were black female heads of household who were native to Atlanta, GA, as was expected, given the demographics of Atlanta's Housing Choice Voucher program participants. I was unable to offer a financial incentive for participating in the study, which impacted the number of respondents, and the speed with which respondents were recruited. Many of the participants I contacted first because they fit the study criteria most closely refused participation. The opportunity to participate in a sociological study alone did not seem to be worth the inconvenience of scheduling time to meet and spending an hour being interviewed. This may have especially been an issue because all potential respondents for this study had been paid for their participation in the Urban Health Initiative. My willingness to travel to respondents' homes, or nearby public location, at their convenience, did seem to mitigate the inconvenience for respondents. Participants were clearly informed that I am a student doing research for an academic project, and viewed that fact in a positive light. My status as a student was also helpful, as many of the respondents mentioned that they were willing to help me because I was working on a school project.

Similarly, my identity as a black woman was most certainly to my advantage in terms of building rapport with the participants. However, my middle-class background may have been a slight barrier. In addition to being middle-class, I am also from Canada. Although my accent is not identifiably Canadian, it is certainly not similar to one of a native Atlantan, so participants immediately perceived my outsider status. One respondent mentioned her surprise and relief at meeting me in person because she was sure that I was a white woman from our phone conversation. Participants may not have immediately felt

comfortable discussing potentially negative feelings toward middle-class neighbors, but I attempted to build rapport earlier in the interview in preparation for this potential discomfort. I made sure to remember any details they may have shared during the conversation we had to schedule. For example, a participant mentioned going through an issue with a grandchild when we were scheduling and I made a point to ask about the grandchild as we began the interview. I also began each interview by allowing respondents to ask any questions of or about me, or about the project, and then explaining that the interview will be conversational, unlike the surveys in which they participated previously. One of the benefits of using the interview method is that this method allows respondents to clarify their comments diplomatically while giving honest answers (Harvey Wingfield 2009). The good rapport I was able to build with most respondents allowed for open responses, as respondents felt comfortable revising their statements when necessary and felt free to share examples to clarify their points.

## 4 FINDINGS

### 4.1 “I stay to myself.”

This study focuses on how relocated public housing residents respond to exclusionary boundary work done by post-relocation neighbors. In their new neighborhoods, relocaters do not necessarily experience the place-based stigma of the public housing neighborhood after relocation. Although post-relocation neighbors may know which houses in the neighborhood are rented, or that their apartment complex accepts housing vouchers, neighbors do not automatically know that relocaters are former public housing residents, and therefore do not necessarily stigmatize relocaters based on that status. Nonetheless, respondents were aware of the image of public housing residents as it stands in the cultural imagination, and they recognized that their unsubsidized neighbors might have this image in their minds when interacting with former public housing residents. Rather than attempting to counter the stereotypical view of public housing residents, relocaters in this study readily acknowledged the validity of those stereotypes and understood why there may be resistance to people with vouchers among neighbors. However, while acknowledging the validity of the stereotypes, relocaters actively distinguished themselves from those stereotypes, emphasizing that the stereotypes do not apply to themselves. I argue that creating this distinction constitutes a personal destigmatization practice.

Respondents did not experience direct exclusion or disparagement from their neighbors, however, relocaters in this study interfaced with generalized stereotypes of public housing residents and people who receive public assistance more broadly. Many respondents were exposed to neighbors', colleagues', and other acquaintances' opinions about public housing residents through overhearing conversations or through interactions in which the comments were not directed toward respondents specifically. In those situations the parties expressing their opinions about public housing residents were not aware of the relocater's status as a former public housing resident. A few respondents encountered what they perceived as negative comments, or dismissive or unfair treatment, they felt were directly

related to their status as a former public housing resident. However, this treatment came from landlords and apartment complex management, never directly from neighbors. Despite the different ways of being exposed to the negative characterizations of public housing residents, respondents all used personal destigmatization strategies (Dunn 2012) in order to defend themselves and escape the associated stigma. Personal destigmatization is focused on individuals' efforts to manage group-based stigma by developing strategies to escape or deflect the group-based stigma.

My respondents regularly described one personal destigmatization strategy: a type of boundary work that consisted of selectively interacting with neighbors designed to avoid being associated with negative stereotypes about low-income households, summed in the often-used statement, "I stay to myself". Like Curley's (2009) respondents, the majority of my respondents had made no new close ties in their neighborhoods two years after relocation. However, a major difference between the results of Curley's (2009) study and those of this study is that respondents in this study all described their neighborhood interactions as being non-existent, even though the degree to which they interact with their neighbors varied greatly, while Curley's (2009) respondents who shared that they stayed to themselves literally did not interact with their neighbors. For example, 28-year-old Deandra explains her relationship with her neighbors as follows:

I stay to myself. They don't bother me, I don't bother them. It stay the same like when I was at Bankhead. I don't come outside. When I come outside, I just sat on my porch, same thing I do here. If I come outside, I sit on my porch or I may go next door and talk to them for a minute, but it's the same.

Respondents like Deandra described using the strategy of staying to self as their mode of operation pre- and post-relocation, and described the strategy as staying to self regardless of their actual level of engagement with neighbors. This suggests that staying to self refers to a broad attitude among respondents about interacting with neighbors, rather than a strict description of their behavior.

During analysis it became clear that the way relocaters discussed their interactions with their neighbors indicated a very strong intentionality in terms of the way that they went about their neighbor-

ing relationships. The phrase “I stay to myself” and similar verbiage was used to communicate something specific about relocaters themselves, and their ideas about neighboring, beyond their actual level of interaction with their neighbors. This discourse was deliberate and strategic, and specifically used to discuss respondents’ overall way of managing their interactions in order to avoid stigmatization. I argue that the discourse my respondents used to discuss their interactions was part of a destigmatization strategy that involved the neighboring strategy I refer to using respondents’ language, *staying to self*. The stay to self strategy my respondents shared is a type of boundary work I describe as *destigmatizing boundary work*, which differs from boundary work as an identity process, as it is commonly used in the literature, in that the goal is not to create or emphasize a particular group identity, but to disassociate from a stigmatized group identity.

Boundaries drawn by relocaters between themselves and their former public housing neighbors were much more apparent in this study than any relocaters perceived being drawn by post-relocation neighbors to distance themselves from relocaters. The boundary work relocaters do to distinguish themselves from their former neighbors is demonstrated by the ways respondents explain why and how they limit interaction with neighbors. Staying to self is a personal destigmatization strategy that involves doing this boundary work, to maintain the distinctions relocaters in this study draw between themselves and former public housing neighbors, and this boundary work is part of a personal destigmatization strategy. Staying to self simultaneously works to distinguish relocaters’ behavior from negative characterizations of public housing residents and to destigmatize their status as former public housing residents. Respondents deal with the possibility of exclusion and stigmatization indirectly, by avoiding close interaction with neighbors and being mindful that their behavior does not match the negative behaviors associated with people who live in public housing. This ensures that they will not be associated with negative characterizations of public housing residents.

## 4.2 Doing Destigmatizing Boundary Work

Public housing residents, and renters using housing vouchers, are commonly regarded as lacking in morality, being too dependent on the government and others for assistance, and being loud, crass, and undesirable neighbors. Stereotypes like the welfare queen and drug dealer abusing the welfare system, and the single-parent family with many undisciplined children create a negative characterization against which relocaters must constantly defend themselves in order to escape the accompanying stigma. Staying to self is used as a strategy in defense against potential boundary work by neighbors as a result of their relocaters' as former public housing residents, but staying to self is also used as a strategy to create and maintain the desired mental and social distance from prior public housing neighbors. The relocated public housing residents in this study use moral boundaries and emphasize differences in appropriate versus inappropriate values and behavior in distancing themselves from people who fit common characterizations of public housing residents. Five behaviors emerged as the basis for doing stay to self as destigmatizing boundary work: aspiring toward upward mobility, emphasizing work, maintaining respectable behavior, avoiding draining ties, and not disclosing voucher status.

### 4.2.1 *Aspirations for Upward Mobility*

One of the most pervasive ideas about people living in public housing, or receiving other government assistance, is that they are permanently dependent on that assistance and content with the lifestyle associated with receiving assistance. Several respondents maintained ideas about which kinds of neighbors shared similar aspirations to escape poverty and government assistance. The distinction between public housing neighbors who did want to become economically self-sufficient and those who presumably did not wish to achieve self-sufficiency led respondents to stay to self because of a desire for upward mobility. It was clear that all respondents had goals and aspirations for their lives, however some respondents emphasized that their time in public housing and as subsidized renters was simply a means to an end and not a permanent situation. Their desired end was a future that involved financial



stability and independence, better neighborhoods and, often, home ownership. These respondents include older former homeowners Rose and Michael, as well as younger women like Simone who may or may not have experienced homeownership in their families, but feel that homeownership is the ideal living situation.

For example, Simone, a 25-year-old warehouse employee, explains why she was renting a town-home-style apartment instead of living in a home she owned:

...I know I have issues with my credit, so that's why – part of the reason why I didn't go forth as trying to get a house, at first. But I do want to redo my credit where it's, you know, stable where I can be a homeowner. And I would like to actually live in a very – I want to say, high-class neighborhood. Because I like quietness and I like to be in an environment where, you don't see too many people walking around and stuff. Kind of like a – most people would say it's like a prison, but to me I like to be, you know – cause, growing up, I've been around a lot of people. So, now, I'm at an age where I like to be alone and quiet and just have a peace of mind.

This quote clearly establishes her desire to live in a neighborhood far different from what she experienced growing up in lower-income neighborhoods and, just previously, in public housing. When asked to describe her neighbors at Hollywood Court, Simone clarifies her point by highlighting what she perceived as a fundamental difference in goals and values:

Actually, my neighbors over there were kind of cool, but I knew that they were comfortable where they were. I felt like they didn't want to, upgrade themselves. I felt like, the projects was all they knew and they were comfortable with being that way – which, I'm not saying I'm better than anyone, but I wanted more out of my life. And I wanted my daughter to not have to live in that type of environment all of her life and go through the things I went through. *I felt like they were like comfortable being how they were.* So, I just distanced myself from them because I was taught that if you hang around negative people, you'll, have negative actions also. So I just distanced myself from people like that.

In distancing herself from “people like that”, Simone developed few friendships in the neighborhood from which she relocated. Having already learned to stay to herself as a young child in a low-income neighborhood, when she moved into public housing, she continued to distance herself from neighbors she believed she should avoid, but now for a different reason. While neighbors in her pre-public housing

neighborhood were prone to conflict, Simone found her neighbors in the public housing neighborhood generally negative and unambitious, and evaded interaction to avoid becoming negative and unambitious herself. This is a clear example of the way staying to self is an expression of boundary work as Simone details the ways in which she differs from her previous neighbors, utilizing these differences as a reason to limit interaction with public housing neighbors, as well as new neighbors in her mixed-income neighborhood.

Michael, a 64-year-old disabled relocater, expresses a similar idea of environmental determinism in his comments about his former neighbors: "Yeah, the attitude. The attitude and personality. See when you live with dogs, you begin to turn into a dog. When you live with civilized people, you become civilized." In Michael's view, the people surrounding him in public housing were dogs and would have eventually influenced his behavior such that he would become one as well. Michael is a former homeowner, who was unable to stay in his home after a debilitating injury and the subsequent surgeries, eventually ending up living in a public housing community. While living there, his desire was to move back to somewhere "civilized", escaping the primitive and animalistic environment he perceived in his public housing community.

Michael characterizes his previous public housing neighbors as being morally questionable, saying "Palmer House I would say was not a place for me because I am not a low down in life. I won't sell something [illegal] to better myself." Here Michael's strong feelings about the morality of the neighbors he had in his previous community become clearer. He goes on to describe his former neighbors as lawless and disrespectful. Despite the fact that former neighbors may have come to live in public housing due to circumstances similar to his own, his experiences of his neighbors has caused his perception of public housing residents to be that they are fundamentally different from him and other people in terms of their morals and values. The idea that his former community, in particular, was a place specifically for people who are "low down in life", not people who lived there for other reasons, certainly colored his

strategy of staying to self while living there and his desire to move away. As a result, Michael felt he did not belong in the public housing complex in which he resided for several years, and that his current neighborhood was a much better fit. Michael's perception of his current neighbors as being more similar to him in terms of value influences his continued strategy of staying to himself post-relocation because he perceives his new neighbors as staying to themselves, describing them as being not intrusive or bothersome.

In another example, Nikki, a full-time student, relocated from a large family project and sees herself as having a different set of values from her previous neighbors, and a current neighbor who also relocated from public housing, as a result of her upbringing. She explains:

So, I just, I guess because I was raised by my grandmother, and she was a grandmother. She wasn't a young grandmother, she was older...she instilled a lot in me, and my uncles and my aunts, and just being around my family. And so... and having some, you know, a lot of people – I experienced a lot of stuff, you know my aunts and uncles, they went to college. A lot of people don't have people to look up to that actually took those steps, you know most of us have people that barely have been making it. So I saw a difference. I experienced more beyond my – what was placed in front of me. And I always think outside of the box.

Nikki attributes her desire to complete her college degree, and her motivation to become economically self-sufficient to the kinds of values that were instilled in her as a child. She sees her values as being fundamentally contrary to those of the majority of her former public housing neighbors and developed a habit of staying to herself in order focus on her goals, avoiding the distraction of people with different values. Post-relocation, Nikki continues to avoid developing closer friendships with neighbors, as she concentrates her efforts on her family and education.

To relocaters emphasizing upward mobility, the social environment of public housing was especially detrimental because of the seemingly contagious complacency of people who live in public housing. These driven individuals never allowed themselves to feel "at home" in their apartments, having already internalized a vastly different vision of what an appropriate home is. Wingate-Lewinson et al. (2010) found that residents living in extended-stay hotels temporarily while attempting to acquire per-

manent housing exhibited a similar desire to not get too comfortable in the temporary housing situation. This desire stems from a particular perception of the people who live comfortably in these marginalized housing situations as somewhat lazy and lacking ambition, as well as a distinct feeling that their own identity is incompatible with that living situation long-term.

Kia demonstrates the negative perception of people who lived comfortably in their public housing community in the distinction she draws between them and herself:

I didn't grow up in Bowen Homes, I just STAYED in Bowen Homes. It's different. And then I be like – people be like, "You grew up in Bowen Homes." No. I wasn't a little kid growing up in Bowen Homes. I STAYED in Bowen Homes. I didn't grow up in Bowen Homes...The people who grew up out there...just – I'm talkin' bout LOVE it. They just go CRAZY about Bowen Homes. If you just – they was like – "If they opened up Bowen Homes right now today, I'd go right back." I bet you would! And they was like, "If Bowen Homes was up there you'd move back?" I be like, "No!" They was like, "You know if you got Section 8, you got first –" I say, "I don't care!" Them people who grew up out there, like little girls, like little kids there? Yeah, they'd love to go back, but [Kia]? When? I mean, I want to get out of that!

Kia emphasizes the difference between growing up in that community and the resulting attachment to it and staying in the community temporarily, suggesting her use of public housing as housing of last resort. Despite spending over a decade in Bowen Homes, Kia was happy to move out and live in a home she considered more worthy of attachment. She seemed to expect those who grew up in the public housing community to have strong attachment motivated those she knew to want to return, saying, "I bet you would [want to move back]." Presumably, Kia's expectations of her former neighbors' attachment to the public housing complex in which they were raised were shaped by what she viewed as a lack of exposure to a superior living situation. For Kia, the only reason someone would want to move from an ostensibly better living situation post-relocation back to public housing is if they did not wish better for themselves. Kia maintained minimal ties to her former neighbors and was cautious about the kinds of neighbors with which she interacted post-relocation in an effort to avoid people with such a limited perspective.

The public housing relocations allowed public housing residents strongly oriented toward upward mobility to enact their housing and neighborhood preferences so that they more closely aligned with their concept of themselves. For example, Nina describes feeling comfortable and as if she belongs in her post-relocation neighborhood, especially because she is in school. She explains:

Cause I know like, I'm going to school, I know eventually it's going to pay off and like, I'm pretty sure, like it's not a lot of Section 8 recipients in here, so that mean they paying rent out they pocket. And I want to be able to do that, you know, one day. *So I think I'm on the right path and I fit in, because I'm on the right path to doing what they're doing.*

Nina sees her current neighborhood as a better fit for her than Bowen Homes because she is now, in her estimation, surrounded by other like-minded individuals who are simply further along in the process of achieving upward mobility than she. She does not believe that her values or motivation have changed as a result of her new neighborhood, rather she moved into a neighborhood that matched her values and aspirations. While living in their public housing communities, upward mobility relocaters employed the literal, isolative form staying to self, choosing relationships sparsely and strategically, while focusing on their goal of improving their material conditions. These relocaters either had tenures in public housing that were shorter, entering public housing with the firm idea that it was a temporary situation until something better was attainable, or grew up in public housing and other low-income communities with the idea that these kinds of environments were not somewhere to become comfortable and feel at home.

Respondents use their desire for upward mobility as a distinction between themselves and their former public housing neighbors. Respondents who stay to self because of aspirations for upward mobility stayed to themselves in the public housing environment because they perceived their public housing neighbors as having a contagious complacency that they wished to avoid. They then stay to themselves in the post-relocation neighborhood because they live in neighborhoods in which the residents tend not to interact with each other, but, more importantly, because they do not wish to be associated with the stigmatized characterization of public housing residents. Having aspirations for upward mobility func-

tions as a motivator for enacting the stay to self strategy by allowing relocaters to focus on achieving that upward mobility. At the same time, respondents stay to self as a form of destigmatizing boundary work, separating themselves as individuals with upward mobility aspirations from most public housing residents who they perceive as not having the same kinds of aspirations, thereby escaping the stigma associated with the stereotypical portrayal of the public housing resident content with dependency on housing assistance.

#### 4.2.2 *Emphasizing Work*

Work and the habit of working emerged as more than simply a justification for not interacting with neighbors. Gainful employment or enrollment in school was a key distinction working respondents used to distinguish themselves from their former public housing neighbors who did not work. It is used as an explanation of certain behaviors these respondents deem undesirable, and serves as something that relocaters have in common with their new neighbors. Respondents emphasized their identities as workers and/or students in response to generalized stereotypes of public housing residents who do not work.

For example, Simone was very knowledgeable about negative impressions that the general public has about subsidized households and people who receive government benefits, especially concerning work ethic. She recounts a time when she encountered the expression of these negative impressions:

I overheard an incident at work, at my current job, where I overheard a lady saying something about people that – no, actually two times, the first one was at work. I overheard a lady saying something about women that are on public assistance. And not just saying, you know, public housing, but just public assistance period. And she was saying how, um, you know, people that get assistance, they don't work, they don't, you know, and that was just her opinion. And I kind of got upset because I know that I'm a worker and I know that, you know, before I got this public assistance, I was working, I was doing everything on my own to provide for me and my daughter, and even my mom. So I kinda got upset about that.

Even though the comment about women on public assistance was not directed at Simone, it had a strong impact on her. She immediately reaffirmed her identity as a worker to herself in the moment.

Working is a major feature of public assistance programs in the aftermath of welfare reform of the 1990s as a result of the cultural idea expressed by the woman Simone overheard at work. The idea that poor blacks, especially those who receive social assistance like public housing, are lazy and do not work is one that former public housing residents must constantly grapple with. Working or being otherwise engaged in productive activities is a destigmatization strategy for relocaters in my study, and a site for boundary work against public housing residents who do not work.

In her research on fast food industry workers Katherine Newman (1999) finds that the dominance of work culture reinforces the division between working people and their acquaintances who do not work, arguing that work culture causes workers to pull away from people who do not share their schedule, their problems, and, in time, their way of looking at the world. She writes, "The further Burger Barn workers sink into their jobs, the more they pull away from the negative elements in their environment and distinguish themselves in every respect from the friends and acquaintances who have taken a wrong turn in life." Not working is nearly synonymous with taking "a wrong turn in life", as it is essentially a sign of rejecting work and work ethic, thereby aligning oneself with alternative values. Similarly, among this study's respondents, work is a key division between people considered to be positive and respectable and people who are negative.

Explaining the difference between her previous neighbors and current neighbors, Nina introduces work as a major distinction, saying, "They work, so they're not home, sitting on the porch. They're not loud. They're not alley. You don't have people trash thrown in your yard." On the surface neighbors working and neighbors throwing trash in the yard do not seem to be related, however, the underlying assumptions about the kinds of people who work and the kinds of people who do not work reveal the connections relocaters make between certain undesirable behaviors and not working. This is essentially the connection that Wilson (1987) and others make to explain patterns of behavior associated with the underclass. Relocaters in my study observe the connection between the lack of jobs and what they per-

ceive as reproachable behaviors. Boundary work based on employment status is done to delineate self-sufficient and appropriate behavior from dependent and inappropriate behavior. Things like respect for other people's property and not meddling in the affairs of others are associated with being productive, and earning and being responsible with resources (paying bills and prioritizing spending).

Deandra, a working mother of four, observes the lack of participation in work as a fundamental difference in mindset between herself and neighbors while explaining her desire to avoid socializing with previous public housing neighbors:

Cause I have known people, like, from Bowen Homes and then I had met back up with them and they're like, 'What are you doing?' 'Where you staying?' and 'Do you have a phone number?' I'm like "No, I don't have a phone" [laughs]. I try to make the past be the past [laughs]. Yeah. Especially if they not on the same mindframe I'm on, you know what I mean? So, I don't know, I got – over here, I don't know. I think everybody go to work and they go to school, so, these are not like Bowen Homes, where people just be sittin' outside, and you just happen to walk by and somebody say something to you. Don't nobody be out here like that.

Although she is not partial to developing close relationships with neighbors in general, she describes being even less likely to have that closeness with people she knew previously in Bowen Homes than other people. Deandra deliberately rejects reconnecting with acquaintances from Bowen Homes, wanting to leave those connections in the past, particularly because she perceives them as not having the same mindset as she, one focused on working and going to school. She views her mindset as being much more like her current neighbors. She then highlights work as the key distinction between previous neighbors and current neighbors in terms of mindframe and thus in behavior. Deandra chooses to cut ties with former neighbors so that she may focus on work without being distracted by people who she perceives as not having the appropriate values concerning work and education. She takes advantage of the opportunity to literally stay to herself, avoiding relationships with former and current neighbors, post-relocation.

Respondents who work and come from families that emphasized work do not spend a lot of time neighboring because they spend a great deal of their time at work. This is a working poor popula-



tion. Neighboring, and importance of neighbor friendships more specifically, can be considered by some to be mainly a leisurely activity of the middle class, or the result of too much idle time. Respondents make an implicit distinction between themselves and those who do not work, making comments implying that the people who have time to sit outside and talk to passersby have time to do that because those people do not work. Rather than members of middle class as the reference group for leisurely neighboring, the relocaters in this study use their former public housing resident neighbors as a reference to which they compared themselves. In the public housing communities, neighbors who were always outside and available for social interaction, or forcing social interaction, were able to do so because they were not working or in school. By emphasizing working and being productive, these relocaters create distance between themselves and previous neighbors who do not work, and highlight similarity to current neighbors who also work. Respondents stay to themselves in order to avoid being perceived as idle and bothersome in the way they perceived some of their former neighbors who were constantly present in community public spaces because they did not leave to go to work every day.

A clear distinction is made between people who work and are oriented toward working or going to school, and those who habitually do not work. Simone contrasts her new neighbors with her previous public housing neighbors in terms of their work habits shaping their behavior, saying:

Um, pretty much, I mean, everyone's just stay to themselves. I mean, only a couple of my neighbors I see they hang out with each other, but most of the people that live in my little parking lot, they work so they're mostly gone all day and when they do come home, they go in the house or, you know, it's never where you know, you see your neighbor sitting out on the porch with another neighbor and they're just hanging out all the time. That's – that's not likely to happen.

In respondents' narratives people not actively engaged in the workforce or in developing their human capital were often characterized as not wanting better for themselves and not having any drive.

Relocaters who place a strong emphasis on work see this as a key distinction between themselves and their previous public housing neighbors. Reflecting on her time in Bowen Homes, Nina puts a positive

spin on her experience, but also sees a distinction between herself and her peers who were living in the community:

It let me see where I don't want to be and it's an opportunity, you know, to get Section 8, or whatever. It wasn't ALL bad. You know, you, you learn. You live and you learn, so it wasn't all bad. And I think it depend on the person, like, when I was going out there, when I was staying out there. I went to school and I worked, so I didn't, I wasn't really free and roaming around the neighborhood like the other girls my age or whatever, so it wasn't so bad for me. But maybe [it was for] them.

Here, Nina attributes being able to see her time in the public housing community as somewhat positive, and an opportunity, to involvement in school and work. Again, interviews with relocaters revealed strong sentiment about working and people who do not work. Relocaters use a working as a basis for staying to self, destigmatizing themselves as individuals who relocated from public housing, creating distance between themselves and former public housing neighbors, and avoiding being perceived as lazy and idle by post-relocation neighbors.

While work was certainly viewed as a means to a financial end, working and the status of worker was also important to these respondents. Working was viewed as a preventative measure against idle time and getting into trouble. Similar to the idea that avoiding interactions with neighbors decreases the likelihood of getting into trouble, working is another strategy to avoid the ills of idle time in the public housing environment. Respondents emphasized their identities as workers and/or students in response to generalized stereotypes of public housing residents who do not work. They also attributed disruptive and inappropriate behavior with not working and associated this disruptive behavior with former public housing neighbors. As a result of the association between not working and disruptive behavior, and the focus on attaining upward mobility through working, respondents who emphasized work stayed to themselves. Relocaters staying to themselves by allowing working to take priority over socializing provided a way to avoid interacting with pre-relocation neighbors who did not share their work orientation, and allowed these relocaters to distance themselves from stigmatized portrayals of lazy public housing residents.

#### 4.2.3 *Maintaining Respectable Behavior*

The disruptive and inappropriate behavior associated with public housing residents was discussed in most interviews. Respondents presented this behavior in contrast to their own behavior and that of their post-relocation neighbors. For example, Barbara's first move after relocation was to a run-down very-low-income apartment complex in a southern suburb of Atlanta that actively recruited relocating public housing residents before the relocations. She noticed some differences between neighbors at the first post-relocation neighborhood with current neighbors in her second post-relocation neighborhood, an older, but well-maintained apartment complex in a northern suburb. She says that most of her current neighbors are "[p]robably middle class here. There are some people like myself with lower income but like I said it's much nicer here." Barbara observes what she considers a key difference in the behavior of her new neighbors and her previous very-low-income neighbors:

They are different here. Whatever they do they do it inside where people don't see it. But over there they were out drinking and acting the fool and smoking marijuana and cussing and it was loud and you could see it and kids and everyone walking by could smell it but they don't do that here. They have police here, they have it there too but when they come around someone would warn them and everyone would hide.

Barbara's observation raises two points about the social environment in shared spaces. The first has to do with the appropriateness of behavior in shared spaces. Drinking, smoking marijuana, using foul language and engaging in disruptive, disorderly behavior is conduct that is deemed problematic, but is especially so because it takes place in outdoor, shared spaces. Barbara's issue with the behavior is not so much that it is occurring, but specifically that it can be seen and heard, and, in some cases, smelled. Exposure of that kind of behavior to children is another issue for her. Barbara appreciates and respects that her current neighbors spend their leisure time indoors where whatever potentially objectionable behavior can be hidden by closed doors, and not exposed to passersby.

The second point about the social environment in the shared spaces is raised by Barbara's observation of both formal and informal social control of the outdoor behavior. The presence of police in

both places is either enhanced or subverted by the other residents. In the very-low-income complexes, the police were present, but unable to enforce appropriate behavior because the social environment was such that other residents would not assist in the policing of behavior, but would assist the perpetrators in escaping the police. In the new neighborhood, however, Barbara observes that the residents would at least avoid obstructing the police process, if not assist in pointing out offenders. Barbara's comments show the ways appropriate, respectful, law-abiding behavior are a key component of Barbara's assessment of the differences between her neighbors in public housing and her neighbors in the market-rate apartment complex. This illustrates some key differences between the values of relocaters like Barbara and those former public housing neighbors they view as lacking appropriate behavior. These differences lead those relocaters to stay to themselves in an effort to avoid being exposed to the kinds of behaviors they deem unacceptable, but also to avoid being associated with people who do these inappropriate behaviors.

Simone demonstrates a similar way of thinking about the outdoor behavior of a couple of her new neighbors to Barbara's way of thinking about hers, and provides some explanation for why this behavior is problematic in the post-relocation setting:

Um....I would probably label maybe one or two of [my new neighbors] as lower class, only because I feel that they are still in the mindset that they're still in the projects, meaning you know, they're always using profanity, and hanging out drinking, and you know, smoking and you know, just stuff that I remember seeing when I was living in the projects. Not saying that, you know, they can't do what they want to do, because they're adults. But in my opinion, I feel like, you know, what you do is what you do, but you know it's...you should try to like do it behind closed doors versus being all out with it, you know? Being that we're trying to try to make ourselves, you know, feel like we're in a better environment. You know, it's not – I feel it's not good to be outside drinking all times of night, and yelling and using profanity and smoking, being that kids are always walking around and you know, they're seeing these things. So, that's why I feel like that.

Again, like Barbara, Simone sees a distinction between what behavior is appropriate for outdoor, public spaces, and what is expected of someone who has a "mindset that they're still in the projects". She makes an explicit connection between the inconsiderate and unseemly behavior exhibited by two of her

neighbors that came from public housing and the fact that they came from public housing. Here Simone shows the ways that respectable behavior, especially outdoors, is a marker of appropriate values, and the ways that public housing residents are often seen as lacking appropriate values. Behaviors like drinking, using profanity, yelling, and hanging out are just some of the markers of inappropriate public behavior with which relocaters in this study attempt to avoid being associated by staying to themselves.

Nina makes an implicit distinction between people who live in apartment complexes and people who live in houses in her response to a question about values, explaining that she was raised not to be loud and inappropriate, “because before we stayed in Bowen Homes, we stayed in Decatur, in a house.” Nina considers her experience of living in a house as a qualification for the kinds of values that were instilled by her mother. She includes this detail as a contrast to public housing neighbors who grew up in public housing, implying that the values she received were as a result of having the experience of living in a neighborhood with single-family homes, and the experience of growing up outside of the public housing environment.

So, we, I mean, we done had a rough life, we moved back and forth, but my momma always had instilled values, and respect people, “Yes ma’am. No ma’am.” You know, not to be so loud and alley, you know what I mean? So, it’s a place for everything. A time and a place for everything. And so, when we moved out there [to Bowen Homes], we still had that habit, you know what I mean? We still had that instilled in us.

She associates the tendency to be loud and boisterous with people who grew up in public housing and attributes this tendency to a lack of value for decorum in the public housing environment.

Latanya, an unemployed mother of three, makes a similar distinction between temporarily living in public housing and growing up in public housing as she explained what she interpreted as her landlord’s perception of her as being “hood”:

I stayed in Hollywood Court, but that was by my own choice, you understand what I’m saying, because I wasn’t born and raised in just the projects alone, you understand me? Yeah, I been in the projects, stayed in the projects. My mom when she first had me, we lived in the projects, but she busted her butt to put me in a house. Not one house, not two houses, not three houses, but multiple houses we stayed in. My mom’s last house now, she’s been staying in that

house for about 22 years. So I mean, please believe me, it's not like I don't know what it feels like to stay in a house.

The distinction drawn between people who grew up in public housing and those who view their tenure in public housing as temporary, or even strategic like Latanya does, is a very firm one in the minds of my respondents. Latanya emphasizes the fact that she has had experience living in a house, which is what has afforded her a broader perspective than that of people who were "born and raised just in the projects alone". This distinction seems related to ideas of multi-generational dependency on housing assistance common in discussions about the culture of poverty. While Latanya had good relationships with neighbors in public housing, she was careful to maintain what she saw as setting herself apart from the stereotypical public housing resident, a commitment to educational achievement and a knowledge of situationally-appropriate behavior. Latanya describes herself as a people-person, in that she loves to interact with people, but also as someone who stays to herself with neighbors because she does not make it a habit to be in any one else's business.

Crystal's comments about the negative perceptions people have of public housing residents illustrates that by ensuring that the stereotypes associated with public housing are not applicable to her, the stigma of coming from public housing can be diminished. She said of her neighbors:

Um, you know, they still talk about [the issue of families with housing vouchers moving into the neighborhood] today, not knowing that I have one, you know? But they'll be like, you know they moving these people in, they gon' have all these problems. But my neighbors she knows – they know that I'm a participant and they have no problem with me. You know, I don't, I don't keep up – we don't be outside – you know, [my brother and his friends] be in here playing the game or something but – Like they probably thought what gon' happen, you know, like the first day we moved over here [laughing] the police was out there when I moved in, but no...I'm not rowdy, I don't keep my yard dirty, you know they – that's probably what they thought because I was from the projects, that I was rowdy and I'm not like that at all. I'm very quiet, and I never went outside when I was there [in public housing]! You know what I'm sayin', so, they be like, well now they movin' all these people with section 8, putting them in our neighborhood... I just look at 'em. Because they sound, kinda crazy. Cause all people not like that.

By making it a point not to be rowdy and/or dirty, or emphasizing the fact that she is not rowdy or dirty, Crystal clearly distinguishes herself from the behaviors associated with public housing residents. Crystal defends the status of Section 8 renters as not all exhibiting undesirable behavior, then quickly acknowledges that some people are like that. At the same time she is careful to emphasize the fact that she is not. She said:

Some of them, are you know, probably right, you know? You know what I'm saying? Cause I done, um you know, it's people I know and I done been to they house and...some of them are right. You got to give respect to get it from your neighbors and stuff. You know, some, some people have the right to think that because you know, sometimes it's true. But, right here it's not. But a lot of people – you know, all the crime, you know what I'm sayin. But I dunno, I just really just maintain on myself. What's going on right here...

Crystal argues that over time her neighbors have had to think differently about her because “I haven't had no problems with them. They haven't had no problems with me. We speak, hey and bye, you know, but I mainly stay to myself anyway”. By “maintaining on herself”, she focused on developing her own presence in the neighborhood as an individual without the baggage of the public housing resident stereotype. In Crystal's statement we see that staying to self is specifically given as a strategy to manage and dispel negative perceptions and potential exclusion by neighbors over time.

Staying to self was also described as a strategy for maintaining sobriety and other lifestyle choices. When asked if her desire to keep to herself was based on her upbringing or her personality Gail replied:

Mmm...well after um, living in Four Seasons and all these government apartments, and, you know, I used to drink and stuff and you know everybody I meet now, they drink and stuff and I – I try to stay away from people. You know, I done left that in the past. And everybody I meet, you know, they're drinking or smoking...so I have to be careful of my friends, you know, I have to be careful.

For Gail, living in subsidized apartment complexes was a circumstance that directly influenced her substance use. Meeting neighbors became a negative experience because the ones with which she became acquainted used substances she had made a decision to avoid. In an effort to leave her substance habits

in the past, she deliberately attempts to avoid people in the neighborhood at large. Her comments suggest that she attributes at least some of her past substance use to living in subsidized housing, as if the social environment in these types of apartment communities were inevitably rife with drinking and smoking. For some respondents, like Gail, the social environment in the demolished communities was not supportive of their decision to remain substance-free because the environment regularly exposed them to people using substances. These relocaters' difficulties were related to the social environment in their public housing communities because they felt as if they were surrounded by drug activity. Staying to self minimized the chances of being exposed to substance abusers, thereby minimizing their chances of drinking or smoking themselves.

Respondents concerned about respectable behavior tended to perceive problems with the social environment in public housing related to outdoor behavior and substance abuse. They used the stay to self strategy in their pre-relocation neighborhoods in order to avoid contact and association with the negative behaviors they observed from their previous neighbors. Respondents recognized those negative behaviors as the basis of stereotypes of public housing residents. By maintaining decorous behavior in post-relocation neighborhoods, relocaters in my sample differentiated themselves from former public housing neighbors and the cultural idea that public housing residents are loud, disruptive, and inappropriate in their behavior, thereby making undesirable neighbors post-relocation. Respondents avoided these behaviors by making a point to limit interaction with neighbors to what is necessary to maintain cordiality.

#### *4.2.4 Avoiding Draining Ties*

Several respondents discussed the seemingly constant need for assistance among neighbors as a bothersome feature of the public housing environment. Sarah, a 48-year-old relocater employed in housekeeping, explains, "[I]t was pretty much everyone was all for themselves but in saying that, there were a lot of people knocking on your door asking for this and that so it was hard to maintain things in



your home without someone taking it or wanting it.” For Sarah, the social environment was isolating, but despite the lack of strong social ties, neighbors would become intrusive, knocking on doors to ask to borrow items. Sarah’s comments suggest that in the absence of stronger social ties, neighbors borrowing had a somewhat threatening aspect to it.

In the same vein, Crystal explains the difference between her Bowen Homes neighbors and her new neighbors in terms of their habitual borrowing:

They don’t knock on the door for ketchup, sugar, mustard [laughs]...tissue, none of that [laughs]. They don’t knock on the door for none of that. Only time the neighbors knock on the door, they might, she want – probably use my rake for the yard, or something like that. But – ain’t nobody always knocking on the door. She’ll call – Respect – she’ll call and ask.

Crystal clearly differentiates calling in advance to borrow a rake occasionally from knocking on the door to borrow daily needs.

Nikki provides a perspective that elaborates on this differentiation, beginning with a description of her neighbors’ borrowing habits:

So, but with her, she borrows and never replaces, and what really kills me is, I don’t borrow formula for my kids. If nothing, my babies always have their formulas...I’ve been able to keep more food and things of that nature, because a lot of people would knock and try to borrow this and...a lot of people I had a heart for, especially when they send their kids, and the kids are hungry, I’d feed them or whatever. So, I kinda like being here, because I don’t have to worry about a lot of borrowing.

Nikki’s statement introduces the idea of reciprocity. For her, it seems that mutual borrowing is an acceptable, neighborly activity. It becomes a problem when the borrowing is frequent and not mutual. Judgments are made based on deservingness and the perception that the borrower’s priorities are in the correct place. Nikki demonstrates her idea of proper priorities in her assertion that her babies always have formula, and her kids are always fed. Nikki manages her interaction with that particular neighbor by staying to herself, explicitly because she finds that being in the types of draining relationships with neighbors is ultimately not worth attempting to be generous with her resources. She contin-

ues: “But, I – them, I stay to myself. You know how sometimes you can feel sorry for people and try to help them out, and it always bites you in the butt. So I just stay to myself [laughs].”

For some respondents, borrowing was not an issue for them because they did not make themselves available to be a source for assistance. 63-year-old Virginia was one such respondent. She was adamant about not becoming involved in lending and borrowing with neighbors. Explaining why she did not have any issues with neighbors borrowing from her when she lived in public housing, she said, “No, I broke that up when I moved there. I told them when I moved there, I said I didn’t come here to feed nobody, I didn’t come here to take care of nobody, so my door is not the grocery store, so go to the grocery store. So I didn’t have no problems.”

For others, borrowing was not an issue in terms of the respondent lending things and providing food to neighbors, but they did not wish to be in the position of having to borrow things because borrowing puts one at risk for developing a reputation as someone who is dependent. For example, Alice says that she would lend something to her neighbors if they needed it, but when asked if she thought they would do the same for her she hastily responded,

“But I – see, I don’t ask for nothing. I’m the type, if I don’t have it, I do without it. I don’t ask people for nothing. I’ve always been like that...Cause the only thing they’re gonna do is start talking about you cause you always borrowing stuff. That’s why I don’t be doing no stuff like that. You know how people [are].”

Alice’s comments reveal a strong desire to avoid a reputation of always borrowing. It is clear that in her opinion, frequent borrowers are subject to ridicule from neighbors. In order to evade the potential ridicule, Alice is sure to avoid asking neighbors to borrow items when she needs them. She stayed to herself in order to distance herself from the image of a person always in need of something.

For respondents in this study, lending and borrowing was not associated with building community or a sense of social support. Rather it was viewed as a nuisance and something they happily did not experience post-relocation. To use Curley’s (2009) terminology, the practice lending and borrowing diminishing resources like food and other household goods was viewed as a “draining tie” in the public

housing community, and was something that these respondents did not miss. They also did not wish to have a lending and borrowing relationship with their current neighbors. By staying to themselves, not seeking to borrow from post-relocation neighbors, relocaters in this study distinguish themselves from their pre-relocation neighbors and align themselves with the norms and values of their new neighborhoods.

#### 4.2.5 *Not Disclosing Voucher Status*

The final behavior that undergirds the stay to self strategy as destigmatizing boundary work is the practice of not disclosing one's status as a voucher recipient. This is done primarily by avoiding close interaction with neighbors that may lead to a situation in which neighbors may discover voucher recipient status, and by avoiding disclosure of status when it comes up in casual conversation. For example, Nina makes a point to avoid participating in neighborhood events and meetings specifically in order to keep her status as a voucher recipient private. She expresses apprehension about seemingly polite neighbors changing their behavior toward her upon finding out about her voucher. Nina's concern about everyone knowing her status as a subsidized renter is an indication that she has a concern about being excluded by her neighbors. Although she is not comfortable referring to them as "bougie", she clearly feels that if her status was to be revealed, her seemingly welcoming neighbors would view her in a negative light and treat her in a less friendly and polite manner than what she has experienced thus far. The fact that she does not participate in the governance of her neighborhood as a result of her concerns reduces her chances of developing relationships with the leadership of the community, who may be likely to have access to information or resources from which Nina could benefit.

In the same way, Larry does not perceive his status as a voucher recipient as a barrier to neighbor interaction, but only because no neighbors are privy to that information. Explaining why receiving a voucher does not hinder relationships with neighbors, he says: "Naw, you know, actually don't nobody really know I'm on no voucher. They don't. Don't nobody know but the rent office...I don't discuss my

business with nobody. So...it's just like part of the neighborhood, that's what I am". For Larry, the freedom to be "just like part of the neighborhood" is based on his voucher status not being revealed publicly. By keeping the knowledge of the voucher status limited to the property manager, Larry avoids any potential stigma associated with his neighbors having that knowledge.

However, this knowledge is not always safest in the hands of the property owner. Knowledge of the voucher recipient status by the property manager or landlord can lead to poor treatment. After defending herself from her landlord's stereotypical assumptions about her, Latanya enacts the stay to self strategy with her neighbors, explaining that, while her landlord may have a negative perception of her as a housing voucher recipient, her neighbors do not, because she does not interact with them much. She explains: "No I don't even deal with my neighbors to even have them have that perception of me, they speak but other than that no. My kids don't give them any problems, I don't give them any problems, it's basically a 'Hello, how are you doing?' and that's it." By keeping the interaction at this level, Latanya precludes a negative experience with neighbors like what she experienced with her landlord.

Kia is another example of a relocater who does not disclose her voucher recipient status. She sums up the general consensus among relocaters in this study who do not disclose their status: "If you need to know if I'm on Section 8, ask me. But if you come and ask me, I'm still not going to tell you, because that's not your business to know if I'm on Section 8 or not. But, I don't...people just downgrade you because you be on Section 8." Because people "downgrade" people with Section 8, not disclosing voucher status can be a very effective tool for destigmatization in concert with others of the five strategies presented in this study.

This is seemingly the only strategy of the five presented in this research that may be categorized as having consequences similar to what Lacy (2007) describes the "psychological toll" her informants may face in maintaining their boundary work, writing, "Even when such strategies pay off, they can be irritating, exerting a potential psychological toll that informants either are unaware of or tend not to

express" (p. 76). Although respondents do not discuss any potentially negative consequences for employing the stay to self strategy in their new neighborhoods, staying to self can have some negative outcomes for relocaters. For example, Nina describes feeling that knowledge of her status as a voucher recipient would negatively impact her neighbors' opinions of her, despite the fact that she had lived in her home for over two years at the time of her interview:

Yeah. Cause people they don't have to know you but they judge you like based on where you come from. You know? Yeah. I think they'll still judge me. Because the meetings and stuff they have, cause like every Tuesday, they have like the town meeting. Like community. I don't ever go...I think that by everybody, it's so close together, everybody nosy, and they would find out. Cause they'll want to ask questions, or, cause then we stay right here by the speed bump, so that means, I know you have to slow down, but you don't have to come to a complete stop. You know what I mean [laughs] so...I just don't want – when I think, I don't want to say they bougie, but then you know you have people that's, I don't know, that's just evil. And I don't want 'em, I don't want everybody in my business, I think. I like it like this without them knowing.

Nina shares that she wants to participate in her townhome community's resident association. Her discomfort about participating in her community should be concerning for policymakers who believe that interaction will take place as a result of proximity. Relocaters' internal understanding of neighboring and the importance of staying to self must be a consideration in the design of relocation policy.

Based on the knowledge of the stigma associated with public housing residents and housing voucher holders, choosing to limit interaction with neighbors in order to avoid disclosure of one's status as a voucher holder is an example of staying to self as destigmatizing boundary work. The goal of staying to self is not primarily to avoid interaction with neighbors, but to avoid the potential stigma associated with being identified as a former public housing residents. In combination with the other strategies, relocaters staying to self who do not disclose their voucher status are better able to distance themselves from the personal stigma of being former public housing residents by not providing any fodder for that association. This way, their behavior is the only thing on which neighbors and others may judge these relocaters as individuals.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Relocaters in my study describe their relationships with their neighbors in terms of their lack of interaction with neighbors. This finding is consistent with the study of HOPE VI participants that found relocated households were less likely to have friends in the neighborhood and had much lower levels of interaction with neighbors than public housing residents (Buron et al. 2002), as well as research on mixed income communities (Chaskin & Joseph 2010; Fraser et al. 2009), and research on mobility programs (Kleit 2001; Manzo et al. 2008) that found low levels of interaction among people with different incomes. Rather than attempting to form or maintain a particular group identity, like middle-class blacks, for example, my respondents engage in boundary work as a destigmatization practice in order to disassociate with a group identity. Obtaining a voucher allowed relocated public housing residents to formally disassociate themselves with the public housing resident group. Although it thrust them into yet another stigmatized group, "Section 8" renters, the ability to choose whether to disclose their membership in that stigmatized group allowed them more distance from the stigmatization than they were able to obtain while living in a public housing apartment complex. By staying to self and limiting association with neighbors, relocaters in this study were able to effectively limit neighbors' ability to perform boundary work and stigmatize them based on their status as public housing residents.

Social interaction in the aftermath of the public housing demolitions and resident relocations that have been occurring nationwide for decades is crucial to understanding the overall impact of relocation policies on the relocated residents themselves and on neighborhoods. Central to this study was the idea that relocated public housing residents in Atlanta, who may experience exclusion by post-relocation neighbors, would have some perception of this exclusion and perhaps have some strategy to deal with this exclusion in order to function in their new neighborhoods. In agreement with Patricia Hill Collins' (1990) assertion that the marginalized are not ignorant of their marginalization, relocaters are not ignorant of the possibility that unsubsidized neighbors may have a negative perception of them as

former public housing residents. They also are aware that exclusionary boundary work is a possibility. However, they have a strategy for handling neighbors in general that can reduce the likelihood and impact of potentially negative neighbor experiences.

Chaskin and Joseph (2010) suggest the expectation of informal social control to shape the behavior of relocated public housing residents away from unacceptable behaviors associated with public housing residents toward acceptable behavior that fits middle class norms. This informal social control could take the form of exclusionary boundary work by middle-class neighbors. The expectation of policymakers with regard to this informal social control does not take into account the fact that relocated public housing residents are very much aware of their individual behavior and perceptions of public housing residents in general. Relocaters in this study use the stay to self strategy as destigmatizing boundary work when dealing with neighbors, which effectively preempts the informal social control possible through neighbors' boundary work, by making sure that they are not associated with public housing residents. Destigmatizing boundary work by this study's respondents also allowed them to separate themselves from the behaviors most likely to be subjected to the informal social control expected in a mixed-income neighborhood.

Like Kleit (2010), I argue that social interventions for relocaters need to be intentional in their consideration of residents' social networks and how to maintain, reconfigure, or expand their social networks post-relocation so that they can take advantage of potential beneficial social ties in their new neighborhoods. Understanding the stay to self strategy among relocated public housing residents can assist in the development of strategic means to beneficial social interaction post-relocation. For relocaters like the majority of my respondents, their behavior in neighborhoods is not conducive to developing the kinds of relationships with neighbors that are likely to lead to greater social capital.

Flemming, Lamont and Welburn (2012) find that confrontation is the most common modality for managing stigma among U.S. blacks. While confrontation may be a satisfying and effective method for

dealing with stigmatization for U.S. blacks, public assistance recipients are a marginalized segment of within the general population of U.S.-born blacks. Relocated public housing residents typically do not occupy any spaces in which confrontation is a possible or effective way of dealing with the stigmatization that they face. In fact, confrontation seems in opposition to the spirit of staying to self. Stay to self as destigmatizing boundary work, can be thought of as a form of “management of the self”, as described in Flemming, Lamont and Welburn (2012), but is specific to neighboring.

Overall, relocaters in this study are very satisfied with their relationships with their neighbors. The stay to self strategy for neighboring that most relocaters moved with works well in their new neighborhoods in terms of avoiding negative interaction and avoiding being associated with negative characteristics of public housing residents. By allowing relocaters to distance themselves from these negative characterizations, the stay to self strategy allows relocated public housing residents who were not content living in public housing the ability to separate from that experience and to emphasize their similarities to new, unsubsidized neighbors. For respondents who stay to themselves, but tend to be more interactive with their neighbors, their relationships with neighbors are perhaps as good as they are likely to get. They feel comfortable that their neighbors will look out for their physical safety and property, and that is satisfactory. There is no desire for closer relationships. For respondents who stay to themselves more literally, their satisfaction with the ability to enjoy their new, better homes in the quiet environment of their new neighborhoods is sufficient to exceed their expectations.

This study adds to the growing number of voices urging policymakers to take relocaters preferences into consideration, and rethink the idea of social mentoring. From a policy perspective, the stay to self strategy as destigmatizing boundary work tells us about the likelihood of relocaters obtaining the social benefits of a lower poverty context. It is clear that each of my respondents have made moves that benefited their overall well-being. But socially there is no mechanism through which to obtain the social and cultural capital benefits of their neighborhood contexts. The lack of close, personal relationships



with neighbors as mechanism for these kinds of benefits is partially a result of the way that relocaters have constructed the stay to self strategy to manage neighborhood interactions, and partially due to the social environment of the neighborhoods to which they relocated. In order to ensure that relocated public housing residents have the opportunity to obtain the social benefits of higher-income, highly interactive neighborhoods, policy-makers and implementers, especially relocation counselors, will need to deliberately intervene - encouraging residents to choose homes with amenable social contexts, and to seek out strategic interactions within their new neighborhoods.

Interview data suggest a number of ways the development of the stay to self strategy is related to the experience of living in public housing. People who would describe themselves as loners may be more likely to end up living in public housing; or perhaps the tendency toward preferring to be alone may be one that develops as a result of living in public housing, as is suggested by some of this study's respondents. A third alternative is that the preference toward staying to self is cultural, rather than an expression of individual personality or behavior. This study's participants provide some evidence for all three of these possible relationships, but most of the evidence suggests that the environment in public housing and other very-low-income urban neighborhoods may inspire a literal stay to self strategy where a natural loner personality is absent.

In the recent recession and decline of the housing market, the threat of foreclosure likely prompted landlords to accept vouchers in situations and locations in which they would not have during in a better economy. These decisions by rental property owners have the potential to deeply impact the composition of the neighborhood and community. This study adds to the body of research that helps to project the outcome of such drastic neighborhood-level demographic shifts. For subsidized households relocating to middle-class neighborhoods this research is particularly relevant because it specifically examines themes in the literature regarding interaction between middle-class blacks and the poor. This research also yielded valuable results about the boundary work members of the black poor engage in

against other poor blacks.

This study was based on a small, purposive sample of relocated public housing residents from some of the demolished public housing communities in Atlanta, therefore findings should not be generalized to larger populations. The method of sampling a small number of participants from a larger, non-random sample, on the basis of zip code-level income data yielded a particular group of relocaters that likely exhibit some selection bias. My respondents likely represent a high-functioning subgroup that tends to self-select into higher-income neighborhoods, especially neighborhoods with single-family homes or higher-end apartment complexes. Most relocated residents in the Urban Health Initiative study moved within 3 miles of their public housing community, which also usually meant that they relocated to a lower-income neighborhood that mainly featured apartments or smaller homes with few amenities. Factors like familiarity with the area, transportation, access to family and friends, and the limited time-frame in which to choose a new place to live all impacted relocaters' choice of post-relocation neighborhoods. However, residents who relocated to lower-income neighborhoods may be less likely to use destigmatizing boundary work because of the decreased likelihood of stigmatization in these neighborhoods, but also because the residents who were the most uncomfortable in the public housing setting, and therefore more likely to do destigmatizing boundary work pre-relocation, were more likely to select post-relocation neighborhoods that were as different from the public housing setting as possible. This would lead these residents to relocate to higher-income neighborhoods, thus making a sample of respondents limited to residents in higher-income neighborhoods more likely to exhibit and discuss destigmatizing boundary-work.

In many ways this research was exploratory. There are a number of concepts that need to be explored at greater depth than what has been presented here. Future research should delve into the idea of staying to self because it is unclear how widespread this idea is or whether it is culturally, racially, regionally, or otherwise specific. Is the stay to self strategy used in other settings, like work or school?

If so, how does it impact interpersonal interaction in these settings? Another consideration is the approach that middle-class blacks take to neighboring. Is staying to self prevalent in this social class category and if so, is it constructed and enacted differently than it is by relocated public housing residents? Future research should also focus exclusively on majority middle-class, single-family home neighborhoods to examine exclusionary boundary work as described in Lacy's (2007) work. It will be important to sample from the entire relocated public housing resident population in the study city in order to maximize the number potential participants living in primarily middle-class neighborhoods. Using block-level socioeconomic data to determine the status of immediate neighbors should yield fruitful results in terms of determining which relocaters are mostly surrounded by middle-class neighbors.

This study contributes to the literature on social mix as a policy preference. Social mix literature tends to focus exclusively on mixed-income housing developments. In mixed-income developments there is a more clear boundary between public housing residents and market-rate residents, but in voucher-receiving neighborhoods, the distinction is not necessarily clear, and it is not necessarily understood and accepted that public housing households will be entering the neighborhood. The incorporation of public housing households into market-rate neighborhoods is one of a number of changes occurring in neighborhoods, and the response to their incorporation is attenuated by the other changes that are occurring simultaneously. Social interaction among various income groups in a neighborhood, if it is to happen, would likely need to take place at particular spaces in the neighborhood, like public or commercial spaces (Joseph 2006, Kleinhans 2004). This is particularly true in a neighborhood of single-family homes, which share little to no public space. An ethnographic method complemented by in-depth interviews would be best for examining the frequency and nature of social interaction in public spaces, and the extent to which those interactions impact the development of close, personal relationships among neighbors of different income and/or class groups.

Research on the relocation experience in apartment complexes is also necessary, as this experience is qualitatively different from the experience in a neighborhood of single-family homes. As housing market trends continue to move toward rental properties, the role of rental property in neighbor relations and attitudes of apartment managers and landlords toward voucher holders will become increasingly important. People in apartment complexes potentially have more interaction with the management company staff than they do with their neighbors. Michael is a good example of this as he describes the people working in his apartment complex leasing office as his “good friends”. Residents of apartments tend to have a number of meaningful interactions with their apartment complex representatives and that colored many of their responses. Dealing with the bureaucracy of apartment living is potentially an additional external barrier to neighboring, beyond the fact that apartment living is generally transient in market-rate apartments. The residential turnover in apartment complexes makes them a somewhat precarious location for relocaters for a number of reasons, but especially because of the number of subsidized households likely to be present at the same time as the individual relocater. Apartment complex management and policies tend to evolve relatively quickly, and that evolution can have a detrimental impact on the living situations of subsidized renters.

Low-income, urban Blacks experience high levels of mobility, especially involuntary mobility. Staying to self makes perfect sense as a strategic practice for people who move around a lot. Relationships that occur from long-term tenure seem more likely to be the kinds of relationships that inspire exchanges of capital. The strong family-type networks some respondents had while living in public housing were largely due to longer tenure and also created place-attachment (Tester et al. 2011). However, my respondents made a clear distinction between those who grew up in public housing and those who did not. The relationship between living in public housing and staying to self may be a spurious one. It seems that the mechanism for a stay to self strategy may actually be the chronic housing instability and resulting high residential mobility common among the people who find themselves in public housing

Policymakers advocating deconcentration do not seem to take into consideration the high rates of mobility among the urban poor when theorizing about the possibilities for social interaction post-relocation. One respondent, Larry, noted that his was one of five or six families that moved from Bowen Homes to a low-income apartment complex that was, according to three of this study's respondents, notorious for having replicated the social conditions of the public housing communities, before moving to the moderate-income apartment complex where he resided the time of his interview. Another respondent, Sarah, discussed having to move out of her first post-relocation apartment, located in a trendy mixed-use development, because the apartment complex management decided to stop accepting housing vouchers. The same push and pull factors that impact the mobility of other urban poor people affect relocaters, because they all share the same vulnerability associated with poverty and dependence on rent assistance, including being at the whim of apartment complex management changes. Relationships likely to produce social benefits for relocaters are very unlikely to develop or be maintained in relocations to apartment complexes because of high rates of mobility of both subsidized and unsubsidized households.

This study contributes to the sociological literature in a number of areas. It advances public housing literature by adding to the growing literature on the neighboring preferences and practices of relocated public housing residents, which ultimately can have a significant impact on relocation outcomes. Understanding neighboring habits and preferences of public housing residents can prove useful in crafting future policy. This study also enhances the boundary work literature by examining the inclusionary and exclusionary boundary work in which the poor engage. Adding to the empirical research showing little interaction between relocated public housing residents and neighbors, this study builds on research about neighborhood change and neighborhood interaction.

By introducing staying to self as a destigmatizing boundary work strategy, both as a tool for responding to boundary work by managing stigma and an example of boundary work as a tool to manage

stigma, this study provides some intellectual underpinnings for understanding the ways boundary work is done in response to potential exclusion and stigma. Future studies with greater variation in their participants will be able to expand on our understanding of the general approach to neighboring among relocaters and take the study of the stay to self strategy further by deconstructing neighborhood interactions and examining the strategy in different contexts.

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## APPENDIX: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Thank you for agreeing to talk to me today. Please state your full name for me.

- What name would you like me to use to refer to you in reports on this study?
- Can you tell me a little about yourself? [Complete Respondent Demographics Form as respondent answers]
  - What is your age?
  - Where did you grow up?
  - What is your educational background
  - Work background?
  - Are you married?
  - Do you have any children?
  - Do you have any pets?
- Did you move to your current neighborhood from a public housing community?
  - Which one?
  - If no, can you describe your previous neighborhood?

### NEIGHBORHOOD INFORMATION

- Where do you live currently?
- How would you describe your neighborhood to someone who has never been here/there?
  - What does the housing look like? Are there single-family homes, apartment complexes, and/or other kinds of housing?
  - What do the yards/apartment complex grounds look like?
- How does it feel to live in your current neighborhood?
  - (Do you like it, feel like you belong?)

### HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER STIGMA

- In the Good Neighbor Program you may have discussed public perceptions of public housing residents and Housing Choice Voucher-holders/Section 8 tenants. What do you think are the perceptions of people with Housing Choice Vouchers?
  - Do you think your current neighbors have similar perceptions?
    - Why do you think that?
- How do you feel about negative perceptions of Housing Choice Voucher-holders/Section 8 tenants?

#### RELATIONSHIP WITH NEIGHBORS

- How would you compare your neighbors now to the ones you had at \_\_\_\_\_ (*Public Housing Community*)?
- Did you know any of your neighbors prior to relocating?
- Have you built friendships with any of your new neighbors?
  - What about your child(ren), have they built friendships?
- Do you think there are barriers or obstacles preventing you having better relationships with your new neighbors? If so, what are they?
  - What about your child(ren)?
- How would you describe your class status? (Middle class, working class or poor, upper class)
- How would you describe the class status of your neighbors? What do you base that description on?
- Do you feel that your neighbors behave differently than you and your household?
  - (IF YES) What kinds of things do you do differently, if any?
  - (IF NO) Do you think that your neighbors think you do things differently than they do?

## RESPONSE TO BOUNDARY-WORK

- How do you deal with your neighbors' negative perceptions? [Skip if reported no negative perceptions]
- Do you think your neighbors' perceptions of you have changed over time?
- Have you encountered negative perceptions of you outside of your neighborhood (i.e. at work, shopping, at your child(ren)'s school)
- How has your life changed since you relocated?
  - Have your shopping habits changed since relocation? How so? Why?
  - Have you started going to different grocery stores?
  - Have your entertainment preferences changed?
- Have you changed the way you speak, act, do certain things to avoid the negative perceptions of your neighbors?

## WRAP-UP

- Is there anything that you want to tell me about your relationship with your neighbors or neighborhood that I didn't ask about?

**Thank you so much for your time. I will send you a copy of the finished thesis if you're interested to see how you've contributed to my study. It was a pleasure talking with you.**