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*Chapter One*

**Critical perspectives on neighborhood engagement and participatory development**

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**Abstract**

This chapter synthesizes interdisciplinary critiques of participatory development and neighborhood engagement. Such critical study urges that community development and participatory interventions be rigorously connected to historically-embedded, local *and* global systems and structures of political, economic, and social power. We first interrogate neoliberalism and post-Civil Rights racism, explaining how important historical, spatial, economic, and political trends of the past century have shaped neighborhoods and inform what community development and neighborhood engagement is today. We then trace the ways that participatory development models often facilitate the de-contextualization of local communities from a history of systemic and structural disadvantage. In the remainder of the paper we examine two unique case studies of urban and community development in the United States that employ a participatory model or ethic: (1) large-scale mixed-income housing projects (HOPE VI) and (2) small-scale faith-based neighborhood development interventions (Christian Community Development Association). In each of these case studies, we identify and deconstruct the tropes and mechanisms of economic and racial power at play, such as white model norming, deficit frameworks, redemptive narratives, and surveillance. We close the paper with a challenge for community scholars and practitioners to incorporate a structural analysis into their use of neighborhood participation.

**INTRODUCTION**

Although a substantial amount of community psychology scholarship has considered the positive attributes of neighborhood engagement and neighborhood participation, fewer community psychologists have approached the topic from a critical perspective, attending to the ways in which forces of racial and economic power impact and constrain communities. In this chapter, it is our intention to outline how these issues manifest in participatory development and trace the ways in which political-economic-racial power has shaped—and continues to shape—the methods, outcomes, and justifications of neighborhood engagement projects. While ‘engagement’ and ‘participation’ have become expected norms in practice fields that intersect with or draw upon scholarship from community psychology – for example, urban planning, community development, social work – a burgeoning literature questions *why* these trends have emerged, *whose* interests are served through their propagation, *how* these terms are operationalized, *what* logics or assumptions are accepted, and *whether* they are leading to healthier, safer, more empowered, self-determined, and respected individuals and communities. Such critical study urges that personal experiences and circumstances be rigorously connected to historically-embedded, local *and* global systems and structures of political, economic, and social power.

This chapter synthesizes interdisciplinary critiques of participatory development and neighborhood engagement to show how notions of participation that are devoid of a power analysis serve to reify structures of oppression. We draw from studies in critical development, critical geography, critical race theory, and feminist theory to guide our review. We see community-focused sociology, psychology, social work, planning and development scholars who study and employ neighborhood engagement as our key audience, and seek to broaden the conversation about engagement and participation by incorporating the critical conversations taking place in other academic disciplines and community-based practices. It is our intention to provide development scholars with a basic framework to examine their assumptions, approaches, and desired outcomes in ways that improve and strengthen their commitments to social justice and equity.

We focus our critique on analyses of political-economic-racial power, thinking specifically about neoliberalism, classism, and post-Civil Rights racism. Due to space constraints, we do not address intersectional issues of gender, sexuality, age, and ability, which also function as crucial sites of power and oppression in American society. Additionally, we focus our attention to the urban American context, where much scholarship and public policy has resided for the past few decades. We recognize these limitations and stress that this chapter is neither an exhaustive nor comprehensive assessment of power within neighborhood studies, but rather an introductory review of critiques of participation as a notion that drives community projects.

In the first section of the paper, we explain the construct of neighborhood participation and connect it to community development more broadly, showing that notions of participation drive a variety of development projects. We then connect these definitions to the important historical, spatial, economic, and political trends of the past century, tracing how they have shaped neighborhoods and inform what community development and neighborhood engagement is today. In the remainder of the paper we examine two unique case studies of urban and community development that employ a participatory model or ethic: (1) large-scale mixed-income housing projects (HOPE VI) and (2) small-scale faith-based neighborhood development interventions (Christian Community Development Association). In each of these case studies, we identify and deconstruct the tropes and mechanisms of economic and racial power at play, such as white model norming, deficit frameworks, redemptive narratives, and surveillance. Finally, we end this paper with a summary of the case studies and challenge for community development scholars from all disciplines to incorporate a structural analysis into their use of and studies related to neighborhood participation.

**NEIGHBORHOOD PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT**

For the purposes of this chapter, we define *neighborhood participation and engagement* broadly, considering a wide range of strategies that accept as an underlying assumption that involving residents and stakeholders in community-based processes positively impacts community well-being, civic health, and decision-making about a setting, place, or community. Such processes might include individual behaviors, interpersonal relations, or collective actions. These assumptions operate in both large-scale (i.e., federal- or state-funded) urban and community development programs and smaller-scale efforts, as well as both institutionally-driven and individual and emergent actions. Large-scale efforts, for instance, include neighborhood revitalization programs that emphasize the value of mixed-income housing; comprehensive community-building initiatives (CCIs); the community development corporation (CDC) infrastructure, or public input processes into private- and public- development efforts. Smaller-scale, neighborhood engagement efforts might include projects to promote resident neighboring behaviors, sense of community, attachment to place, citizen empowerment, local civic engagement (e.g., participation in neighborhood associations, litter cleanups, etc.), or local organizing around a specific issue.

Scholars of participation, largely from within development studies, suggest that participatory spaces be categorized as closed, invited, or claimed/created spaces in order to parse out how power operates within different contexts. Closed spaces are defined as those where decision making involves no attempt at an inclusive or participatory process; invited spaces are those where “people (as users, as citizens, as beneficiaries) are invited to participate by various kinds of authorities, be they government, supranational agencies or non-governmental organizations” (Cornwall 2002, cited in Gaventa 2004, 35); and claimed or created spaces are those that emerge from the efforts of people on the margins (e.g., non-elite).

In this chapter we approach ‘closed spaces’ of participation – i.e., those where no public-process is convened for decision making – as part of the continuum of “neighborhood participation and engagement” because, even while they do not engage these strategies, they may operate from an assumption about the benefits of participation or neighborhood engagement for community life. Additionally, we are informed by Arnstein’s (1969) hallmark ‘Ladder of Citizen Participation’ which challenges wholesale acceptance of ‘invited’ participatory spaces in the planning fields. The ladder suggests that so called “citizen participation” can represent forms or spaces of participation that fall along a continuum from public manipulation to authentic citizen power in decision making. These related typologies of participation and engagement draw a critical lens to meso-level settings, institutions, and processes. Our goal is to extend such critiques to macro-level structures.

Important differences exist within this range of activities, and collapsing them risks obscuring specific challenges (or opportunities) or mischaracterizing unique goals and rationales. Nevertheless, we group them together in order to challenge practitioners and researchers, diverse as they may be, to consider how their particular practices, theories, and goals reflect similar assumptions that would benefit from a critical structural analysis of participation, writ large.

**Situating Neighborhood Participation in Structures of Political and Economic Power**

Neoliberalism, the dominant political and economic structure of the contemporary era, is a system of policies, programs, and an ideology that privileges a free market economy, unencumbered by government regulation, as the best vehicle to economic and social development (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). As Harvey (2005) explains, neoliberalism presupposes that “human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (p. 2). This institutional framework includes a system of tax cuts, austerity measures, reductions in government expenditures, deregulation of markets, and privatization of social services at multiple levels of government (Brenner & Theodore, 2002).

At the municipal level, governments’ focus on the creation of ‘good business climates’ and employ strategies to attract private investment. While the state is non-interventionist in terms of market regulation, it is interventionist in the sense of facilitating the market economy, for example by minimizing its own role in communities (Jessop, 2002). As neoliberal restructuring takes place, state (i.e., government) investments in social reproduction (e.g., housing, employment, education, health expenditures) and collective consumption expenditures (e.g., transportation infrastructure) are reduced, and instead the burden of such responsibilities is devolved to more local-level governing entities and to the private sector (Fraser et al., 2003; Fraser & Kick, 2005). Such measures of neoliberal restructuring operate to exacerbate social inequality and secure the wealth of an elite class (Harvey, 2005). Neighborhood engagement and participation are embedded in this context of neoliberal policies, practices, and ideologies; thus, they must be troubled for their assumptions of (1) universal or widespread benefit, (2) the effectiveness of localism, and (3) social capital models or frameworks as reliable routes to socially just community change.

While municipal priorities are directed toward inter-urban competition to attract capital and investment, the burden of social welfare provision shifts to community institutions. With the labor and financial resources needed to address social unevenness increasingly strained, efforts to address neighborhood needs become heavily dependent on support from private industry or interest groups. Such partnerships make low-income communities vulnerable to exploitation (Fraser et al., 2003; Fraser & Kick, 2005), and offer no guarantees that organizational priorities will change from private capital investment interests to public control over decision-making for their neighborhoods. Indeed, using language of ‘development,’ ‘growth,’ and ‘revitalization,’ efforts to restore and invest in impoverished areas often serve the interests of elites—such as developers, city officials, middle and upper-income residents—rather than existing residents who are directly affected in adverse ways.

Hence, in the neoliberal context, neighborhoods—especially low-income or impoverished neighborhoods—become sites of political contention. As wider and multi-scalar forces of economic development impact local neighborhoods, residents must reckon with powerful agents whose involvement and interests may be obscured. Thus, an important component of understanding the complexities of neighborhood participation is to first make visible the ways that neighborhoods are embedded in a larger political and economic context, and how these forces impact, constrain, and exclude local residents even while they profess to include or benefit them.

A growing body of literature from political geography urges that participatory efforts on behalf of public organizations or public-private alliances be considered through a *governmentality* lens. Governmentality refers to the governing of conduct not simply by top-down policy and pronouncements, but through the absorption of government and power-actors influence into discourse and accepted everyday conduct. As a form of neoliberal governmentality, participatory efforts are seen as a mode of controlling constituents’ political engagement, constraining the content of public discussion, and preserving institutional structures that perpetuate social inequality (Blakeley, 2010).

For instance, structured engagement opportunities to ‘gain buy-in’ or ‘get public input’ often represent pre-determined agendas where conveners have decided what is ‘up for grabs’ and what is off-limits. The conveners of such efforts (e.g., a municipal government department or a private organization partnering with a government entity) maintain a grip on what can be imagined and on what opportunities for change or challenge are exposed or kept hidden. In these cases, for example, citywide processes to engage residents in visioning and planning for neighborhood development have been critiqued for misleading participants to believe that revitalization efforts that invariably lead to gentrification are the best and only path for improving residents’ lives. Similarly, critics of government-led engagement have noted that such efforts are a way to stifle public contestation and legitimate neoliberal interventions, rather than serve as a means for engagement to inform better decision making or a shift in power (Rosol, 2014; Huisman, 2013). The universal benefit of neighborhood participation and engagement is thus called into question.

Throughout the 20th century interest has mounted from scholars, policymakers, media, and social service practitioners on how to address growing social disparities (e.g., in income, health, employment, education, etc.). On the one hand, much prominent scholarship and social practice has focused on individual- and community-level *deficits* at the root of these disparities (for example, Wilson’s 1987 study of inner-city joblessness highlighted social isolation and lack of social capital as drivers of poverty). However, on the other hand, focus has been directed to community *assets* as the key to their resolution (McKnight, 1995). In this vein, community building, social connection, and resident engagement have become primary goals of social service provision (McKnight, 1995; Fraser & Kick, 2005; Chaskin & Joseph, 2013). Assumptions about the intrinsically positive nature of neighborhood participation and engagement are tied in with an intense localism that is characteristic of neoliberal restructuring. This ‘localism’ refers to strategies, practices, and ideologies that, first, prop up ‘community’ or ‘neighborhood’ as the ideal scale for developing interventions to address social welfare and, second, assume this localized unit as both responsible for and capacious enough to achieve and sustain the amelioration of social problems.

The ethos of localism is adopted by the contemporary neoliberal workfare state that emphasizes individual entrepreneurialism and competitiveness as the means to well-being and devolves social welfare responsibility to public-private partnerships or local communities (cf. Fraser & Kick, 2005). Through this decentralization and privatization of state functions, neoliberalism places the burden of social welfare provision on low-resourced communities or organizations that face increasing need and decreasing resources; has a disproportionate impact on low-income communities, women, and people of color; and offers no guarantee that interventions promoting engagement and community cohesiveness at a local-level will bring about justice or positive outcomes for historically marginalized residents. For example, “defensive” localism is evident in the ‘not in my backyard’ mindset that has been mobilized against the siting of affordable housing or public transportation in affluent or White communities, thereby advancing social exclusion for some and cohesion for others. Some studies have shown that community-building interventions have had negative repercussions on original residents, such as: removing decision-making power from local residents; interrupting social cohesion; co-opting neighborhood autonomy; and displacing residents through gentrification (Chaskin, 2012; Lees, 2008; Lepofsky & Fraser, 2003). Specific issues of resource allocation, securing funding, diverse goals, and power differentials among stakeholders all limit the ability of neighborhood engagement to have substantive material impact on the life chances of vulnerable populations.

The valorization of ‘the local’ as the launch point for social change also has the effect of shifting responsibility to local communities and their constituents for social conditions, wellness, and opportunities. It advances a ‘bootstrapping’ mentality that demeans those who continue to struggle as deficient and divorces social and local problems from their structural root causes. For example, interventions that have as their sole focus building community and fostering inter-subjective connections may appear to have positive outcomes in terms of individuals’ neighborhood engagement, sense of community, or place attachments, but these outcomes do not necessarily translate into awareness of, desire or ability to confront the very systems and institutions that create the conditions of social unrest, fragmentation, and inequality. Turning communities’ focuses inward stifles analysis of and attempts to change larger social, political, and economic systems.

Related to the emphasis on localism, many participatory or neighborhood engagement efforts are rooted in a social capital framework that emphasizes social connections between individuals as the key lever for community well-being. The focus on social ties (bridging and bonding relationships) and the fostering of trusting relationships (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Perkins, Hughey & Speer, 2002; Putnam, 2000) is important in many regards. Numerous studies have shown positive outcomes associated with strong social capital ties, including civic participation, economic security, and health (Christens & Perkins 2008; Saegert & Winkel, 1998; Veenstra et al., 2004). Furthermore, numerous studies have examined how local residents have collectively sought to improve their quality of life; first, through neighboring behaviors, such as informal assistance and support among local residents (Perkins & Long, 2002; Unger & Wandersman, 1985), and, second, through community organizing, which is generally understood as distinct from neighboring behaviors, although it can contribute to these goals (Speer & Christens, 2011; Stoecker, 2003). Our concern is when enhancing social capital is advanced as the primary goal and expected to have a broad social-uplift effect.

The framework of social capital does not incorporate a structural analysis that attends to the ways economics, history, and politics shape the possibilities of individuals and communities. While this framework may help us understand how interpersonal, and even inter-organization, connections are important for thriving communities, it does not help us to interrogate and disrupt structural factors (e.g., institutional racism, classism) that are at play. As DeFilippis (2001) has argued, social capital interventions divorced from consideration of economic capital fall short of meaningful impact—the real issue is about power:

Rather than assuming that social networks and relationships are win-win endeavors and that low-income people and areas are socially disconnected, we need to construct social networks that are truly win-win relationships for people in low-income areas, while building on already existing social networks and relationships. And we need to do so in ways that allow those networks to realize greater control and power over the flows of capital that play such an important role in shaping and producing American cities (DeFilippis, 2001, p. 801).

DeFilippis’ critique emphasizes that all neighborhoods and communities are embedded in wider political and economic contexts as well as histories of oppression. Overlooking these structures that fundamentally shape and inform the possibilities of a given neighborhood ultimately positions the community, rather than the social structures, as responsible for their disadvantage (DeFilippis, 2001; Fraser, Lepofsky, Kick, & Williams, 2003; Stoecker, 2012). The social capital framework employed in many participatory or neighborhood engagement efforts obscures the power dynamics that impact social change, and, too, it becomes a useful tool to advance a neoliberal ideology rooted in placing all of the responsibility for achieving their own well-being on individuals and communities.

**Structures of Racial and Ethnic power**

In our post-Civil Rights era, structures and systems of racial power—race-based advantage and hierarchy—continue to have a profound impact, despite widespread American cultural ‘norms’ of colorblindness (the disavowal of racial relevancy) and assumptions of a post-racial society (one where race is no longer a determinant of life opportunities and outcomes). This chapter cannot provide a comprehensive analysis of the structuring and restructuring of racial power systems in the U.S., however we will briefly situate the analysis and focus specifically on racial residential segregation.

Much scholarship has been conducted on the spatial patterns of race and class-based disparities in American society, emphasizing how racial oppression maps on to economic oppression, often through geography and segregation. Although scholarship has established that race is a social construction, it has profound material and non-material implications, leading to a systematic racial hierarchy in which whites have the greatest advantage and opportunity (Du Bois, 1899; Lipsitz, 2006; Oliver & Shapiro, 1995). Critical Race theorists, in particular, examine how race-based advantage is embedded into multiple social structures—such as labor, housing markets, education, law, and media—to protect the interests of Whites (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2006; Lipsitz, 2006). The results of these racialized structures lead to disproportionate life-chances on the basis of race. For example, people of color disproportionately experience incarceration and criminalization (Alexander, 2010) and economic insecurity or impoverishment (Lipsitz, 2006; Oliver and Shapiro, 1995). Moreover, race-based disparities intersect with and are compounded by other identities, such as gender and ability, yielding unique and extensive marginalization through a complex matrix of oppression (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991). Finally, scholars also note that White racial advantage is often dismissed or unacknowledged by Whites, who tend to justify their privilege through complicated and strategic maneuvers, often citing colorblindness and a disavowal of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Wiegman, 1999; Yancy, 2016). Racism and classism operate as structural and systematic hierarchies with substantial material repercussion, including through the process of residential segregation.

Racial segregation and its connection to poverty and economic oppression is a key issue in community studies. Scholars have examined how poverty has increasingly been concentrated to particular places, noting that segregation on the basis of race and class takes shape within and among counties, cities, and neighborhoods (Du Bois, 1899; Massey and Denton, 1993; Massey, Rothwell, & Domina 2009; Wilson 1987, 1996). Studies of segregation in the first two-thirds of the 20th century found that segregation was primarily guided by overt anti-Blackness, leading to a stark separation between Whites and Blacks (Massey & Denton, 1993). The late 20th century, however, was marked by the changing shape of segregation, driven by discriminatory housing markets and federal policies, which led to segregation at the local scale, within and among cities and neighborhoods (Massey, Rothwell, & Domina, 2009). Now in the twenty-first century, our states, cities, and neighborhoods remain segregated in complex ways, increasingly impacted by the intersection of socioeconomic status and race (Massey, Rothwell, & Domina, 2009).

In this emerging “segregation regime” as described by Massey, Rothwell, & Domina, (2009, 87), which is driven in large part by federal and municipal land-use policies, the interaction between class and race is particularly powerful, serving to especially isolate poor people of color (see also Lichter, Parisi, & Taquino 2012). Recent national disasters, such as the 2007-2008 Great Recession and Hurricane Katrina, have exacerbated patterns of economic isolation, which are increasingly found in suburban and rural areas (Lichter, Parisi, & Taquino, 2012). Recent studies also emphasize how contemporary patterns of segregation are reflected at the city-scale—that is, while many places are more ethno-racially diverse than in previous decades, segregation is increasingly found at city and suburb scales, rather than among neighborhoods. Lichter, Parisi, and Taquino (2015) refer to this as “macro-segregation,” explaining that the urban fringe, suburbs, and small towns are increasingly important actors in the mapping of segregation.

Scholars also note that an important way in which racial power is expressed spatially is through white settler colonial logics, a discourse and system of property acquisition based on race and achieved through mechanisms of violence and erasure. Access to and control of private property in early American history, including through homesteading and frontier expansion, was explicitly and overtly raced. As urban geographer Sara Safransky (2014) explains,

Under early U.S. settler colonialism, the legal capacity to claim property rights was contingent upon race. Slavery created white privilege through black subordination and the legal conversion of blacks into property. At the same time, the extermination and removal of Native Americans from the land and nullification of their first possession rights justified the conferral of landed property to white settlers (p. 239).

Scholars note that while the language and form of white settler colonialism has shifted and changed over time, the logic is still embedded into society today, for example through urban revitalization projects (Fraser et al. 2012; Kipfer and Petrunia, 2009; Safransky, 2014, 2016; Smith, 1996; Smith, 1999;). Critical analyses suggest that such projects are energized by colonial logics in both nonmaterial ways (e.g., narratives of erasure, discourses of social control and civility) and material ways (e.g., claiming and appropriating space, removing or displacing residents, and destroying historical markers).

For instance, Safransky (2014) examines how discourses of colonialism manifest in the city-planning and urban farming/greening projects of Detroit, allowing “urban pioneers” take control of “empty” landscapes for economic development. She contends that the white settler colonial discourse guides these projects by erasing the people who inhabit the area and (re)positioning the space as available for acquisition through ideas of “new frontier” and “urban wilderness,” disproportionately benefiting whites. Other scholars note how settler colonialism is evident in the privatization of formerly public space, which reduces the amount of common space and gives even more control to those with access to capital and property, again primarily benefiting property-owning whites (Chaskin & Joseph, 2013; Kipfer & Petrunia, 2009). The expression and implications of these projects reflect the realities of racial power in the U.S., as they ensure that those with access to whiteness and economic capital maintain it, often at the expense of others.

Thus, we see that the boundaries that delineate private property often reflect the distribution of power and capital, as well as the raced and classed realities of life chances. Understanding the ways in which racial power and settler colonial logics impact communities, as practices that appropriate space and exclude local populations, is critical to studies of neighborhood engagement.

In the following sections, we examine two case studies of neighborhood engagement projects to consider specifically how structures of racial and political-economic power function and impact communities. Although a variety of projects seek to foster neighborhood participation and engagement through diverse and integrated contexts, we focus on two distinct programs: first, state and/or federally-funded mixed-income housing developments (such as HOPE VI); and second, grassroots faith-based initiatives for mixed-income neighborhoods, by relocating higher-income residents to lower-income neighborhoods (such as the Christian Community Development Association). These two cases help us to see how participatory logics play out at different scales, enabling us to identify the ways the racial and economic structures are maintained in, different, yet similar ways.

\* \* \*

**CASE STUDY 1:**

**MIXED-INCOME HOUSING PROJECTS**

The advent of mixed-income housing—residential housing that is explicitly designed to include residents with varied economic means—came into full force in the U.S. with the federally-funded Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere (HOPE VI) program (Thurber, Bohmann, & Heflinger, 2017). The purpose of the HOPE VI policy, which ran from 1993-2009, was to redevelop highly distressed and concentrated public housing projects into new models of mixed-income housing, in which both market-rate and publically-assisted units were available. Accomplishing the goals of HOPE VI required the destruction of current public housing projects, the forced relocation of the current residents, the rebuilding of new housing projects to include both market-rate units for purchase and affordable units for rent, private-public partnership to fund and organize the rebuilding, and the re-relocating of public-housing residents as well as market-rate residents into the housing project (Fraser et al. 2012).

Several scholars have shown that HOPE VI actually reduced the amount of affordable housing units available to low-income households (Thurber et al, 2017; Lees, 2008). Moreover, Thurber also shows that mixed-income housing neighborhoods are rarely socially integrated—that is, although people of diverse economic backgrounds live in spatial proximity to each other, they rarely interact and thus do not achieve social integration (Thurber et al., 2017). HOPE VI was followed by the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative and the Rental Assistance Demonstration Project (RAD), which similarly seek to develop mixed-income neighborhoods. Mixed-income housing projects are also prominent outside of the U.S., including Canada and the United Kingdom (Lees, 2008; Kipfer & Petrunia, 2009).

The HOPE VI policy, and the other mixed-income housing projects that followed, are largely based on neighborhood effects theories, which argue that the impacts of economic disadvantage on individuals and families are heightened within contexts of concentrated poverty (Chaskin & Joseph, 2015; Fraser et al., 2012; Jargowsky, 1997; Wilson, 1987, 1996). Additionally, these policies draw on social capital theories, which suggest that broadening one’s social network through establishing new bridging ties—ostensibly occurring through the social mixing that is built into the model—will help to mitigate the impacts of poverty. Thus, mixed-income housing seeks to alleviate poverty through residential integration—that is, placing lower and upper-income residents in proximity to each other in order to make new opportunities available to poor residents, ultimately providing avenues to escape their economic isolation. We suggest that in this way, mixed-income housing programs are heavily based in participatory logics: they attempt to address issues of poverty and exclusion by cultivating engaged and socially interactive communities, explicitly seeking to foster social mixing and integration among residents in a shared setting.

However, we propose that the fundamental logic, as well as material implications, of mixed-income housing projects serve to re-inscribe and reinforce racial and economic power structures. In what follows, we argue that following forms of racial-economic power manifest themselves not only in the participatory assumptions of mixed-income housing but in other tacitly or explicitly embraced frameworks; namely, white middle class normativity; deficit frameworks; surveillance and criminalization of ‘deviance’ or incivility; and exclusion from decision-making.

**White Middle Class Normativity**

Although some studies have found that social mixing can achieve expanded social networks (Joseph, Chaskin, & Weber, 2007), few empirical studies have demonstrated that poor residents actually benefit from living near higher-income households (Fraser, et al., 2012; Lees, 2008). Rather, critical scholarship suggests, models of development that seek to interrupt concentrated poverty through mixed-income housing imply that interaction with middle and upper-income residents will benefit lower-income residents by modeling appropriate behaviors. (Chaskin & Joseph, 2013; Fraser et al., 2012). This perspective assumes that the ‘issue’ with lower-income residents has to do with their behavior and choices, rather than economic and racial structures that enforce economic isolation, and further assumes that upper-income households are somehow more advanced than lower-income households—that is, if lower-income people would just act like upper-income people, their problems would be solved. For example, Fraser et al. (2012) contend that in the HOPE VI policy, “higher-income homeowners were celebrated as the norm to which subsidized former public housing residents are told to aspire” (p. 528). While this assumption fundamentally places the blame for economic insecurity at an individual level, it also reveals the ways in which upper-income people are subtly placed as superior to lower-income people.

Gentrification scholar Loretta Lees (2008) critiques mixed-income housing projects that draw upon ‘social mixing narratives,’ contending that this claim obscures an underlying “social cleaning agenda” (p. 2451) that seeks to remove low income residents and replace them with higher income and thus more *desirable* residents. She further contends that mixed-income housing policies are masked state-sponsored form of gentrification, leading to further “segregation and polarization” (Lees, 2008, p. 2463), failing to secure inclusivity by assuming middle-class superiority. Moreover, these dynamics are followed by profoundly material implications: Calling for the need to de-concentrate poverty and revitalize extremely distressed housing projects, HOPE IV projects, for example, razed existing units and replaced them with mixed-income units, ultimately *reducing* the number of affordable housing units and *displacing* long-term and lower-income residents of the area while courting higher income residents (Lees, 2008; Thurber et al. 2017). The material results of the program had far greater benefit for households with economic capital and security, further marginalizing lower-income households.

Moreover, this norming process is profoundly classed and raced: economic (in)security is intimately connected to racial status and embedded in a long history of race-based oppression. In the colorblind rhetoric of our 21st century, it can be difficult to identify and name the racialization that is occurring, but, like the subtle methods that place middle and upper income people as the standard and de-contextualize economic systems, structures of racial power are actively engaged in the solidifying of white middle class normativity. The social integration assumptions that undergird mixed-income housing are disproportionately directed toward people of color and implicitly place white norms and culture as superior. As Kipfer and Petruinia (2009) describe, mixed-income housing, and its associated social mixing, “is understood as a way of socializing public housing tenants—precarious and property-less residents of mostly non-European descent—into what is assumed to be responsible moral behavior” (pp. 127). Moreover, the material impacts of mixed-income housing (such as the reduction of available units) also disproportionately impacts people of color, “often involving a peripheralization and dispersed re-segregation of people of color” (Kipfer & Petrunia, 2009, p. 115). Other studies note that behavior modeling is disproportionately directed toward lower-income people of color, often resulting in codified practices of surveillance and exclusion (Chaskin & Joseph, 2015), as will be discussed below.

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**Deficit Frameworks**

Underlying the methods and assumptions of projects that bring in white and upper-income residents is a deficit-based premise that implicitly blames marginalized communities for their social disparities. While briefly attending to the lived experience of public-housing residents (by acknowledging the severely distressed nature of the housing units, for example), the fundamental structure of mixed-income housing projects fail to examine the broader dynamics and histories of structural oppression. Instead, many of these projects implicitly suggest that marginalized neighborhoods and communities have a dysfunctional social structure that is to blame for their economic woes. Even more ‘progressive’ projects that claim a positive view of low-income communities of color may draw on pathology-based frameworks that rely on a deficit analysis. For example, historian Robin D. G. Kelly explains,

In the mid- to late 1960s, a group of progressive social scientists, mostly ethnographers, challenged the more conservative culture-of-poverty argument and insisted that black culture itself was necessary adaptation to racism and poverty, a set of coping mechanisms that grew out of the struggle for material and psychic survival. Ironically, while this work consciously sought to recast the ghetto dwellers as active agents rather than passive victims, it has nonetheless reinforced the monolithic interpretation of black urban culture and signification shaped current articulations in social science approaches to poverty” (Kelly, 2004, p. 121).

Similar to the process that places whiteness and middle-class status as the norm, deficit frameworks keep analyses of disadvantage at an individual level and essentialize the groups that experience oppression. Obscuring systemic realities that have led to economic isolation, for example, this perspective naturalizes the social position of the white and wealthy, rather than identifying and disrupting structures that protect social inequality. In this way, racial and economic power are working in tandem—discursively and materially—to uplift one group while holding back the rest.

**Surveillance and Criminalization**

Additionally, the assumptions that place middle class white values and behavior as the norm can manifest in multiple ways, such as the formation of rules to govern the use of private and public space, as well as the surveillance of these spaces and the people who inhabit them. For example, Chaskin and Joseph’s (2013) study of mixed-income housing in Chicago found that tension and disagreement regarding public behavior expectations were framed around maintaining order and property value. The study found that while all residents, regardless of class or race, agreed that rules and expectations for behavior should exist and be fairly applied, conflict emerged regarding *who* made those rules and *how* the expectations were enforced. The study found that “the rules governing access and use both protect and restrict residents’ rights, privilege[ed] to a large extent the rights of private property over public access and public order over specific kinds of individual freedom” (Chaskin & Joseph, 2013, p. 497).

For instance, while some behaviors were generally accepted by all to be a nuisance to others and unacceptable, such a playing loud music during the night, other norms were contested and founded on personal opinions of appropriateness, such as hanging laundry from a balcony or stepping outside without wearing shoes. The study found that the power to create rules to govern these behaviors tended to be made by homeowner associations, which were mostly comprised of upper-income residents. In this role, upper-income residents were enabled to enforce their own behavior norms and “ascribe meaning to the source and appropriateness of particular behaviors among their neighbors” (Chaskin & Joseph, 2013, p. 491). Moreover, by structuring homeowners as the ‘rule-makers,’ they were implicitly positioned as superior to other residents, namely renters, by virtue of their ability to own a house. This system implied that homeowners were better able to assess behavior norms and had the right to enforce them on others.

A more recent study has found similar results, noting how “regulatory regimes” through formal and informal sanctions and surveillance in mixed-income housing projects reproduce inequality and marginalization (Chaskin & Joseph, 2015). This study particularly noted that rules and surveillance were disproportionately directed at relocated public housing residents, who generally “found the nature and extend of surveillance and regulation highly invasive, often excessive, and a significant source of stress” (Chaskin & Joseph, 2015, p.146). They noted that the extensive regulatory systems included numerous cameras, police presence, and unit checks.

It is important to acknowledge how this is also a process of racialization. The system that allows upper-income homeowners to codify their norms into social policy for the entire neighborhood, and the incivilities, crime, and surveillance that result from these policies, map onto race, gender, and age lines. For instance, Fraser and colleagues’ (2012) review of mixed-income housing projects found that in many studies, “market-rate residents tend to identify young, African American men as a threat” (p. 529, referencing Chaskin, Joseph, & Voelker 2011; Joseph 2008; Sedlak 2009). Chaskin and Joseph (2013) found that most upper-income resident complaints “focused around the actions of unsupervised youths” (p. 490). More broadly, however, these projects draw on frames and narratives that are embedded in, and often re-enforcing, structures of racism. Kipfer and Petrunia’s (2009) study in Toronto makes visible the racialization woven into the strategies and justification of public housing restructuring, noting that, “Both the macro and micro aspects of housing redevelopment help territorialize, gender, and racialize class relations” (Kipfer & Petrunia, 2009, p. 115).

While many mixed-income housing studies fail to fully interrogate the racial dynamics at play, which are caught up in the mechanisms of norming, modeling, and criminalizing despite being coded through class references, we can identify how racial disparities and oppression are involved. Failing to mention or acknowledge race, or employing avowals of colorblindness does not make the racial reality disappear. The widespread criminalization and surveillance of non-white bodies in society and media (Alexander, 2010) can be traced in communities and community projects. As the aforementioned studies show, homeowners associations and other resident groups are sites of power imbalances that function to overlook historical legacies that lead to race-based income and housing disparities today, allowing white and upper-income residents to occupy positions of decision-making power that exclude and criminalize lower-income residents of color.

## Decision-Making Power

## Finally, a major critique of mixed-income housing programs is their inclusion of local residents as decision-making stakeholders. Decision-making ability and control over group discussion and visioning are crucial sites of power, places that systematically exclude low-income residents and people of color. In the context of neighborhoods, this can often look like contestation over boundaries and vision—that is, who has the power to define the neighborhood, the stakeholders, the needs and assets, the goals described, and the actions steps taken? The crucial work of defining and determining neighborhood boundaries, hopes, and values is easily usurped by more-powerful elites, including municipal governments, large developers, community development practitioners, or social service providers. Fraser and Kick (2005) explain that the tension “between a neighborhood defining and actuating its own agenda while at the same time garnering access to needed resources from those stakeholders with different visions of how a neighborhood should achieve its goals” is known as the “politics of place” (p. 38). This dispute can manifest in large and small-scale projects, especially when developers and practitioners fail to meaningfully engage community members and attend to the substantial power differentials between local community members and national development corporations.

While the goals of mixed-income housing redevelopment express a commitment to interrupting racial and socioeconomic segregation, the logics undergirding the model operate to re-inscribe racial and economic exclusions. Such programs put the onus of alleviating social alienation and segregation on the community itself by assuming that the interactivity and social capital cultivated among residents is enough to energize social uplift. Further, these efforts to engineer social-mixing work to valorize some behaviors and identities as desirable (i.e., those that cohere with a white upper-middle class norm), while others are cast as deviant, criminal, or unfit. Finally, while such efforts might encourage interactivity among residents, they do not necessarily encourage interactivity between residents and power-holders – that is, social capital does not necessarily equate to political capital. In the contemporary era of neoliberalism, when social inequalities are intensifying and social change efforts are increasingly thwarted by power imbalances (Mayer, 2013), these dominant logics take hold because they minimize the responsibility of state actors for achieving social welfare, they cater to the interests of a dominant white and elite class, and they depoliticize efforts of social actors by disconnecting them from structural targets. While mixed-income housing redevelopment efforts may be only one type of participatory development or neighborhood engagement model, they offer a lens into how seemingly benign or even positive efforts can, albeit unintentionally, perhaps, serve goals that are at odds with their intended purpose.

\* \* \*

**Case Study 2:**

**Christian Community Development Association**

The Christian Community Development Association (CCDA) is a national organization dedicated to poverty alleviation and social justice. Based in Chicago, IL, with thousands of organizational and institutional members throughout the country, the CCDA focuses on training community development practitioners at national conferences, training workshops, leadership cohorts, and networking events (CCDA *About, Events, Get Involved)*. Their methods of development are explicitly based on neighboring relationships. For instance, the CCDA handbook states:

Perhaps the greatest need of under-resourced communities is for achieving neighbor-leaders. Achieving neighbors can do much to break the isolation of poor neighborhoods and reconnect them with the life-giving systems that are the common grace of the city and larger society. Achieving neighbors bring living, personal model of hope back into a disheartened environment. Achieving neighbors bring resources and skills into a depleted neighborhood, along with fresh energy to deploy them” (Perkins, 1995, p. 83).

Best known for their early philosophical tenets of *Relocation* (moving by choice to a marginalized neighborhood), *Redistribution* (investing material and non-material resources into the marginalized neighborhood), and *Reconciliation* (developing meaningful relationships with neighbors)—often referred to as *The* *Three Rs*—the CCDA emphasizes that community improvement can only happen through local relationships of committed neighbors (CCDA *Philosophy)*. Since its founding, the CCDA has expanded its philosophy to incorporate five other tenets: *Leadership Development*; *Empowerment*; *Wholistic Approach*; *Church Based*, and *Listening to the Community* (CCDA *Philosophy)*.

Liked mixed-income housing projects, the CCDA philosophy draws on neighborhood effects and social capital theories. They seek to alleviate poverty through community engagement and neighboring behaviors, and they hope to expand opportunities for marginalized neighborhoods by re-investing people, and their people’s resources, into disinvested areas. It is important to note that the organization does not explicitly acknowledge these theoretical paradigms, but rather draws on theological and scriptural justification for their methodology. This is just one example of a grassroots, faith-based non-profit that draws on notions of participation and engagement as the basis for their philosophy and interventions. In the following sections, we show how the underpinnings of the CCDA philosophy, like mixed-income housing policies, serve to reinscribe and reinforce racial and economic power structures. Much of the critique raised early can be applied to CCDA practices, but we specifically focus on two concepts: micro-level focus and redemptive narratives.

## Micro-level Focus

## Like many organizations in our neoliberal era, the CCDA focus on the individual or the community as the key actor in poverty alleviation and neighborhood development. Rather than engage the structures that constrain economic mobility or enforce spaces of poverty, the CCDA focuses on local residents, seeking to develop their efficacy and leadership. For example, the CCDA’s core philosophy, *The Three Rs* is designed to bring upper-income individuals and households into “poor and under-resourced communities” (CCDA *Philosophy*) to build relationships and disperse new resources in the area. The organization states its goal to, “harness the commitment and energy of men, women, and young people living in the community, and others who care about their community, and find creative avenues to develop jobs, schools, health centers, home ownership opportunities, and other enterprises of long-term development” (CCDA *Redistribution).* While these efforts are important and can have impact, as well as help to foster collective empowerment and political organizing, our critique is about the fundamental assumption of the method: This method suggests that a few altruistic (wealthy) Christians can change the economic disadvantage of a local neighborhood by opening up new opportunities.

## This ideology thus suggests that local communities are responsible for their economic status, and as such, under a neoliberal framework, communities and citizens, are called upon to lead reform and change. Many projects for community development, such as programs to strengthen neighboring behaviors, sense of community, civic participation, and ties of trust, unquestioningly accept this premise and focus their interventions on the local level. In doing so, the local community is de-contextualized from existing economic trends and historical oppression, failing to address the many forces that impact a given neighborhood regardless of their sense of community (Berk-Clark & Pyles, 2013; DeFilippis, 2001).

## As Fraser et al. (2003) explain, “the basic foundations of the community-building field function to mitigate the responsibility of extra-neighborhood, public and private institutions whose (in)action has played a major role in the creation of de-valorized neighborhoods through certain efforts in the production of space and place” (p. 421). Focusing on the local level and fostering individual/communal capacity, while potentially meaningful or impactful in many ways, also functions to de-emphasize the structural reality of neoliberalism. Ultimately placing the onus on community members, rather than at the structural level of the federal government, neighborhood based solutions often serve to reinforce myths of self-help (Fraser & Kick, 2005) while obscuring the systemic dynamics of oppression that are at play.

**Redemptive Narratives and Deficit Frameworks**

The CCDA’s philosophy, which emphasizes social justice and poverty alleviation through relationships, also draws on implicit narratives of redemption, despite explicit attempts to avoid salvific roles. For example, the organization website states,

A new generation of Christians are faced with a question about how they will respond to the troubles of the poor and under-resourced communities today. The desperate conditions that face the poor call for a revolution in the church’s approach to the problem. Through years of experience among the poor, many have come to see that *these desperate problems cannot be solved without strong commitment and risky actions on the part of ordinary Christians with heroic faith* (CCDA *Philosophy*, italics ours*)*.

This quote suggests that the CCDA sees poverty as an important issue and understands the church to have a role in the solution, but also suggests that the practitioners who take up this charge to be exemplary and heroic. *The Three Rs,* similarly, suggest that the presence of practitioners in a neighborhood will be unquestioningly positive. In this way, the CCDA assumes that the core issue at stake is that the neighborhoods do *not* have practitioners—solutions will come once the practitioners arrive. Our critique is that this philosophy not only implicitly positions practitioners as superior to local residents, but also assumes a deficit within the neighborhood.

Additionally, although the CCDA’s philosophy seeks to ensure stakeholder decision-making power, we find that it also allows for the coopting of local power. For instance, the CCDA’s eighth philosophical tenet is *Listening to the Community*, which emphasizes Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) and prioritizes the “thoughts and dreams of the community itself” (CCDA: *Listening to the Community)*, contends that the community members must have the most power in the development process*.* This tenet focuses on including community members as stakeholders and positioning them to drive the processes of change in the community. Despite this explicit commitment to community leadership, however, other philosophical tenets ­­­remove local residents from decision-making roles. For example, *Relocation*, which calls for higher-income outsiders to take occupancy in low-income neighborhoods, fails to include a process of gathering community consent or support (CCDA *Relocation*). These tenets also fail to describe the processes and mechanisms that ensure community members, rather than outsiders, remain in decision-making roles. The implications of this further reveal the ways that the CCDA subtly places practitioners above local residents—although lip service is paid to issues of stakeholder involvement, little detail or accountability is provided to ensure this occurs or to address power-differentials.

Our key critique in this section is not to dismiss the work done by the CCDA, nor to suggest that neighboring projects and theory are unimportant. Rather, we have sought to reveal how the undergirding assumption of these projects fail to address the realities of power—that is, how the material and nonmaterial implications of racial and economic structures, and their legacies through history, create very real constraints for communities but are often obscured and denied.

\* \* \*

**CONCLUSION**

This chapter synthesizes interdisciplinary critiques of participatory development and neighborhood engagement to urge community psychology scholars, particularly those confronting issues related to urban planning and development, to examine their assumptions, approaches, and desired outcomes in ways that improve and strengthen their commitments to social justice and equity. We have argued that development and participatory interventions must be rigorously connected to historically-embedded, local *and* global systems and structures of political, economic, and social power. By analyzing how structures of racial and economic power reproduce the structural roots of poverty and inequality, we have sought to make visible the larger forces with which local neighborhoods are contending.

Specifically, we have considered how two, different yet similar, development projects reinforce these realities of inequality. First, we examined how mixed-income housing projects, such as HOPE VI, draw on white, middle class norming; employ deficit frameworks; surveil and criminalize behaviors of racial minorities; and exclude local residents from decision-making roles. Second, we considered how faith-based non-profits, such as the CCDA, emphasize a micro-level focus and redemptive narratives. These examples elucidate the deeply embedded, and often times hidden, nature of logics that undergird participatory development and neighborhood engagement efforts – that is, assumptions about participation’s universal benefit, power of ‘the local’, value of social capital, and the (dis)continuation of racial ideologies based white supremacy and settler colonialism. These analyses help us to see how such programs can operate to exacerbate the marginalization of residents who are poor, racial minorities, and the communities (geographic or otherwise) where they comprise the primary demographic. By suggesting that social problems and needs can be addressed with the right combination and proper expression of social interaction and public input, these efforts can obscure the structural nature of social problems. By forgoing confrontation with the political, economic, and racial structures of domination, some manifestations of participatory development and neighborhood engagement curtail their ability to work towards social justice.

## Moving Toward Social Justice

## While some deployments of participatory development and neighborhood engagement exhibit logics and practices that exacerbate social inequities, the aims of such efforts, especially those focused on cultivating collective efficacy and community empowerment, constitute valuable launch points for positive social change. A starting point is to develop a critical consciousness – a step we have sought to encourage in this chapter – around prevailing power structures, including racial power. Such a consciousness examines community life not as simply the aggregate of atomistic individuals and their inter-subjective interactions, nor as confined to a single geographic location, but as historically embedded, connected to global systems of power and inequity, and as teeming with processes of inclusion and exclusion. That is, community, as well as participation and engagement in it, are understood as contested and unsettled constructs.

## Thus, rather than accept participation and engagement as intrinsically positive, projects that deploy participatory or neighborhood-engagement models can advance social justice by explicitly positioning local residents in decision-making roles by addressing power differentials (Fraser & Kick, 2005); developing new methods of community governance and deliberation that attend to issues of power and difference (Chaskin & Joseph 2010); debunking the “myth of social mixing” (Lees, 2008); building local power through community organizing (Speer & Christens, 2012); exploring opportunities for alternative property practices (e.g., community land trusts) (DeFilippis, 2001); and considering new alternatives to market-driven community development, such as fostering a solidarity economy—communal economic structures with decision-making power (van den Berk-Clark, 2012). By critically analyzing structures of oppression, scholars, practitioners, and laypeople may participate in the ongoing work of dismantling subjugation in the struggle for equity and liberation.

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