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ARCHITECTURE & PLANNING | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Attempting to change behaviors and aspirations in a HOPE VI neighborhood through a phantom homeowners' association

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Abstract: The goals of Homeownership and Opportunity for People Everywhere (HOPE VI) housing virtually mandate that property managers attempt to change the norms and behaviors of residents, but most studies of the program seem to avoid this subject. This study examines the transcripts from 23 residents of an established HOPE VI housing development to better understand how residents experience any efforts of management to change their behaviors and aspirations. Based on their responses, residents clearly believe that management has, indeed, enacted rules and procedures designed to change behaviors and aspirations. Residents experienced these actions as paternalistic, and many of the rules resemble those enacted by homeowners' associations. Reactions to these rules are mixed, but residents tended to appreciate many of the results of these efforts (e.g., clean and quiet surroundings), and, overall, interviewees tended to focus more on positive experiences than negative ones.

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Homeownership and Opportunity for People Everywhere (HOPE VI) was created in 1992 to rehabilitate severely distressed public housing. In most instances, it has meant razing older housing developments and replacing them with mixed-income housing. These new developments aim to use the new housing and new rules to help develop self-sufficiency of residents; improve the living environment; improve surrounding neighborhoods; decrease the concentration of poverty; and build communities that will thrive in the long run. I use interviews with 23 residents of one HOPE VI development to understand how they experience efforts to change their behaviors and aspirations. Not only do I confirm that residents believe management is trying to change numerous behaviors and aspirations, but residents experience these efforts in a variety of ways—ranging from resenting paternalistic oversight to praising their clean and quiet surroundings. Overall, interviewees tended to focus more on positive experiences than negative ones.

In 1989, Congress sponsored the National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing, defining “severely distressed” as places with: “Residents living in despair and generally needing high levels of social and supportive services; physically deteriorated buildings; and economically and socially distressed surrounding communities” (National Commission on Severely Distressed Public Housing, 1992, p. 5).

In August 1992, the Commission recommended both that residents receive a broader array of social services and that the housing identified be either renovated or demolished and replaced. Congress responded quickly and, in October 1992, passed a bill authorizing the construction of HOPE VI housing developments. The main goals of HOPE VI were to help develop self-sufficiency of residents; improve the living environment; improve surrounding neighborhoods; decrease the concentration of poverty; and build communities that will thrive in the long run (Popkin et al., 2004). In practice, HOPE VI has evolved over time into a program that most frequently razes blighted public housing projects and replaces them with mixed-income developments that include both subsidized housing and various social supports (e.g., financial counseling and homeownership classes) for low-income residents alongside market-rate rentals and homes for sale for middle-income residents (Cisneros & Endgahl, 2009). The mixture of market-rate, subsidized, and houses for sale varies widely by development, though (Vale & Shamsuddin, 2017).

The rationale for creating mixed-income neighborhoods was essentially twofold: (1) to reduce the concentration of poverty, which has been associated with numerous negative conditions (Khadduri, 2001); and (2) to increase the social capital, and change the culture, of low-income individuals by exposing them to different norms and allowing them to network with middle-class individuals (Joseph, 2006).

In order to ensure that people will be interested in paying market rates, care is taken to create and sustain a neighborhood that is both aesthetically and socially attractive. The latter is accomplished through a mixture of screening (e.g., rejecting applicants who have a criminal record or are unemployed) and strict rules (e.g., working 30 h per week and not making too much noise). Similar tactics have been adopted elsewhere (Rosenbaum, Stroh, & Flynn, 1998). Accordingly, many residents of newly re-developed HOPE VI neighborhoods report that their surroundings are quieter, safer, and more orderly than their former neighborhoods (Cisneros & Endgahl, 2009).

Most research on HOPE VI has focused on living conditions in new developments and the housing outcomes of those who lived there previously (see, for example: Popkin et al., 2004; Popkin, Levy, & Buron, 2009) and have found that although most residents say they want to return, few actually do. Most residents end up moving to private housing using vouchers, but “the majority have experienced meaningful improvement in their quality of life as a result of HOPE VI relocation” (Popkin et al., 2009, p. 487). The vast displacement of residents was unexpected and may be the largest impact of HOPE VI in the long run.

Often missing from this research, though, are analyses of the ways in which living in a HOPE VI development has affected new residents—particularly attempts to help them develop self-sufficiency. How the management of HOPE VI developments attempts to do this—and whether it succeeds—is a crucial part of the evaluation of the program’s overall success.

To start to answer these questions, I analyze interviews of 23 residents of a large HOPE VI development—the John Smith Homes.¹ Residents report a wide array of efforts to alter their behaviors by management, most notably through strict rules that resemble those that many homeowners’ associations (HOAs) put in place. It should be noted that much of the previous literature has defined a “HOPE VI Resident” as somebody who lived in a neighborhood designated for HOPE VI intervention prior to that intervention, but I use the term to refer to current residents of neighborhoods that have already been redeveloped through HOPE VI.

1. HOPE VI, behaviors, and aspirations

Cities and residents often attempt to improve neighborhoods by making them appear “clean and safe” (Mitchell & Staeheli, 2006). This sometimes involves retreating behind gates (Low, 2001), and sometimes involves removing certain residents (Harms, 2012; Zhang, 2006). HOPE VI attempts both to improve neighborhoods by removing certain residents and to improve new residents’ lives by moving them to “better” neighborhoods.

If contexts and outcomes differ between different social and economic classes and neighborhoods can change these, it seems likely a program aimed at ameliorating poverty would attempt to alter the behaviors and aspirations of low-SES families. This seems even more likely if administrators or authorizers of the program adhere to the belief that these behaviors and aspirations either cause poverty or are a negative outcome of poverty. How might the management of a HOPE VI development attempt to change residents’ behaviors and aspirations? Managers of HOPE VI facilities control a number of policies and make a number of choices throughout the process of constructing and running a development. Three that specifically apply to these outcomes are the design and upkeep of the neighborhood, the rules in the community, and the residents who are selected to live in the community.

There is limited evidence both that some developers are thinking along these lines and that these actions have some positive effects. Joseph (2010), in an analysis of developers’ experiences in creating HOPE VI developments, reports that “on a more fundamental level, the task was to get individuals to commit to making deep changes in how they had been thinking about and living their lives” (p. 110). Accordingly, another study reported that residents were satisfied with the appearance of their newly built dwellings and had positive interactions and were learning from their neighbors (Joseph & Chaskin, 2010).

Such attempts to influence behavior and aspiration are likely based, in part, on “broken windows” (Wilson & Kelling, 1982) theory (a theory with a fair amount of popular awareness due to its use by many urban police forces)—the notion that a few broken windows (or other signs of decay and disorder) in a neighborhood are likely to result in a lower opinion of that neighborhood, less respectful behavior, and, eventually, larger problems. Many associate physical disorder with other signs of chaos and behavioral disorder, which affect child development (Coley, Lynch, & Kull, 2015).

Ultimately, any attempts by management to alter behavior and aspirations must filter down to individuals. If residents notice nothing different about the way their neighborhood is run, any actions that were previously undertaken by the management are likely irrelevant. This paper explores the way that residents experience the rules in their new neighborhood in order to answer two questions: (1) To what extent are any attempts by management to influence behaviors and aspirations felt by residents on a day-to-day basis? (2) If residents are aware of such attempts, in what ways are they experiencing and reacting to these rules and other policies?

2. Data

Data are taken from a larger study of the implementation of HOPE VI neighborhoods in a large, southern city. This paper utilizes interview transcripts from the first of the neighborhoods to be sampled, and data for this study come from the 23 household heads who were interviewed in the John Smith Homes.

John Smith is a rather large development consisting of well over a 100 units. The majority of these units are heavily subsidized rental units, but the development includes some market-rate rental housing as well as a significant number of owner-occupied homes sold with income restrictions. John Smith is typical of HOPE VI developments in that the old units were razed and replaced with mixed-income housing. The development is situated near downtown with a

surrounding neighborhood consisting mostly of small homes occupied by low-income African-American families and a highway separating the development from a middle-class neighborhood.

Interview participants were solicited by attaching notes to doors—compensation was offered in the form of gift cards. Residents were randomly selected to be included in the study, though it is unlikely that agreement to participate was also random. All 23 participants are African-American or biracial, are public housing residents, and almost all are single mothers (see Appendix 1). Interviews were approximately 60–75 min long and resulted in transcripts that averaged about 40 pages in length in each. Interviews were conducted in the summer and fall of 2008. For a full list of respondents and short bios, see Appendix 1 at the end of the article.

3. Methods

Since the goal of the study is to examine how HOPE VI residents experience attempts to change their behaviors and aspirations, it is appropriate to analyze the data using methods in the phenomenological tradition. Phenomenological studies aim to learn how people experience certain happenings, or phenomena. Often, these studies have examined phenomena that were not the choice of the research subject, making this study less typical in that it examines phenomena that subjects chose, at least to some extent, to experience. Though this is somewhat atypical, it by no means invalidates the method; a phenomenon is a phenomenon whether somebody chose to experience it or not and whether somebody is conscious that it is occurring or not. Another atypical aspect of this study is that it does not follow the oft-used structure of asking residents two broad questions as the sole interview framework (Creswell, 2007) but, instead, it relies on the answers to a variety of questions from a longer interview. At various points scattered throughout these interviews and resulting transcripts, residents described ways that they experienced attempts to influence their aspirations and behaviors along with their reactions to these attempts. Once the interviews were completed, however, traditional phenomenological methods were utilized when reviewing, coding, and analyzing transcripts (Hycner, 1985).

Before reading through the transcripts, the interview protocol was examined. The interview protocol was not specifically designed to address the questions asked in this paper, but special attention was paid to questions that asked residents about the cleanliness of their neighborhood, whether or not residents were concerned with what others thought, how much longer they planned to live in the development, whether or not rules were too strict, and whether or not they thought the development was accomplishing its stated goals.

In the phenomenological tradition, these responses were read multiple times in order to gain a feel for them that might not be possible through simple coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The 23 transcripts were read in their entirety, and relevant sections were pulled out—about half of the relevant sections were in response to these questions, but residents offered thoughts and reactions applicable to this study throughout the interview in response to other questions, spontaneous questions, and follow-up questions. Interviews were reduced from an average of about 40 pages to an average of about five pages in this step. These sections were then reread, and statements of significance were collected and sorted by general topic (e.g., “neighbors,” and “rules”). Situational maps (Clark, 2005) were constructed after each of the first two rounds of reading. All statements were then read a third time and assigned a formulated meaning. After this round, a period of reflection led to the creation of a concept map that would be refined after each subsequent round. Over the course of two more readings, all formulated meanings were sorted into theme clusters.

4. Results

From 23 verbatim transcripts, 192 statements of significance were collected. After assigning formulated meanings to each statement, 14 theme clusters emerged. The themes are arranged roughly in order of descending importance based on the number, forcefulness, and coherence of statements that are part of each cluster.

4.1. Theme 1: Cleanliness

Residents talked quite a bit about the cleanliness of their neighborhood—in part because one of the interview questions asked directly about the topic. Residents tended to focus on the fact that not only were their surroundings clean, but also management so heavily emphasized cleanliness. As Jocelyn put it,

‘They have people outside just about every day picking up trash. I could see some trash and when I come home I’m getting ready to get it up and they’ve already come through with the maintenance people, cutting the grass and so they do pretty good as far as keeping the neighborhood up.’

Residents reported that the neighborhood was clean because management picked up trash, because people picked up after themselves, and because there were fines for having trash or clutter around one’s home (which follow regular inspections). When asked if people keep up their property, Brittany responded that “They just make sure we do. They have inspections and everything; everything’s kept up pretty well.”

Responses were mixed between attributing the cleanliness to actions of management or to actions of residents, but virtually all agreed that their neighborhood is clean. Why and how the neighborhood becomes clean divided residents. Clean physical surroundings were appreciated, but some certainly saw strands of the type of urban redevelopment that often aims to make neighborhoods “clean and safe” (Mitchell & Staeheli, 2006).

4.2. Theme 2: John Smith is different

Residents reported that John Smith Homes are different: from the John Smith Homes of old; from the other public housing developments; and from the surrounding community. As Amanda puts it, “this is not the projects anymore ... It’s homes, you know.” Among other differences, residents observed that the homes are nicer, residents’ behavior is different, and living conditions are better than before. Emily encapsulates the different living experiences:

‘They don’t hang out like it was the project. You couldn’t come out for the corner being a thousand guys at the corner, you know. People have respect for what they tell their neighbor. I can say that. You know when it was the projects, it was a different thing. They didn’t care. You know, they’d pull up in the yard. They’d sit out there and play their music real loud ... Now, people have respect, I think so, for each other because when I come out and I look around, I don’t see that except for when I go up there at night.’

Residents also noted that their community differs not only from the projects that used to stand in its place, but also from the surrounding neighborhood. Numerous people said that gangs hung out and drugs were dealt across the street—outside of the boundaries of John Smith—but not within the development.

Many residents report that their community is different and distinct—mostly in a good way. That razing homes and replacing them with new ones make people think the neighborhood is now different should surprise nobody, but differences in norms, attitudes, and behaviors have potentially wide-reaching implications.

4.3. Theme 3: Distaste for John Smith

While responses definitively trended toward the positive, more than a few residents aired complaints—sometimes one, but sometimes many. Some directly contradicted what numerous other residents reported (e.g., that there were drugs all over the place), but the main recurring theme was that the rules were burdensome, if not insulting—with some insisting that they were treated differently because they received public assistance. Lucy’s acquaintance interrupts to opine that management seemed to have

'like a preconceived notion about what a person that receives subsidized housing is like ... you've already been labeled a stereotype before you got here by the mere fact you signed an application that said the government is going to subsidize part of your housing and the reason I say that is because you would not have that same treatment for people that pay market rent.'

Given that the mixed-income neighborhood had both market-rate and subsidized renters, it is unclear to what extent management applied different rules to different groups. But perception seemed to be that the subsidized renters would not be treated the same way if they were paying market rates. People also specifically disliked the fact that their rent went up when their income increased—with some characterizing this as a hindrance or a disincentive—and that they seem to be charged for everything—including things they would not normally pay for in an apartment (e.g., unclogging a toilet).

More than one person said they resented that management could come into their home at almost any time, unannounced, to fix or inspect something. As Rosa reported

'When I'm renting it's not as much 'big brother' looking over you. You know, you strictly pay your landlord and that's it. But here, it's like, okay, I don't know who's coming for house inspection and I don't know who's coming in when I'm gone.'

Though many residents appreciate some of the outcomes of interventionist management techniques (e.g., neighborhood cleanliness), some chafe at being so closely watched. This echoes many of the same tensions observed by Goffman (2014) as police shift strategies from ignoring high-poverty areas to aggressively policing them. While some neighbors express relief that their neighborhood is no longer ignored and that the streets are safer, many bristle at the intense scrutiny and feel trapped.

4.4. Theme 4: Doubt regarding efficacy

Only two of 13 theme clusters are exclusively negative, but both cover a fairly large amount of ground. While many residents were hopeful or at least cautiously optimistic, John Smith is not without its share of naysayers. People doubted that John Smith would work for various reasons. Some thought that the newness would wear off; some thought that management was not following through; and some were simply skeptical. Brittany exhibited the latter two. She recalled that

'We had to sit down and set goals. Okay? Like little kids in a room setting goals ... I know that I didn't do anything that I said I was going to do on that paper and I never went in any of the directions I said, but I was promoted in my job, but it was like they just asked us that and it ended. I don't think they're doing what they're supposed to do.'

Lucy had a lot to say on the issue, arguing that some residents might think

'This may be the best thing since sliced bread because they've never had anything better than this. But when you've been exposed to better, you know, and a different environment and, you know, you just, you see things a little clearer ... That grant is not going to make it happen, because that grant has no power. The only power that that grant has that you're writing for is to put things in places of communities. But nobody's going to utilize those things when underlying fear is there among the residents.'

She was one of a few residents who reported fearing socializing with neighbors because of the possibility that they would report her misdeeds and she would get fined. Such fears may inhibit the desired interactions through which lower-income residents were supposed to build social capital in mixed-income housing (Joseph, 2006).

Though residents tended to highlight the positives in the interviews, no neighborhood would be complete without at least a few skeptics. In this case, the skeptics seem to believe the neighborhood will not work for two different (though related) reasons. On the one hand, some are skeptical that rules will force people to change (e.g., worrying that they will make residents afraid to associate with other residents). On the other hand, some believe the interventions do not provide enough support. Given the decline in funding for the support services over time, these residents are not alone in this feeling. Indeed, researchers have concluded that neighborhoods in Nashville and Atlanta (Oakley, Fraser, & Bazuin, 2015) along with Louisville (Axtell & Tooley, 2015) have had limited impacts partly due to their focus on goals instead of support services.

4.5. Theme 5: Neighbors are responsible

Praise for neighbors was not universal but, by and large, residents seemed to be impressed with their neighbors—or at least what they saw of, and knew about, them. As a result, they felt that their neighborhood was improved. Patricia reports that her “neighbors now are focused on keeping our neighborhood safe and looking good,” while Anne argues that “certainly, it helps keep a lot of crazy stuff out of the neighborhood.”

Residents reported that their neighbors were quiet at night, went to work in the morning and, generally, were responsible—certainly more so than their former neighbors. As Susan puts it:

‘I think it’s weeded out some of the, you know, the people you usually see when you go to the housing project. You know, sitting around, not going to work, just hanging out and like I feel like I’m going to work and paying for you to sit at home and you know, you’re getting everything, benefits and all this type of stuff and I can’t get any kind of assistance. I’m thinking it kind of got people out of here and not letting some people in because of the requirements. And I think that’s a good thing.’

If the goal of the screening process was to ensure that residents live in a neighborhood with less disorder, then the screening process appears to be working. Or at least the residents believe it is working. Excluding some applicants (particular prior residents of the neighborhood) remains one of the most controversial aspects of HOPE VI. These residents seem to believe it improves their neighborhood, but scholars still worry about the fate of those who were excluded.

4.6. Theme 6: Planning for the future

A large number of residents reported that they were planning on buying their own house down the road, with a number crediting this to the HOPE VI program. Jessica reported that:

‘Even though I’m young, I mean I want to move up. So in three years I expect to have my money saved and me doing something and me to buy a house which I think John Smith kind of embeds in you when you first come. They give you keys to, okay, you know, to get yourself together and get your goals set and get everything you want to set up and done. So by then, I’ll be graduated from school and I’m going up to try and get my Bachelor’s and going up to do more things and probably graduate with my Bachelor’s. So I expect to have some of this stuff done and have my own home.’

Also notable was that a few residents reported taking part in a program where part of their monthly payment was matched by the housing authority and could be used to put a down payment on a house after five years.

Many residents are setting goals for the future; goals that are very similar to those that the management might hold for them. It remains to be seen how many residents will actually be able to follow through and purchase a house in the future. It also remains to be seen how many people this will help. Although homeownership seems to improve things like civic engagement, financial stability, and academic attainment (Engelhardt, Eriksen, Gale, & Mills, 2010; Manturuk, Lindblad, & Quercia, 2017; McCabe, 2013), it can also cause trouble for families who run into financial

hardships and/or purchase homes far from work, family, or friends (Rohe & Lindblad, 2013) and lock families into neighborhoods when they might be better off moving (Barker, 2013). More homeowners in a community, though, may also benefit that entire community (Coulson & Li, 2013).

4.7. Theme 7: Positive peer pressure

Residents reported that they felt indirectly pressured to act in certain ways by their neighbors. Given that their impression of their neighbors was largely positive, so are their responses to these neighbors. Residents reported various reactions; from trying to keep things cleaner to simply being inspired. Sheila says that

‘Over in here you hardly ever see anything and it makes you want to be like darn, I dropped that or I did this and get something up. It makes you want to get it up. Like if you get your trash out there and if it falls over it makes me mad. Honey, I come in the house and look like my momma, getting buckets of water and dumping PineSol, sweeping off the porch ... It makes you want to be clean.’

Similarly, Jessica says “Honestly, I do. I kind of watch myself for my neighbors. Like I make sure that you know, even my car, from my car is clean to my porch. You know what I’m saying, because I don’t want my neighbors to think ‘Oh my gosh.’”

And Patricia says that it has “been very inspiring. Yeah and seeing other neighbors doing it and saying ‘Well, I can do that too.’” Residents report both receiving help from other neighbors and helping other neighbors out.

One major concern about HOPE VI and other mixed-income housing is whether they can effectively foster social interaction. John Smith does seem to be fostering at least some interactions and what is described as mostly positive peer pressure. The question again looms, though, whether these types of changes will benefit residents in the long run or not. Keeping one’s porch and property clean is usually appreciated by neighbors, but redirecting one’s energy to these tasks may take away time from others. Given the scarcity of time, energy, and money for many living in poverty (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013), this reallocation may or may not prove beneficial. It is noteworthy, though, that these residents mentioned activities to maintain the “clean and safe” aims of the neighborhood that were motivated by their peers rather than by management. It is also unclear whether this peer pressure, if positive, constitutes a form of social capital.

4.8. Theme 8: Pride in their community

The distinct differences between John Smith and their former homes have pleased many residents. But these differences have led to more than a pleasant surprise or satisfaction; a number of residents report feeling pride in their community. Kristin is among those who think that John Smith reflects well on her:

‘I mean, I think they’re really trying to build the neighborhood up and where you live at demonstrates a lot about who you are. Where you live at reflects who you are and I think everybody wants a clean decent place to live, you know, so. It makes people feel good that they can go home to a decent place. When I was living where I was living before, it was not a clean place, not a place where I wanted to invite anybody and it’s kind of like you may feel ashamed of that. You know, I mean, but over here, you know, it gives you a different kind of atmos ... outlook.’

Patricia simply says that “when where I lived in the bricks, I felt hopeless. I don’t feel hopeless here” (residents refer to the older housing developments as “the bricks”). Lest one think that the pride is merely a boost of self-esteem, a number of residents report that this pride makes them want to reach higher. Jessica says that

'it makes you feel comfortable, that you know what I'm saying, that you might live based on income, but you live in a beautiful home. So you have something to be proud of and have a reason to go to work. And like you said, have a reason to get a better job and a reason to do better.'

For many residents, taking pride in their neighborhood is a distinct change from previous experiences—one which, arguably, could lead to other changes down the road. What we do not know is to what extent that pride stems from the quality of the housing, the upkeep of the neighborhood, or their neighbors. In other words, is the management style itself making people feel pride, or are people simply happy to live in newer housing?

4.9. Theme 9: Residents receive help

Some residents report that they have received help from the development. Residents report that they have taken classes, received encouragement, and enrolled in special programs. Jocelyn reports that "she [the staff social worker] tries to call you every year, at least once a year, to say 'What are you doing? Have you met your goals yet?' You know, so I think that's the main reason I guess for this program over here, which is good."

While some residents resented such attempts to help them, others received them with open arms. Like many HOPE VI neighborhoods, these programs seem somewhat limited based on resident reports. A social worker calling once per year, for example, is less than intensive aid.

4.10. Theme 10: Rules are strict

One of the most popular topics for residents was the rules that are present in John Smith. Again and again, residents reported that the rules were quite strict. "They hold our hand to the fire," as Patricia says. Debbie describes enforcement of the rules surrounding garbage and clutter:

'Yeah, does a sweep of the area. Pretty much they do the front and might ride the middle and the back sometimes. But if they ride through the middle and the back, he's checking your trash cans and looking at your area's space right there to see how cluttered it is and if it needs to be cleaned up. They take pictures and they'll come back to you with a letter in your box to let you know you need to have it straightened up at a certain time. And if you don't have it done promptly, then you'll be charged a fee. Like your trash can, when the trash people come on Wednesday, if your trash can is still sitting outside on the curb by Friday, you get hit with a fee.'

Different residents reacted differently to the rules that were in place, but virtually all agreed that strict rules were, in fact, in place. I rely on resident reports, meaning I cannot be sure of the exact rules—for example, exactly how long one has to leave a trash can on the curb before receiving a fine—but in many ways, perception is the reality in this situation. In other words, people will respond to the rules they believe exist rather than the rules that actually do (and the rules they actually believe will be enforced).

4.11. Theme 11: Rules yield results

The rules present at John Smith sometimes yield results, according to the residents. Numerous residents reported that they or others react to the rules in various ways. Most prevalent in the discussions were reactions to rules on upkeep. When asked if people litter in the neighborhood, Jane replied, simply, "Never, cause you're also charged a fine." Patricia reported that she had to report back on a monthly basis with proof that she was interviewing for jobs and, eventually, accepted a job out of fear of the consequences.

'[management] let me know that it was only, I could only stay here for 12 months without having a job ... And, uh, you would have to work somewhere ... And you have to work at least 20 hours a week ... Yeah. I was, I was afraid. Um, I've got a degree in communications and I could not find a job in my field and I was frustrated. Um, and I thought working at [a

local fast-casual restaurant] is beneath me, is what I thought. And I had to really look at, dang-gone-it, you need a job cause I need some income coming in. Um, I've never wait-ressed in my life ... So, uh, yeah I felt pressured. I didn't want to lose my place.'

Residents' reactions to the rules are both positive and negative—and, as in the case above, sometimes a little of both. But many shared a behaviorist perspective on the rules. It seems to be a matter of fact in the community that the rules do yield results. When asked if residents keep up their properties, Jennifer simply replied “well, that's mandatory here”—in other words, it is not a choice.

Rules have consequences, and John Smith is no exception. What remains unclear is how many residents are making long-run changes to behaviors and how many are changing them right now *because* of the rules. Residents almost certainly want to keep up their yard or be employed, for example, but may be more likely to do these in certain ways or certain timeframes. We also do not know how it will ultimately affect them even if residents *do* make these sorts of changes.

4.12. Theme 12: Stated and implied expectations

While many of the designers and advocates of HOPE VI expect the program to yield positive outcomes, it should not be assumed that residents are necessarily aware of such expectations. According to the residents at John Smith, however, many are. Kristin reports seeing the Mayor give a speech at the ribbon-cutting on “on what the expectations are and how they're trying to improve.” In other words, nobody is hiding these expectations from the residents.

June says that John Smith “was built for you know to be self-sufficient, get on your feet, and then move along.” It appears that they pick up these expectations from a variety of places—sometimes they hear it directly from an official's mouth, and sometimes they hear it through the grapevine. One notable example is the one that Nikki provides when asked if she has heard a lot about homeownership:

'Yes I have. I've heard a lot about it. When I have gone to the association meetings, they bring that up. They would put in the newspaper, the John Smith newspaper showing where people actually bought their own homes and talked about it.'

According to the residents, the management of John Smith (along with at least one public official) clearly makes an effort to let residents know that they are expected to adopt certain behaviors and aspirations. The “self-sufficiency” and homeownership pieces sound like they are taken almost directly from the official language of HOPE VI. What we do not know is the extent to which either management or residents believe that other neighborhood rules and practices are tied to these goals.

4.13. Theme 13: Support for management's tactics

Given that residents report they are living in a very different neighborhood with very strict rules, we might expect different reactions to their experiences. Indeed, a number report feeling like they are being infantilized or otherwise resenting the management's actions. But a number also support various steps that have been taken. Anne was told that she needed to move crates that were blocking a possible fire escape route through a window and her reaction was “No, I didn't have any problem with it ... He was just talking about he was advising me.” She went on to say that “if a person can't get with and live with the rules the way they are, then they shouldn't be here.”

Susan reports that the curfew was stricter at her last residence, and Brittany says that even a local wealthy suburban neighborhood has strict rules. Maya is in full support of the weeding-out of many applicants, saying that she only recommends John Smith to friends “If they're the type of people that is like me; clean and working and nonviolent.”

While not everybody appreciates the rules and enforcement methods, a sizeable number of people do. As with virtually any group anywhere, people seem to feel the need to limit membership in some way. In this case, residents seem to imply that only certain others are suitable for living in this neighborhood, and they do not wish to allow other types in. The irony, of course, is that other surrounding neighborhoods are doubtless fighting to keep John Smith residents out for much the same reason.

4.14. Theme 14: Working to improve

Finally, residents noted that they were working to improve themselves and their lifestyle—often in direct concert with the goals and expectations of the neighborhood’s management. A number noted that living in John Smith meant increased amounts of responsibility. Anne reported that:

‘Instead of you living in one place and just paying the rent, like in public housing you just pay this rent, but here you have to pay your rent, pay the light bill, and it’s showing you how to be responsible. So you’re really getting an idea of being responsible if you decide to go out there and get your own house on your own.’

Some mentioned specific examples like saving for a house, attending homeownership classes, or paying bills on time, while some mentioned just a determination to do better. Kristin mentioned both:

‘I, well, for the time I’ve been here, I’ve become more responsible to know how to manage my money and not go out and spend, buy clothes and party and stuff like that. Because I know I have to pay my rent at the beginning of the month, you know, stuff like that. I’ve become more responsible and with having kids, you know, you grow up fast anyway, because, you have to be the provider for them.’

Given that one of the HOPE VI program’s goals was to increase the self-sufficiency of residents, these reports would probably be looked at favorably by many policymakers. Given the description of the Mayor’s speech and the neighborhood newsletter encouraging homeownership, it seems likely that local officials and management would as well.

5. Discussion

The themes discussed above lead to three overarching conclusions:

- (1) Residents clearly believe that management is, in fact, attempting to influence their behaviors and aspirations—often in ways not dissimilar to that of a sort of phantom HOA.
- (2) Some of these attempts may be working—there is limited evidence that some residents have, in fact, changed certain behaviors and aspirations.
- (3) Residents have experienced these rules in various ways, often enjoying the aesthetics of the development while bristling at perceived micromanagement. Within this set of interviews, residents tended to speak of these experiences positively more than negatively.

5.1. Conclusion 1

Through the statements of residents, it seems quite likely that the management of the John Smith Homes intends to alter the behaviors and aspirations of residents. At the very least, residents seem to believe that these types of efforts are in place. The clearest evidence of this is in the discussion of the rules to which residents are subjected. Table 1 below is a list of some of the things residents mentioned that were not allowed at John Smith.

A quick glance at the list allows the reader to note that all of these rules can reasonably be assumed to curb disorder and/or discourage behaviors stereotypically associated with poverty. There seems to be an implicit assumption, for example, that middle-class families sit inside with their air conditioning while lower-class families leave their screen door open to get air. Similarly, somebody fixing a car in the street does no harm other than to make the neighborhood appear

Table 1.

Banned/Fined For

Trash in yard
Leaving garbage can out for >1 day
Cooking on the front porch
Having clutter around the house
Kids staying out past curfew
Torn blinds
Owning pit bulls
Fixing cars in the street
Screen doors

more like a stereotypical lower-class neighborhood. In short, while some of the rules might be designed to address specific problems, the thread that connects nearly all is that they are behaviors stereotypically associated with lower-class families and neighborhoods. If management believes that these types of behaviors are to be discouraged, we would expect to see a similar list of prohibited actions.

In other words, these rules appear to be paternalistic in nature. Mead (1997) defines paternalism as:

‘Social policies aimed at the poor that attempt to reduce poverty and other social problems by directory and supervisory means. Programs based on these policies help the needy but also require that they meet certain behavioral requirements, which the programs enforce through close supervision. These measures assume that the people concerned need assistance but that they also need direction if they are to live constructively.’ (p. 2)

Based on the narrative provided by residents and the table above, the management certainly seems to be asserting that it knows better than the residents what is best for them and their community.

Readers who live in a neighborhood with a HOA may think a number of these rules look familiar. Residential community associations, such as HOAs, are one way of managing neighborhood change (or lack thereof) (Dilger, 1992). The number of such associations has more than doubled over the past 25 years and today exceeds 330,000 (Community Associations Institute, 2016). HOAs are found mostly in affluent, majority-White communities (Cheung & Meltzer, 2014), and are often designed to increase property values (McKenzie, 1994), which they tend to do (Scheller, 2015).

The difference in this situation is that the rules are not established by a group of property owners in the community but, rather, are established by the local housing agency and the development administrators (along with the resulting power imbalance). In this sense, the John Smith Homes are run as if by a phantom HOA: residents are expected to adhere to a number of mildly invasive rules designed to improve appearances of the neighborhood, but the residents themselves have little to no say over the development or implementation of these rules. These rules likely affect both the neighborhood itself and residents’ sense of how they fit with their neighborhood. Some seem to reject the rules as illegitimate, while others identify with the rules and adamantly insist that outsiders who do not follow these rules do not belong in this neighborhood.

The John Smith Homes, and potentially other HOPE VI developments, are far from the first to strictly manage people living in poverty (Piven & Cloward, 2012; Soss, Fording, & Schram, 2011), and an era of welfare reform (Grogger & Karoly, 2005) has led many to scrutinize the effects of welfare more than the effects of poverty (Handler & Hasenfeld, 2006). Paternalistic management of low-SES people is perhaps most noticeable in education right now, where so-called no excuses

schools (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2004) have had mixed effects, raising test scores (Abdulkadiroğlu, Angrist, Dynarski, Kane, & Pathak, 2011; Dobbie & Fryer, 2011) but creating deferential “worker-learners,” who follow instructions rather than seeking new knowledge (Golann, 2015). John Smith certainly manages fewer details of residents’ lives than schools do of students’ lives, but we may still see similar effects where short-run measurables improve while other harder-to-measure aspects decline.

5.2. Conclusion 2

It also appears that the rules in place at John Smith are altering at least some residents’ behaviors in at least some instances. I have constructed a table (Table 2) that shows actual examples, taken from the statements of residents, of actions and outcomes. The chart shows the action taken by the management or the condition present in the community and the effect that it a specific resident reported.

Note that this table is not intended as proof that these relationships always occur in these directions; such an analysis is outside the scope of this paper. The purpose is merely to show that these are paths through which managers appear to be trying to influence residents and, in at least in one case, appear to be succeeding. From these data, we cannot say to what extent changes are occurring versus not occurring—numerous examples can also be provided in which these relationships did not exist. Nor can we determine to what extent these changes, when they do occur, may be positive versus negative. While some appear to meet the goals of HOPE VI (e.g., possible increased likelihood of employment), they may or may not help in an immediate situation (e.g., through reduced ability to care for one’s child). And they seem to be perceived as positive changes by some residents while others feel what Pattillo (2009, p. 33) calls the “tyranny of the middle class” pushing them to adopt the behaviors of their new middle-class neighbors.

A question for future research is whether any of these changes led to changes in adjacent neighborhoods. Collection of data on surrounding neighborhoods is outside the scope of this research project but, anecdotally, major demographic changes failed to materialize immediately following reconstruction. We have evidence, though, that this has happened elsewhere (Tach & Emory, 2017).

Table 2.

Actual Examples of Relationships between Actions/Conditions and Outcomes

Action/Condition	Result
Only allow new residents with jobs (Screening process)	See neighbors going to work (Behavior of neighbors)
Home Ownership Class (Class)	Aspires to own a home (Aspirations)
Home Ownership Class (Class)	Saves money for house (Behavior)
Fines for littering (Rule)	Do not see neighbors littering (Behavior of neighbors)
Fines for littering (Rule)	No litter around neighborhood (Appearance of neighborhood)
Fines for littering (Rule)	Does not leave trash around house (Behavior)
Expectation: Stepping Stone (Expectation)	Prepares to move out in a few years (Behavior)
Regular lawn maintenance (Appearance/Upkeep)	Lawns look neat and clean (Appearance of neighborhood)
Residents pay utility bills (Increased responsibility)	Becomes better at budgeting (Behavior)
All neighbors go to work (Behavior of neighbors)	Working is a norm (norm)
Lawns are neat and clean (Appearance of neighborhood)	Neat and clean lawns are a norm (norm)
Working is a norm (norm)	Helps neighbor find job (Behavior)
Neighbors are buying houses (norm)	Aspires to own a home (Aspirations)

5.3. Conclusion 3

At least a fair number of residents seem to be aware of the expectations that they will change their behavior and aspirations. Some residents respond in ways policymakers anticipate (e.g., saving to buy a house) while others resent these expectations (e.g., saying they don't need any help). Residents are certainly aware of how their neighborhood compares to other neighborhoods around town and in which they have previously lived. In terms of appearances, the neighborhood receives high marks—as does (for the most part) the behavior of the neighbors they have. One curious aspect of this is that nearly all residents interviewed reported that they knew five or fewer other residents by name. It is unclear whether residents simply assume that other residents are responsible based on limited information or whether this judgment can be made without knowing others closely. The degree to which these relationships (or lack thereof) have increased residents' social capital is a topic worth exploring in depth in the future.

In terms of rules, resident reaction is a mixed bag; many like the outcomes of the rules but do not necessarily like being subjected to them (much like taxes). Either way, there seems to be a consensus that rules are eliciting responses from residents. As might be expected, residents are divided between skepticism that the goals of HOPE VI can be reached and earnest determination to improve their own lives. Overall, however, residents appear to be experiencing more positive than negative aspects of the management of their new neighborhood.

As funding for HOPE VI winds down, it will be tempting to shift attention to newer housing initiatives. But the research on the trajectory of HOPE VI developments, their residents, and surrounding neighborhoods 20 or 30 years post-redevelopment may prove even more important than the wave of evaluations and investigations that immediately followed.

5.4. Questions for future research

Given the experiences the residents report, we are left with a number of questions for future research. Chief among these, perhaps, is the effect that these experiences will have on residents in the long run. Will they be more likely to purchase homes, maintain employment, or maintain their properties? And if they are, will this improve their lives?

If there is a mostly unspoken effort by management to change things like motivation and perseverance, will it mean that residents develop better noncognitive skills (Heckman, 2000)? Even if they do, will more grit (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015), for example, improve outcomes IF more jobs are NOT available?

Comparing different strategies and supports across different HOPE VI neighborhoods should tell us which are more effective at increasing self-sufficiency and social capital of residents. The practices of management at the John Smith Homes seemed to result in both positive changes and resentment among residents. Would a less paternalistic structure yield less of the latter without yielding less of the former?

We also need to know whether there are ripple effects of redevelopment on surrounding neighborhoods. If the nice things that residents say about the John Smith Homes (e.g., that it is well-kempt and feels safe) prove sustainable, what will it mean for the neighboring blocks? Will there be positive spillover effects on safety and resident satisfaction? If so, will these ultimately lead to gentrification of the neighborhood that leads to more displacement? And if this happens, will this effectively create a larger mixed-income neighborhood or wall off the John Smith Homes from the more affluent surrounding streets? Will the changes deconcentrate poverty, or simply relocate it?

Finally, we need to know whether these neighborhoods (both the developments and the surrounding residential areas) are sustainable in the long run. It is likely easier to maintain high standards for maintenance and upkeep with brand new housing than in the following decades. When the homes are 30 years old, will they be dilapidated and lead to a new cycle of disorder? Or

will they be maintained well enough to look like they did in their first decade of existence? Regardless of the level of physical disorder, will social bonds strengthen or weaken over time? Most residents in this sample had not yet formed deep bonds with their neighbors. Will residency time limits and fear of punishment keep these bonds from forming, or will residents eventually form tighter networks? Similarly, for surrounding neighborhoods, will things return to the way they were before, completely shift to a new gentrified reality, or create a diverse neighborhood that remains stable for decades to come?

6. Limitations

Without speaking to the management and comparing John Smith to other housing developments, we cannot say for sure that management's rules were paternalistically designed to alter residents' actions and beliefs. Other housing developments enact various strict rules, for example. While I do not know exactly what types of rules other developments enact or how prevalent these are, I think the difference here is that they seem to be part of a larger-scale effort to change the way that poor people live. Given the goals of the larger policy, the design of the actual housing complexes, the types of rules residents report, and the ways in which residents are experiencing the enactment and enforcement of these rules, it seems different than, say, an apartment complex posting strict rules about noise or hanging things on walls. As Lucy's acquaintance interjects during the interview

'what's really sad if you take the very same complex, have the same management sitting down there at that office and fill it with people that pay market rent, the results would be different . . . You would not have that underlying fear going on among the residents. You would not have management to some degree trying to control what goes on . . . I think they kind of thought about the old John Smith and what made that community so terrible and then based upon that community implemented some controls to this community that are to some degree a little bit oppressive.'

The sample also limits the generalizability of these results. Not only does the sample consist of residents of only one neighborhood in one city, but the residents are almost all female and almost all African-American.

7. Conclusion

HOPE VI was designed to improve the lives of residents, a broad aim that different complexes and different researchers interpret differently. While most prior research focuses on outcomes of prior residents, I examine the experiences of new residents. Some HOPE VI developments (such as the John Smith Homes) clearly aim to change the day-to-day lives of their new residents, and a reasonable case can be made that a major goal of management is to "improve" the residents' outcomes by altering their behaviors and aspirations.

Indeed, many residents of John Smith perceived that management was attempting to do just that after they moved into the neighborhood. And, predictably, reactions are mixed. Some are notably furious while others seem willing to trade scrutiny for a shiny new neighborhood. Some feel oppressed while others feel uplifted. Within this set of interviews, respondents tended to refer more frequently to positive outcomes of these efforts—notably the cleanliness of their neighborhood—than they did to the negative aspects of these efforts.

These findings carry numerous implications for both researchers and policymakers. Follow-up studies should also examine in greater detail how and why administrators are running HOPE VI developments and how these decisions affect residents. The goals of these decisions, as seen through the residents' eyes, in John Smith, include maintaining an orderly house, remaining employed, and moving toward purchasing a house. This study sheds only a little light on the extent to which these goals are being realized; additional research should both expand and refine the list of goals and further examine the degree to which residents are accomplishing them—for better or worse. Since local housing agencies were given wide latitude regarding implementation,

different developments are doubtless run in different styles with different goals in mind; comparing the outcomes of residents in developments with more paternalistic governance styles to those in developments run in different manners would shed light on both the influence of neighborhoods on resident behavior and the limits and possibilities of HOPE VI.

As policymakers debate the next generation of housing policy, they should closely examine what has worked and what has not in HOPE VI developments—this paper sheds light on that question by exploring the ways in which residents are experiencing and reacting to attempts by administrators to meet the original goals of the program.

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Note

1. All names—both of places and of people—are pseudonyms.

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Appendix 1

Name	Residence	Race	Bio
Patricia	5 years	African-American	Single Mother with three kids (8, 11, 24). 35 year resident of city. Moved from halfway house. Currently works as waitress.
Jane	6 months	African-American	Recently divorced Female living with school-age children and her mother. Works as a nurse's assistant
Anne	6 years	African-American	Female with one daughter who is enrolled at a local college. Works as a crossing guard.
George	6 years	African-American	Single Disabled Male living alone. Works part-time as a shuttle bus driver at local airport and sports arena
Debbie	3 years	African-American	Single Mother living with two teenage daughters. Works as a medical technician.
Susan	1 year	African-American	Married female living with a son in elementary school. Works as a medical technician and attends nursing school.
Jessica	3.5 months	African-American	Single mother living with pre-school aged son. Works as childcare counselor and attends school.
Amanda	6 years	African-American	Single Grandmother living alone. Lived at John Smith before it was converted. Works as crossing guard.
Elizabeth	1.5 years	African-American	Single mother living with two teenage children. Works with child services and as a nurse technician.
Jocelyn	1.5 years	African-American	Single mother living with pre-school aged daughter. Works as a phlebotomist.
Brittany	4 years	Black/Asian	Recently divorced female living with college-age daughter. Works in security.
Emily	5 years	African-American	Divorced older female living alone. Is on disability.
Lucy	5 years	African-American	Single mother living with two school-aged children. Works as a legal administrator.
Kristin	2 years	African-American	Young single mother living with two young children. Works in medical records.
Rosa	5 years	African-American	Single mother living with two school-age children. Works in collections.
Sheila	1 year	African-American	Female living with husband and two young children. Works as a nurse assistant and hair stylist
Maya	5 years	African-American	Single mother living with teenage daughter. Works in security.
Maggie	30 years (total)	African-American	Retired single female. Lived at John Smith before it was re-done.
Nikki	5 years	African-American	Female living with husband and teenage daughter. Works as a janitor.
Jennifer	2 years	African-American	Older single female living alone. Works as a medical tech.
Ashley	5 years	African-American	Older single female living alone. Living off of social security.
Henry	6 years	African-American	Older single male currently working through a divorce. Lives alone. Is retired.
June	1.5 years	African-American	Single mother, recently divorced. Lives with two children and works as a customer services rep.



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