



**WESTERN  
MICHIGAN**  
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

---

Volume 37  
Issue 1 *March*

Article 4

---

2010

## Exploring Homeowner Opposition to Public Housing Developments

Joanna Duke  
*Arizona State University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Social Work Commons, and the Urban Studies and Planning Commons

---

### Recommended Citation

Duke, Joanna (2010) "Exploring Homeowner Opposition to Public Housing Developments," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*. Vol. 37: Iss. 1, Article 4.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15453/0191-5096.3493>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol37/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact [wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu](mailto:wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu).



**WESTERN  
MICHIGAN**  
UNIVERSITY

# Exploring Homeowner Opposition to Public Housing Developments

JOANNA DUKE

Arizona State University  
School of Public Affairs

*This paper examines the beliefs and attitudes of homeowners in two receiving communities of public housing units. Opposition to housing mobility programs is generally attributed to fear of falling property values and increased crime rates. Given the spatial and redistributive nature of the programs, this paper proposes and explores space and liberty-based ideologies as causes of dormant opposition persisting beyond relocation. Survey data were collected from two neighborhoods where developments containing public housing were located. Results indicate that ideologies about space and liberty are important to understanding receiving community opposition as well as the extent to which members of the receiving community feel that public housing residents are part of their community.*

Key words: *Housing, NIMBY-ism, Mobility*

Over the past several decades, public housing and, in particular, the placement of public housing has been a major point of contention in the United States. For decades, the federal government had sanctioned neighborhood exclusionary behavior with discriminatory housing policies (Lipsitz, 1998; Massey & Denton, 1993; Goetz, 2003). In the 1960s, it began to reverse its own actions by promoting fair housing policies and integration, which made resistance to change inevitable (Goetz, 2003). Over the last several decades, mobility programs, programs that aim to give public housing residents the opportunity to move out of desolate, low income neighborhoods, were

Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare, March 2010, Volume XXXVII, Number 1

implemented as a result of litigation and the recognition that impoverished neighborhoods can detrimentally impact residents' lives (Wilson, 1987; Ellen & Turner, 1997; Jenks & Mayer, 1990). Responses from individuals in receiving communities of public housing residents or public housing developments have included protesting at town meetings, forming picket lines, submitting angry editorials to the local newspapers, and, in rarer instances, violent or criminal activity (Galster, Santiago, & Pettit, 2003; Goetz, 2003). Most of the opposition has played out in the media. There has been little empirical research conducted on the beliefs and attitudes of members of the receiving community with regard to entering public housing residents. By examining how individuals from the receiving communities perceive different characteristics of the entering community and mobility programs, empirical insight into opposition may emerge that can inform policy implementation.

The present study is an exploratory examination of middle class homeowners' aversion to public housing residents post-relocation. The focus is on public housing relocations that took place in two Texas cities, Dallas and Fort Worth. In the Dallas case, the relocation consisted of a court mandate to locate a public housing development in an affluent, predominately white neighborhood. The Fort Worth case consisted of voluntary desegregation; the Fort Worth Housing Authority purchased an existing market rate development in an affluent neighborhood and allocated units as replacement housing for a razed, downtown public housing development.

In general, the main assumption underlying dispersal programs is that low-income residents who move into mixed income housing will be better off. That is, most of the benefits intended by the programs are based on low-income residents living in proximity to more economically comfortable residents. Mixed income housing can include developments such as HOPE VI projects (where low-income residents live within the same development as market-rate residents), scattered-site housing (where assisted developments are located in affluent neighborhoods), and mobility programs (where residents use housing vouchers to move to less impoverished neighborhoods) [Kleit, 2005]. For the conceptual purposes of this study, mixed income housing is viewed with an

encompassing definition of low-income residents living in low poverty neighborhoods. The present research is focused on a public housing development located in an affluent neighborhood (Dallas) and a market-rate development containing a small proportion of public housing units (Fort Worth).

Generally, the literature notes that the receiving community residents' fears about low income housing relocating to their neighborhood include falling property values and high crime rates (Galster, Santiago, & Pettit, 2003; Briggs, Darden, & Aidala, 1999). Decades of literature on residential segregation lends support to prejudice and discrimination as causes of opposition to housing integration. While these explanations are important, this paper proposes and explores an additional cause for opposition, an ideological mismatch between the beliefs of the homeowners in the receiving community and the ideology underlying mobility programs in general. An ideological mismatch might provide additional insight into why opposition persists beyond other fears that homeowners have, which might be especially pertinent post-integration.

The purpose of this work is to examine the beliefs and attitudes of homeowners with regard to the deconcentration of poverty through mobility programs. The research question is "how do the receiving homeowners' existing beliefs about liberty and spatial rights relate to their support of mobility programs and feelings about low-income residents as neighbors?" By studying the beliefs and attitudes of homeowners, it may be possible to gain a better understanding of why NIMBY-ism (not-in-my-backyard) occurs in middle class neighborhoods in relation to mobility programs. One reason this perspective is important is the impact of political pressures caused by NIMBY-ism on mobility program implementation. Several researchers have noted that mobility programs are greatly limited in who they help, due to strict screening criteria (Goetz, 2003; Popkin, Buron, Levy, & Cunningham, 2000). The screening is driven by receiving community members' fears, and some contend that screening and strict oversight of properties is necessary in order to keep programs politically viable (Galster et al., 2003). Other strategies for placating economic integration-based fears have been attempts at seamless integration through design elements that make it difficult to tell which units are subsidized

(Talen, 2006; Brophy & Smith, 1997). Dispersal programs that employ these designs may not address the underlying causes of opposition. By studying opposition to low income housing units or residents, strategies for mitigating conflict, rather than placating it with stringent oversight, may emerge.

### Why NIMBY-ism?

Before proposing additional causes for homeowner opposition, it is useful to review theories and research that have dominated the literature. There are several causes for opposition that are mentioned in the literature, including concerns about property values and crime rates and racial discrimination. Before policy implementation, the receiving community envisions increased crime rates, decreases in property values and threats to the "social fabric" of community (Briggs et al., 1999). Briggs et al. (1999) analyzed real estate data in Yonkers, New York and conducted phone surveys of households near seven scattered public housing sites as well as households farther from the sites. They asked homeowners questions that concerned their plans to move, reasons for moving, sense of community, and satisfaction with their neighborhoods. While they did find that NIMBY-ism was common, not only race-based, but class-based, they did not share the sense of impending doom spouted by protesters. The data suggested that the sales and prices of houses near the sites were typical of those of the entire city. Further, the responses of homeowners near the sites did not suggest that people were unhappy with neighborhoods and the majority of respondents even recommended their neighborhood to others.

Galster et al. (2003) did a comprehensive review of receiving community studies. Their research found that in more affluent neighborhoods, deconcentrated poverty did not significantly impact the neighborhood as long as reconcentration did not occur, while more vulnerable neighborhoods, those with low to moderate house values that had already been steadily declining in the past decade, were more inclined to have negative effects. Residents in vulnerable neighborhoods were more concerned with the effects of subsidized housing. Interestingly, residents in the least vulnerable areas were either not aware

of the Section 8 housing or were not concerned that Section 8 housing could impact their neighborhood significantly. For the most part, studies of receiving communities indicate that mixed-income housing is generally not detrimental to receiving communities in terms of property values, crime rates, and neighborhood satisfaction.

In addition to potential neighborhood impact, racial discrimination may contribute to opposition. Persistent opposition to low-income neighbors may be grounded in residential segregation typical of middle class neighborhoods in the U.S. Scholars have proposed several hypotheses for persistent segregation that involve residential preferences, that is, the preference to maintain predominately white neighborhoods. It lends itself to reason, then, that relocating public housing residents, who are disproportionately minorities, would evoke similar opposition. Although there are a few hypotheses about what has sustained neighborhood segregation, the predominant cause stated in the literature to date is prejudice and race-based discrimination (Dawkins, 2004). For instance, an early study by Farley, Schuman, Bianchi, Colasanto, & Hatchett (1978) showed respondents living in Detroit's inner city suburbs cards diagramming hypothetical neighborhoods with varying amounts of black and white households. Results indicated that Blacks preferred to live in integrated neighborhoods, while Whites generally preferred "segregated neighborhoods" no more than 30 percent Black. Bobo and Zubrinsky (1996) conducted a partial replication of the Farley et al. (1978) study almost 20 years later with data from the Los Angeles area. They included interviews with Latinos and Asians in addition to Blacks and Whites. Their results also supported the hypothesis that racial segregation is caused by discrimination and prejudice. This was especially the case for Blacks, who were at the bottom of the hierarchy when respondents were asked to rank potential neighbors by whom they would prefer to live. More recent studies have found similar results, such as Ihlanfeldt and Scafidi (2004) who concluded that Whites' preferences for predominately white neighborhoods were greatly associated with racial composition.

Although the neighborhood segregation literature may lend support to race-based opposition to mobility programs

stemming from neighborhood preferences, it is important to note that there are significant differences between racial and economic integration that pose different issues for policymakers. Public housing relocation programs do not threaten to "tip the scales" to any significant degree, as there are relatively few public housing residents actually relocated (Goetz, 2003). Thus, previous racial integration studies, which focused on preferred neighborhood compositions, do not apply as well in the case of economic integration. In terms of race-based discrimination causing opposition to mobility programs, it may be more appropriate to understand homeowners' attitudes toward race and class, rather than neighborhood racial preferences.

Opposition based on individual characteristics, such as race or income, may also inhibit the degree that residents interact post-relocation. One assumption underlying mobility policy is that social interaction will occur between different income groups in mixed income settings (Kleit, 2005). Allport's (1954) contact theory assumes that different racial groups living side-by-side helps decrease prejudice. The necessary conditions for contact theory to be applicable to economic integration may not exist (Yinger, 1986; Kleit, 2001). Wittig and Grant-Thompson (1998) point out that contact theory has specific conditions that must be met in order for it to be successful, such as "equal status of respondents within situation," "cooperative interdependence among respondents across groups," and "individualized contact having the potential for friendships across groups" (p. 798). Mixed income housing does not generally meet these conditions, and thus, whether individuals in the receiving communities would consider public housing residents part of their community is questionable.

The extent to which opposition and social integration occurs in programs that promote economic integration may depend on the beliefs and attitudes of receiving communities. Beyond initial fears of property damage, racial discrimination, and attitudes about race and class, what else could be sustaining opposition to public housing relocation? There is definitely reason to believe that all of the above reasons for NIMBY-ism would apply to housing mobility programs, but the forced nature of the integration and the spatial redistribution it entails adds additional explanations for opposition.

*Proposed Framework for Opposition*

The concerns and opposition of the receiving community may be indicative of an ideological mismatch between mobility programs and beliefs homeowners have about liberty and spatial rights. Goering (2003) discusses the complex situation involved in the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) program in Baltimore County, which moved public housing residents into low poverty neighborhoods with vouchers.

To many white residents, MTO was an act of governmental unfairness. Seen by the minority poor, MTO and other assistance programs were but modest down payments toward correcting the racial bias they had experienced; experiences invisible to many of their fellow white Baltimore residents (Feagin & Sikes, 1994). HUD planners and administrators had no tools with which to redress such deep tensions and misunderstanding. (Goering & Feins, 2003, p. 51)

Homeowners who believe government should correct past injustices to minority poor may support mobility programs, while homeowners who see the programs as an unfair government act will oppose them. Given the negligible impact the programs have on the more affluent neighborhoods, it makes sense to look beyond the traditional integration concerns and address the broader issues that concern individuals related to social welfare.

*Liberty.* Two schools of thought on the meaning of liberty are used to conceptualize the beliefs that government actions in the case of mobility programs are fair or unfair. The dichotomous concepts of liberty as "liberty to" and "liberty from," are respectively referred to by scholars as positive and negative liberty (Berlin, 1962). Negative liberty, labeled "negative" due to its lack of government intervention, is based on Mill's (1879) classic belief that government should be limited to exerting power over individuals solely in the case of preventing harm. In contrast, positive liberty is a more proactive definition of liberty, which requires active intervention by government to help individuals overcome barriers to pursuing liberty (Stone, 2002). As is playing out in current housing policy, when the "negative" and the "positive" perspectives coincide, there is



inevitably conflict.

*Spatial rights.* The different conceptions of liberty play a pertinent role in analyzing beliefs about housing policy and mobility programs, yet the concept does not address the spatial nature of the program. Moreover, individual factors such as class and race may not account for the sociospatial implications of mobility programs. Purcell (2001) contends that homeowner activism is motivated by more than just individual factors. "Homeowners do not see their project as designed to maintain a certain class, race, or gender regime in the city. Rather, they see it as a struggle over space" (Purcell, 2001, p. 178). He examined the spatial dimension of opposition and argued that homeowners reacted to proposed physical changes in their surroundings and the ideas and feelings they associated with what they believed their surroundings should have looked like. Purcell's (2001) contention can be applied to the opposition often instigated by housing mobility programs in terms of the rights homeowners believe they have to space.

"Right to the city," which can be expanded to include "right to the suburb," is a theoretical concept proposed by Lefebvre's manifesto and is useful to this study in that it focuses on what individuals believe about their spatial rights versus the rights of others. There are three dimensions to the right. The first dimension, diversity, is perhaps most pertinent to neighborhood studies (Duke, 2009). As discussed earlier, one proposed cause of segregation is that many Whites prefer to live in homogeneous neighborhoods. Attitudes toward diversity and the desire to maintain homogeneous spaces might inhibit the acceptance of low-income residents. The second dimension is "the right to appropriate urban space" (Purcell, 2003, p. 577). Appropriation refers to the right to utilize the city's use value without the city's exchange value taking precedence (Purcell, 2003). The use value of a city is its creative, imaginative uses by the residents, which often take place in public spaces within a city. The exchange value is space that has been privatized and is generally seen as an investment in the real estate market (Logan & Molotch, 1987). This dimension of the right considers whether homeowners place a higher value on their property values over communal access to neighborhood amenities and space.

The third part of the right to the city is “the right to participate centrally in the production of urban space” (Purcell, 2003, p. 577). Lefebvre believed that all residents, especially low-income residents, should have a significant, central role in decision-making. The extent to which low income housing individuals are able to participate in a low poverty neighborhood may depend on their neighbors’ believing they have the right to participate.

### Methodology

The selected neighborhoods contained residents who vehemently opposed public housing residents moving into the apartment complexes adjacent to their homes. In both the Dallas and Fort Worth sites the opposition received great publicity. Although relocation occurred throughout the cities, the chosen sites contained a development which was integrated into a neighborhood with predominantly single family homes. Other relocation sites were either remote or were in high poverty locations.

*Fort Worth, TX.* In 2001, the residents of a downtown Fort Worth Housing Authority (FWHA) public housing development were dispersed into other areas of the city. The current study takes place in the most affluent neighborhood to which residents could have relocated. FWHA purchased an apartment complex and designated 58 (out of 583) units for public housing. Some of the surrounding homeowners tried in vain to stop the purchase. The complex remains a market-rate complex and most closely resembles the HOPE VI model of mixed income housing, in that different income groups live within the same development and there is no way of distinguishing between public housing and market-rate units. This study takes place three years after relocation.

*Dallas, TX.* In 1987 seven women filed a suit against the Dallas Housing Authority (DHA), claiming that the DHA was purposefully segregating Dallas public housing. The infamous Walker case (Anderson, 2004) instigated a legal battle that lasted over 10 years. In accordance with the decree, DHA found a location for townhouses in an affluent, predominately white neighborhood. Over 1,000 homeowners, with the support of

then U.S. House Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-Irving), sued and enjoined construction. The decision was eventually overturned in a higher court, and the townhouses (76 family units) were completed. The townhouses differ from the Fort Worth complex in that they are more of a scattered site development consisting entirely of assisted housing surrounded by homeowners and market-rate developments. Another important difference between the sites is that many of the homeowners surrounding the Fort Worth complex lived in gated communities, while none of the surveyed Dallas homeowners lived behind gates. This study takes place eight years post-relocation. Unfortunately, this study could not include a pre-test of what the homeowners' beliefs and attitudes were before the relocation. Rather, the present study is a snapshot of the homeowners' perspectives about the mobility program, years later.

The participants of the study were 153 homeowners in two Fort Worth and Dallas neighborhoods where public housing replacement units had been located. Cross-sectional data were collected through mail surveys. An anonymous mail survey was considered most appropriate for this research in order to elicit honest responses and minimize the tendency of respondents to write socially acceptable responses. A total of 600 surveys were sent—300 to Dallas and 300 to Fort Worth. Surveys were sent to households within 600 meters of a development in the Fort Worth neighborhood and to households within 700 meters of a development in Dallas. The sample was not random, and thus prohibits generalization to other homeowners.

All street names within a certain area around the housing development were entered into a spreadsheet. In order to get a variety of households from different streets, half of the homeowners from each street were selected. For example, if there were 10 houses listed on "Street A," the first five names were selected. This was done until the target number (300) was achieved. In Dallas there were not as many houses surrounding the complex, so additional houses were added from the original streets until the sample was even.

A total of 153 surveys were returned, yielding an overall response rate of 26 percent. More Fort Worth residents (86) returned surveys than Dallas (67), yielding a sample that weighted slightly more to Fort Worth (56%). It is unclear how

representative responses are of homeowners, given the low response rate. The Dallas sample was more ethnically diverse than the Fort Worth sample, with only 67 percent identified as Caucasian as compared to 93 percent in Fort Worth. These proportions are similar to the Census data shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Neighborhood census data and respondent data

	Dallas Census tract*	Dallas respondents	Fort Worth Census tract*	Fort Worth respondents
<i>Median income</i>	\$39,960	\$101,000- \$150,000	\$52,014	\$101,000- \$150,000
Black	13.9%	5.9%	.9%	1.2%
Hispanic (any race)	12.8%	7.5%	3.0%	3.5%
White	72.9%	67.1%	95.3%	92.9%

\*Source: U.S. Census, 2000

*Note:* Sample data are limited to homeowners, so comparisons are limited.

More male homeowners completed the surveys (76, 54%) than female homeowners (65, 46%). Twelve respondents did not indicate a gender (8%). The overwhelming majority of respondents had a bachelor's or a graduate degree (46% and 40%, respectively) and another 11.3 percent (17) had some college or an associate's degree and only four (.03%) respondents had just a high school diploma. The majority of respondents were married/cohabiting, 9.5 percent were widowed, 8.1 percent were single and 7.4 percent were divorced. The number of years respondents lived in their communities ranged from 0 to 50.

Cross-tabulations of the cities and other demographic variables revealed a more detailed analysis of respondents by city. Dallas and Fort Worth respondents differed in terms of race, income, how long they lived in the neighborhoods and awareness of the subsidized apartments in their neighborhoods (see Table 2).

Table 2. Differences in demographics by city

Variables	Dallas	Fort Worth	Total
<i>Race</i>			
White	45 (36%)	79 (64%)	124
Non-White	22 (76%)	7 (24%)	29
$\chi^2 = 14.95^{***}$ , $\Phi = .31^{***}$			
<i>Years in residence</i>			
≤ 5 years	29 (59%)	20 (41%)	49
6-11 years	31 (58%)	22 (42%)	53
12-18 years	6 (33%)	12 (67%)	18
≥ 18 years	0 (0%)	27 (100%)	27
$\chi^2 = 30.97^{***}$ , $p < .001$ , Cramer's $V = .46^{***}$ ; $t(145) = 5.61^{***}$			
<i>Income</i>			
Under \$50,000	8 (%)	5 (%)	13
\$51,000-\$100,000	21 (%)	23 (31.3%)	44
\$101,000-\$150,000	24 (%)	12 (35.8%)	36
Over \$150,000	12 (%)	25 (17.9%)	37
$\chi^2 = 9.7^*$ ; Cramer's $V = .27^*$			
<i>Awareness of Subsidized Housing</i>			
Yes	54 (40%)	80 (60%)	134
No	12 (67%)	6 (33%)	18
$\chi^2 = 5.35^*$ ; $\Phi = .19^*$			

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .001$

## Operationalization of Variables

### *Perception of Liberty*

In order to measure the concepts of liberty and space, the author developed and tested scales based on conceptual descriptions addressed earlier. To measure respondents' views of liberty, respondents were asked how strongly they agreed (on a scale from 4, "strongly agree" to 1, "strongly disagree") with statements that reflected beliefs about the key tenets of positive or negative liberty.

The following statements were used to measure positive liberty: (1) "Government needs to intervene in people's lives to ensure that everyone has the resources and opportunities necessary for freedom"; (2) "Freedom means having the resources and opportunity to participate in public decision-making." The following items were used to measure negative

liberty: (1) "The government should not intervene in people's lives unless it is to prevent harm;" and (2) "Freedom means limited government interference."

The positive items did not both work well as an independent scale ( $\alpha=.35$ ). The two recoded negative liberty items and one of the positive liberty items ("Government needs to intervene in people's lives to ensure that everyone has the resources and opportunities necessary for freedom") worked well as a single, continuous scale which produced a composite liberty score ( $\alpha=.78$ ), with higher scores denoting an affiliation to positive liberty beliefs. All three of these items mentioned the role of government, whereas the second positive liberty question did not, which could have resulted in low construct validity for that item. The liberty items were weighted equally, and an additive index score was calculated for each participant with a possible score of 3 (negative liberty orientation) to 12 (positive liberty orientation).

### *Spatial Rights*

In order to develop a spatial rights scale, questions measuring three dimensions of the "right to the city" concept were developed and tested ( $\alpha=.77$ ). Respondents were asked how much they agreed (on a scale of 1 to 4 with 4 being "strongly agree" and 1 being "strongly disagree") with the statements illustrating each dimension of the variable.

The following items pertained to the right to diversity dimension: (1) "Having persons of diverse racial and economic backgrounds is good for my neighborhood;" and (2) "I prefer that people in my neighborhood have backgrounds similar to my own." Statements measuring right to participate focused on the degree to which individuals in the receiving community would be likely to accept low-income residents as central decision-makers in their communities and included: (1) "Low income people should have the right to live in any neighborhood they want;" and (2) "People with higher incomes should have more of a say in community decision-making because they contribute more financially to society." To determine the degree to which individuals in the receiving communities prioritized exchange value over use value, the final dimension contained the following items: (1) "Maintaining my

property value is more important to me than low-income families having greater access to decent housing, schools and parks;" and (2) "Development of private property is more important to my community than the development of public space." A spatial rights score was obtained for each participant by adding the six items together for a scale ranging from 6 (low belief in spatial rights of low-income residents) to 24 (high belief in spatial rights of low-income residents).

#### *Race-based Discrimination*

Measuring attitudes about race is difficult to do through survey research (Blank, Dabady, & Citro, 2004). Overt questions about race are not likely to be answered honestly. In order to measure beliefs respondents had about minorities, questions from the General Social Survey (GSS, 2000) were adapted to fit the needs of the present study. The GSS questions focused on whether individuals believed that discrimination and other factors were reasons why Blacks and Hispanics had "worse jobs, income, and housing than white people." The current study adapted these items and asked how important the following statements were to the disenfranchisement of Blacks and Hispanics: "Discrimination against Blacks (Hispanics)" and "Most Blacks (Hispanics) don't have the opportunity for high quality education." The items formed two scales, for beliefs about causes of disenfranchisement for Blacks and Hispanics, with a high score (8) indicating respondents believed structural factors were "very important" and a low score (2) indicating "not important at all." The term "disenfranchisement" was selected to convey the restricting or deprivation of civil rights, such as rights to housing and participation.

#### *Class-based Discrimination*

Participants' perceptions of poverty were measured by finding out to what extent they subscribed to positive and negative stereotypes about low-income individuals. Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler (2001) developed a list of 38 attributes that they gleaned from the poverty literature. In the interest of having a shorter survey instrument, 10 items were selected. The 10 items were selected based on their pertinence to mobility programs. Specifically, the chosen items were

characteristics one might desire or not desire in a neighbor. Each negative item was paired with a corresponding positive item that was somewhat related, although not always an antonym. Participants rated the attributes on a 5 point scale, with 1 being not very characteristic of low-income individuals at all and 5 being extremely characteristic of low-income individuals. Positive characteristics included "hardworking," "family-oriented," "responsible," "moral" and "friendly," while negative characteristics included "lazy," "have too many children," "uneducated," "immoral" and "criminal." A factor analysis confirmed that the positive and negative items loaded well on two factors. "Uneducated" was the only item excluded from the scale due to its lower reliability.

Positive stereotypes included hardworking, family-oriented, responsible, moral and friendly ( $\alpha=.83$ ) Negative stereotypes included immoral, lazy, have too many children and criminal ( $\alpha=.76$ ). The negative items were recoded in order to create a single scale for stereotypes about low-income individuals ( $\alpha=.76$ ) where higher scores indicated a belief in positive stereotypes about low-income individuals and lower scores indicated a belief in negative stereotypes.

#### *Effects of Subsidized Housing*

In order to control for the reactions respondents might have had based on perceived threats to their neighborhood, respondents were asked how much they agreed or disagreed that subsidized apartment complexes would (1) lower their property values and (2) increase crime rates in their neighborhood. The two items were combined to form the "neighborhood effects" scale ( $\alpha=.84$ ), with a range from 2 (strongly disagreed) to 8 (strongly agreed).

#### *Dependent Variables*

To measure support of mobility programs, respondents were asked how much they supported (on a 4 point scale ranging from strongly support to strongly oppose) the following statement as a solution for ameliorating poverty: "Relocating low income families to more affluent neighborhoods."

In order to measure whether respondents felt that low-income individuals were part of their community, they were



asked how much they agreed (on a 4 point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree) with the statement "I consider the low-income families who have moved in as being part of my community."

#### *Control Variables*

The control variables consisted mostly of the demographics described earlier. They included respondents' race, gender, city, income, education, awareness of public housing in the neighborhood and the number of years they lived in their neighborhood.

### Findings

#### *Feelings about Mobility Programs and Low-income Neighbors*

The majority of respondents opposed or strongly opposed relocating low-income individuals into more affluent neighborhoods so that they could have access to better amenities (75%,  $N = 122$ ). Female respondents tended to be more ( $M = 2.1$ ,  $SD = .7$ ) supportive of relocation programs than male respondents ( $M = 1.8$ ,  $SD = .8$ ) [ $t = 2.5$ ,  $p < .05$ ].

The sample was more evenly split on feeling that low-income individuals were part of the community. Fifty-one percent ( $N = 76$ ) agreed or strongly agreed with the item. There were no significant differences based on personal characteristics.

#### *Beliefs about Neighborhood Effects and Race*

*Perceived effects of subsidized housing.* Seventy-six percent ( $N = 114$ ) of all respondents answered "strongly agree" or "agree" to "apartment complexes with rent-subsidized residents will lower my property values," and 71% (106) answered "strongly agree" or "agree" that "apartment complexes with rent-subsidized residents will increase crime rates in my neighborhood." The combined neighborhood effects variable illustrated that 69.1% ( $N=103$ ) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that both effects would occur, 11.4% ( $N=17$ ) were split (agreed one effect would and one would not occur) and 22.9% ( $N=28$ ) either disagreed or strongly disagreed that either effect would occur.

Whether respondents were aware of the mixed income housing in their neighborhood was related to their perception that negative effects would occur in their neighborhoods.

Respondents who were not aware of the low income housing in their neighborhoods agreed more ( $M = 6.7, SD = 1.1$ ) that crime rates would increase and property values would decrease than who were aware ( $M = 5.9, SD = 1.6$ ) [ $t(152) = -1.98, p < .05$ ].

The respondents from Dallas ( $M = 6.6; SD = 1.2$ ) were significantly more likely to agree on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) that apartment complexes with rent-subsidized residents would lower their property values and increase crime rates in their neighborhoods than respondents from Fort Worth ( $M = 5.6; SD = 1.7$ ) [ $t(147) = 4.2, p < .001$ ]. These differences could be due to several factors. Fort Worth residents had more recently received subsidized housing and perhaps they were more likely to realize that their properties were not affected in an adverse way; conversely, the Dallas community has had more time to have other neighborhood changes since the relocation which may affect their property values.

Respondents who thought that subsidized housing would have detrimental effects on their neighborhood were not likely to feel that low-income residents were part of their community ( $r = -.24, p = .009$ ). Not surprisingly, they also were less likely to support mobility programs ( $r = -.51, p < .001$ ).

*Beliefs about race/ethnicity.* On a scale of 8 (very important) to 2 (not at all important), respondents' average score for feeling that structural factors were important to the disenfranchisement of Blacks was 5.2 ( $SD = 1.7$ ). Male respondents did not think that structural factors were as important [ $M = 4.6, SD = 1.6$ ] to the disenfranchisement of Blacks as female respondents [ $M = 5.8, SD = 1.5$ ] [ $t(109) = 4.2, p < .00$ ]. Believing that structural factors were important was positively related to feeling like low income families were part of their community [ $r = .22, p < .02$ ] and supporting mobility programs [ $r = .47, p < .000$ ]. Respondents who held more structural beliefs about Black disenfranchisement also had higher spatial rights scores [ $r = .25, p = .009$ ] and had more of a positive liberty orientation [ $r = .31, p = .001$ ].

Respondents' average score for believing that structural factors were important to the disenfranchisement of Hispanics [ $M = 5.3, SD = 1.7$ ] did not differ significantly from their beliefs about the disenfranchisement of Blacks [dependent  $t = .6,$

$p = .55$ ]. Not surprisingly, male respondents did not think that structural factors were as important [ $M = 5.9, SD = 1.6$ ] to the disenfranchisement of Hispanics as female respondents [ $M = 4.7, SD = 1.6$ ] [ $t = 3.9, p < .00$ ]. And likewise to beliefs about the disenfranchisement of Blacks, believing that structural factors are important factors in the disenfranchisement of Hispanics was positively associated with feeling that low income families were part of the family [ $r = .18, p < .05$ ], supporting mobility programs [ $r = .45, p < .000$ ], having higher spatial rights scores [ $r = .26, p = .007$ ] and having a positive orientation toward liberty [ $r = .33, p = .000$ ].

Given the above similarities in responses about Blacks and Hispanics, it is not surprising that they are strongly, positively related [ $r = .85, p = .00$ ]. The two scales were combined to form a scale representing beliefs about disenfranchisement of minorities [ $\alpha = .87, M = 10.5, SD = 3.2$ ].

*Beliefs about class.* On average, respondents tended to ascribe more negative stereotypes about the poor with a mean score of 27 ( $SD = 5.7$ ), on a scale of 10 (agrees with all negative stereotypes and disagrees with all positive) to 45 (agrees with all negative stereotypes and disagrees with all negative). Respondents who ascribed to more positive stereotypes about the poor had higher spatial rights scores [ $r = .38, p = .000$ ], believed that structural factors were important in the disenfranchisement of Blacks and Hispanics [ $r = .21, p = .05$ ], and that low income neighbors would have negative effects [ $r = -.43, p = .000$ ].

#### *Beliefs about Space and Liberty*

*Liberty.* On average, respondents tended to believe in negative liberty principles with a mean score of 5.6 ( $SD = 2.2$ ) on a scale of 12 (strongly agree with positive liberty tenets) to 3 (strongly agree with negative liberty tenets). The liberty distribution is greatly skewed to the negative side.

Female respondents had a higher orientation toward positive liberty tenets than male respondents. [ $t(108) = 2.5, p < .05$ ; female  $M = 6.1 (SD = 2.4)$ , male  $M = 5.1 (SD = 1.9)$ ]. Believing in positive liberty was related to supporting mobility programs [ $r = .56, p = .000$ ]. Respondents with a positive liberty orientation were less likely to feel that subsidized housing would be

harmful to their neighborhoods [ $r = -.24, p = .008$ ].

*Spatial rights.* On average, respondents had a spatial rights score of 14.7 ( $SD = 3.7$ ) on a scale of 24 (strongly agree with right to the city tenets) to 6 (strongly disagree with right to the city tenets). Male respondents had lower spatial rights scores [ $M = 13.8, SD = 3.5$ ] than female respondents [ $M = 15.5, SD = 3.5$ ]. [ $t(102) = 2.6, p < .05$ ]. Respondents who weren't white had lower spatial rights scores [ $M = 16.1, SD = 3$ ] than whites [ $M = 14.3, SD = 3.7$ ]. [ $t = 2, p < .05$ ]. Respondents with higher spatial rights scores were associated with feeling that low income residents were part of the community [ $r = .52, p < .000$ ], supporting mobility programs [ $r = .61, p < .000$ ], not feeling that subsidized housing would be harmful to their neighborhoods [ $r = -.42, p < .000$ ] and having a positive liberty orientation [ $r = .41, p = .000$ ].

#### *Predicting Support for Mobility Programs and Low-income Neighbors*

OLS regression was used to determine the most relevant variables in predicting support for mobility programs and feeling that low income residents were part of the community. Respondents who were most likely to support mobility programs were less likely to think that subsidized housing would adversely affect their neighborhoods, they believed that structural factors were important to the disenfranchisement of minorities, that government needed to interfere to ensure opportunities for all, and most importantly, that low income residents have the same spatial rights as they do. The model explained 60 percent of the variance in support for mobility programs. These results support past literature in that racial discrimination and concerns about property damage are important variables for understanding opposition. However, most important were beliefs about liberty and space, ideologies that are not necessarily addressed in current implementation of mobility programs.

While predicting support for relocation programs might be useful for understanding how implementation can be improved, shedding light on feelings about low-income residents can help with social integration. Thirty five percent of the variation in feeling that low-income residents were part of

respondents' communities was explained by the model. More educated respondents were more likely to view low-income residents as part of their community. Income, however, had a negative relationship with seeing low-income residents as part of the community. Beliefs about spatial rights were very significant in the model. Whether or not respondents viewed low-income residents as part of their community depended on believing they had a right to the space in the first place (See Table 3 for regression results).

Table 3. OLS results predicting feelings about mobility programs and low income families

	Support for Mobility Programs B (SE)	Low Income Families are Part of Community B (SE)
Demographics		
Gender (Female)	---	---
City (Fort Worth)	---	---
Race (White)	---	---
Income	---	-.21 (.09)*
Years lived in the neighborhood	---	---
Awareness	---	---
Education	---	.28 (.1)**
Literature based predictors		
Negative neighborhood effects	-.11 (.05)*	---
Structural causes of minority disenfranchisement	.07 (.03)**	---
Stereotypes about the poor (positive)	---	---
Proposed predictors		
Belief in spatial rights of low income residents	.06 (.02)*	.12 (.03)***
Belief in positive liberty	.13 (.04)***	---
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.60	.35

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

## Discussion

Although many studies have focused on how public housing residents are doing in their new communities, few studies have examined the beliefs of receiving homeowners and the impact they may have on homeowner opposition to mobility programs. The purpose of this paper was to explore how homeowners' beliefs related to support for mobility programs and feeling that low-income families were part of the community. This perspective is important in that homeowner opposition impacts the implementation of housing mobility programs and may contribute to the overall success of the program post-implementation.

There are several theories about the underlying cause of opposition, including fears about property values decreasing and crime rates increasing and racial or class discrimination. Most literature on receiving communities of subsidized housing has found the concerns about property values and crime rates to be unwarranted. Additionally, the number of relocated residents is generally minimal and does not threaten to dramatically alter the racial or economic composition of a neighborhood. This paper proposed an additional cause for opposition, an ideological mismatch between the beliefs of the homeowners in the receiving community and mobility programs, which might help explain why opposition persists beyond relocation.

Results indicated that racial beliefs and fear of property impacts were important for supporting mobility programs. Yet beliefs about liberty and spatial rights were as or even more important in explaining support or opposition, indicating that policy implementation may need to consider more radical strategies for overcoming deeply held ideological beliefs. Belief about spatial rights was the only significant primary variable that explained respondents' feeling that low-income residents were part of the community, indicating that ideology may be especially important for fostering social integration in communities.

The more overt response of the community may have settled into a dormant opposition, yet there is evidence an opposition remains. The results of this study provide insight into

how policy implementation may mitigate opposition by reinforcing ideology that is associated with supporting mobility programs and, perhaps even more pertinent to the success of the programs, feeling that low-income residents are part of the community.

Most homeowners in the sample believed that government should not interfere unless it was to prevent harm to others. Oftentimes, relocations occur without discussing the program with the receiving communities. It is no wonder that they feel their liberty is being infringed upon. Before announcing the relocation, officials may want to meet with homeowner groups to discuss the impetus for relocation programs and provide a forum for real feedback. Addressing the concerns of homeowners up front and reporting on past studies that have shown minimal impact to neighborhoods such as theirs might be useful in diminishing their fears about neighborhood effects, but are probably not sufficient, as they do little more than inform or placate homeowners rather than give them any real decision-making control in their neighborhoods.

At the same time, the liberty of public housing residents, although not directly addressed in this particular study, is also a concern. Involuntary relocations take away the liberty of public housing residents to some extent. It appears that the positive and negative liberty approaches to mobility policy contain flaws. From a negative liberty perspective, mobility programs would not be supported and public housing residents would be left with choices mandated by the market, most likely concentrated poverty. The positive liberty perspective is a more proactive approach, but it involves involuntary relocation by government agencies who are making decisions on behalf of residents without the entering or receiving communities' input. Homeowner opposition could be exacerbated by their lack of control, while public housing residents face the consequences and stress of an involuntary move. A third perspective on liberty, perhaps a participatory liberty, should be taken when addressing this type of situation that acknowledges both homeowners and public housing residents. In a participatory approach, government agencies would intervene only to make sure that both groups have an equal say in policy outcomes.

In addition to questioning how decisions about mobility

programs are made, another concern is that housing mobility programs might reinforce ideologies of homeowners that tell them they have more of a right to the neighborhoods than public housing residents. The spatial rights scale included beliefs about diversity, private property and participation, which are all beliefs that can be affected by policy implementation. Sneaking public housing residents into a neighborhood in an attempt to control conflict and exposure does little to establish diversity as a formal goal. Some would argue that these measures are in place to protect the rights of the public housing residents—why should they be spotlighted when no one else in a community is (Goering & Feins, 2003; Rubinowitz & Rosenbaum, 2000)? This point is certainly valid. However, it is often the case that homeowners find out, so attempts at discretion may not always work. If mixed income housing is to become a feasible option for neighborhoods, then perhaps the merits of such diversity in a neighborhood need to be discussed openly. Moreover, frankly addressing the positive elements of diversity might be a better approach to alleviating some of the race-based discrimination underlying opposition.

One policy suggestion by Galster et al. (2003) is to have strict oversight and maintenance of public housing developments in order to keep them politically viable. The Fort Worth neighborhood has a committee of homeowners, public officials, and law enforcement in place that serves to that end. However, the committee does not consist of any of the relocated public housing residents. With the emphasis being placed on the protection of home values and private property, the ideology that the exchange value of a community is more important might be reinforced. Moreover, it helps establish that homeowners have a greater right to participate in the community. Strict oversight might just be a way to ignore the larger social issue that exists in these neighborhoods. Perhaps an oversight committee consisting of residents of different housing tenures would help integrate a community and orient residents toward common goals. This could be especially important in helping homeowners to see the low-income residents in their communities as neighbors versus unwelcome guests. Through proactive post-implementation strategies, program administrators can establish an environment where diversity is encouraged,



community space is important, and everyone, regardless of income, has a voice in the community. The results of this study point to the need for further examination of the impact of receiving communities' opposition on the successful integration of low-income residents, especially considering the growing popularity of mixed-income housing as a policy strategy.

There are several limitations to this study. Survey research is limited in that one can not be sure how respondents perceive a question, although it can be useful for exploratory research (Babbie, 2001). Future studies should include in-person interviews, which would give members of the receiving community a better opportunity to explain their positions. The sample size was small and there is no way of knowing how representative the sample was to other homeowners. Finally, while the cities contained significant differences, both would be considered non-vulnerable. Future studies may want to include receiving communities with greater demographical variety.

While extremely important, the perspective of the entering community paints only part of the very complex picture of the implementation of mobility programs. The members of the receiving community are inextricably connected to the successes, failures and opportunities of the entering community. It is important to discover how opposition can impact the overall success of the programs and how implementation can mitigate opposition before, during and after integration.

## References

- Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Reading, MA.: Addison-Wesley.
- Anderson, W. (2004). Colorblind segregation: Equal protection as a bar to neighborhood integration. *California Law Review*, 93(3), 843-884.
- Babbie, E. (2001). *The practice of social research*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.
- Berlin, I. (1962). *Four essays on liberty*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Blank, R. B., Dabady, M., & Citro, C. F. (Eds.) (2004). *Measuring racial discrimination*. Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press.

- Bobo, L., & Zubrinsky, C. L. (1996). Attitudes on residential integration: Perceived status differences, mere in-group preference, or racial prejudice? *Social Forces*, 74, 999-1025.
- Briggs, X., Darden, J. T., & Aidala, A. (1999). In the wake of desegregation: Early impacts of scattered-site public housing on neighborhoods in Yonkers, New York. *Journal of American Planning Association*, 65(1), 27-49.
- Brophy, P. C. & Smith, R. N. (1997). Mixed-income housing: Factors for success. *Cityscape*, 3(2), 3-31.
- Cozzarelli, C., Wilkinson, A. V., & Tagler, M. (2001). Attitudes toward the poor and attributions for poverty. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57(2), 207-227.
- Dawkins, C. J. (2004). Recent evidence on the continuing causes of black-white residential segregation. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 26(3), 379-400.
- Duke, J. (2009). Mixed income housing policy and public housing residents' 'right to the city.' *Critical Social Policy*, 29(1), 100-120.
- Ellen, I. G., & Turner, M. A. (1997). Does neighborhood matter? Assessing recent evidence. *Housing Policy Debate*, 8(4), 833-866.
- Farley, R., Schuman, H., Bianchi, S., Colasanto, D., & Hatchett, S. (1978). Chocolate city, vanilla suburbs: Will the trend toward racially separate communities continue? *Social Science Research*, 7, 19-344.
- Galster, G., R. S., Santiago, A., & Pettit, K. (2003). *Why not in my backyard?: Neighborhood impacts of deconcentrating assisted housing*. Center for Urban Policy Research.
- Goering, J., & Feins, J. D. (Eds.). (2003). *Choosing a better life? Evaluating the moving to opportunity social experiment*. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press, 37-57.
- Goetz, E. G. (2003). *Clearing the way: Deconcentrating the poor in urban America*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press.
- Ihlanfeldt, K., & Scafidi, B. (2004). Whites' neighbourhood racial preferences and neighbourhood racial composition in the United States: Evidence from the multi-city study of urban inequality. *Housing Studies*, 19(3), 325-359.
- Innovative Housing Institute. (1998). The house next door. Retrieved from <http://www.inhousing.org/>.
- Jenks, C., & Meyer, S. E. (1990). The social consequences of growing up in a poor neighborhood. In L. E. Lynn & M. G. H. McGeary (Eds.), *Inner city poverty in the United States* (pp. 111-186). Washington DC: National Academy Press.
- Kleit, R. G. (2005). HOPE VI new communities: Neighborhood relationships in mixed-income housing. *Environment and Planning A*, 37(8), 1413-1441.
- Kleit, R. G. (2001). Neighborhood relations in suburban scattered - site and clustered public housing. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 23(3-4), 409-430.

- Lefebvre, H. (1996). *Writings on cities*. (E. Kofman & E. Lebas, Trans. & Eds.). Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- Lipsitz, G. (1998). *The possessive investment in whiteness: How white people profit from identity politics*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Logan, J. R., & Molotch, H. L. (1987). *Urban fortunes: The political economy of place*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Massey, D. S., & Denton, N. A. (1993). *American apartheid: Segregation and the making of the American underclass*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Mill, J. S. (1879). *On liberty*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Popkin, S. J., Buron, L. F., Levy, D. K., & Cunningham, M. K. (2000). The Gautreaux legacy: What might mixed-income and dispersal strategies mean for the poorest public housing tenants? *Housing Policy Debate*, 11(4), 911-942.
- Purcell, M. (2001). Neighborhood activism among homeowners as a politics of space. *Professional Geographer*, 53(2), 178-194.
- Purcell, M. (2003). Citizenship and the right to the global city: Reimagining the capitalist world order. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 27(3), 564-590.
- Rubinowitz, L. S., & Rosenbaum, J. E. (2000). *Crossing the class and color lines: From public housing to white suburbia*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Stone, D. (2002). *Policy paradox: The art of political decision making* (rev. ed.). New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Talen, E. (2006). Design for diversity: Evaluating the context of socially mixed neighborhoods. *Journal of Urban Design*, 11(1), 1-32.
- Wilson, W. J. (1987). *The truly disadvantaged*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Wittig, M. A., & Grant-Thompson, S. (1998). The utility of Allport's conditions of intergroup contact for predicting perceptions of improved racial attitudes and beliefs. *Journal of Social Issues*, 54(4), 795-812.
- Yinger, J. (1986). On the possibility of achieving racial integration through subsidized housing. In J. M. Goering (Ed.), *Housing desegregation and federal policy* (pp. 290-312). Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.