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The Impact of Gentrification on the Youth of Church Hill

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The Impacts of Gentrification on the Youth of Church Hill

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master’s of Urban and Regional Planning at Virginia Commonwealth University

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Dedication & Acknowledgements Page

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the topic of gentrification and how the youth have been impacted by this movement in the neighborhood of Church Hill. Given that there are many youths in the community, this thesis specifically focuses on how students have been impacted in regards to their sense of place and their new mentoring relationships with the new residents in the community. Through open-ended interviews with both high school students and post high school graduate students and mentors to the youth, this study focuses on how the students have altered where they spend their time and how they are affected by their mentoring relationships. The interviews have been analyzed to find common themes on how the youth are impacted by gentrification and from this analysis, suggestions are given for how to incorporate the youth in future planning and redevelopment decisions.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Purpose of Research

In the early beginnings of urban planning, civic engagement was only offered to an elite class and stakeholders. If an individual did not fit into these categories, they were often left out of the planning process. As time progressed, planners like Paul Davidoff (1965) suggested that all citizens be engaged in the planning process. Since then, many in the planning profession have started advocating for those who were typically left out of the decision making process (i.e., low-income and minority residents). To further the concept of equity planning, the Just City theory has been established to ensure that the planning community be as democratic and diverse as possible (Fainstein, 2011). In spite of vast improvements within the participation realm, many groups continue to be left out of the discussion. One class that remains greatly left out are the youth in communities. Particularly being effected by gentrification in their neighborhoods, it is the adults and parents of communities being engaged in conversations about such change instead of the youth.

Often cited, planners have expressed that the youth are typically not considered stakeholders in decision making processes because they are unsure of how youth could be incorporated within the engagement process. Planners argue that youth are generally left out because the profession does not have a consensus on how the youth can be engaged as a whole (Frank, 2006).

Planners and authors such as Barry Checkoway (2010) and Caitlin Cahill (2007) explain why and to some extent, how youth should be involved in planning
but there is still a large gap with student participation. Because of this break in research and the lack of understanding on how to engage students in planning, this study intends to incorporate youth in the process. Focusing on the main question, “How are the youth impacted by gentrification?” the research conducted has interviewed the youth in the Richmond neighborhood of Church Hill along with stakeholders and students’ mentors to determine how their lives have been directly affected by the gentrification occurring in the community. This research suggests that in Church Hill, the youth are affected by gentrification but not always in the manner one might assume. Youth have expressed that youth are both gaining and losing a sense of place as redevelopment occurs and new residents move in and as they gain relationships with these residents, positive relationships are instilled but not as permanently as desired. Based off conducted interviews with the students in Church Hill, suggestion are made to how to better engage and incorporate the youth in planning decisions.

**Introduction to the Case**

This study focuses on the neighborhood of Church Hill located in Richmond, Virginia. More specifically, this case focused on students engaged with Church Hill Activities and Tutoring (CHAT), an organization that uses mentoring relationships to improve youth educational outcomes. Because Church Hill has rapidly over the last decade, many students and their families have been present to witness the change. Between the years of 2000 and 2010, for example, the demographics of the
neighborhood shifted a great amount. As of 2010, the white population went from 39% in the year 2000 to to 69% in 2010.

This non-profit located in Church Hill originating in 2002 by a white couple new to the neighborhood. Its mission is to “equip and serve the youth of Church Hill to make transformative decisions” (About CHAT, 2014). Students enrolled have the opportunity to commit to after school tutoring twice a week and attend a life skills class (i.e., cooking, sewing, dance) once a week. Students who are high school age have the chance to become a part of the street leader program which is a leadership program that engages and encourages students to become leaders in their community (Withrow, 2015). High school students may also be employed with CHAT through the entrepreneurship program. CHAT offers urban farming, screen printing, and a woodwokring as entrepreneur opportunities. Working year round on a weekly basis and daily in the summer time, these programs offer students job skills and information on how to run a small business. CHAT is partnering with Bon Secors to discuss furthering their entrepreneurship programming. This new opportunity will be done through running a small coffee shop. Starting in the neighborhood hospital, the students will run a coffee cart in the hospital, selling coffee and baked goods with the idea of moving to a currently vacated building near the hospital (Whiting, 2015).

**Why Results Matter**

Because neighborhoods such as Church Hill are changing so rapidly, and students are not given a chance to share their perspective, these results bring
important and useful information. In these interviews, I asked students to discuss how they felt about their altering community. Results show the positive effects of gentrification, such as having nicer areas to spend their time at. With such results and possibilities, these interviews will help organizations within the neighborhood learn how to capitalize on the positive effects. Such results will mitigate for negative impacts through policy and planning and can be used for similar neighborhoods as a case study. These results are impactful to the field of study as the youth are so often left out of research in regards to gentrification. Often, it is adults and stakeholders that are asked for their opinions on this topic, while students are not asked for their thoughts at all. For this research, I engaged the youth to gain their insight on how they have been impacted by the change. By engaging them for this study, the results will help for future planning decisions, giving suggestions as to how planners and stakeholders can engage the youth on future decisions. This research will also help residents and organizations like CHAT better understand how mentorships have affected the youth both positively and negatively, offering suggestions on how to better capitalize on these relationships. These adolescents are a large portion of the population in the Church Hill community and planners, researchers, community members and community organizations should value their opinions to better understand how plans could better aid the youth rather than harm them.

Personal Motivation

Behind this research comes personal background and motivation. I have been engaged with students from CHAT for six years and have been a Church
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Hill Resident since 2012. By working personally with students who live in Church Hill through Church Hill Activities and Tutoring (CHAT), there was a personal desire to learn more about how they are directly affected through individuals who are different than the neighborhood norm moving into the community. Having relationships and background with approximately one hundred fifty youth in the neighborhood and seeing a glimpse on how these changes have effected them, I wanted to know more about how they are feeling with their changing environment. While individuals moving into the community are helpful and positive thing, and these new coffee shops and restaurants are making Church Hill known, it is critical to hear the students’ perspective on this change. So often the youth are not asked or invited in to share their thoughts and opinions on planning issues and it needs to be recognized they have opinions that are important and need to be heard.

Road Map

In this thesis, I first review the literature on gentrification, how youth are affected by changes in their sense of place, education and mentorship changes due to gentrification, along with the process of youth engagement in planning. This information reveals the work that has already been done with students, while also pointing out the gaps within the field and youth involvement. A detailed description of the methodology I used in this study is laid out, giving a full explanation of the interviewing process that was used for both students and mentors. Following this, the analysis of the found research explains the results and suggestions are provided on how youth should continue to be engaged. These methods and results will help

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for future research on involving youth in planning before any implementation takes place.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction to the Literature

The history of gentrification helps frame the start of this concept and allows one to better understand where the issue is today. The conducted literature review also discusses how the youth and their families have been impacted by gentrification in regards to their sense of place and their new level of comfort and discomfort in their neighborhoods. Researchers such as Leslie Martin and Melissa Butcher provide insight on how the youth and their families have a new level of discomfort in their community while authors like Oscar Newmann offer insight on how mixed communities have benefitted families. Because youth spend much of their time in the school environment, educational changes due to gentrification is also important to note to better understand how their education is altering. Maddox, et al. (2014) offers insight as to how parental involvement is changing the inner-city school systems for the better while DeLuca (2010) provides research to how school students are not receiving the same opportunities as their counterparts.

As this thesis unfolds relationships between the students and new residents, literature in regards to mentorships has been analyzed to see the connections that the youth are gaining. Kleit (2014) offers research on mixed income housing and how this movement has offered social and economic opportunities. Finally, because this project deals with interviewing and engaging students, theoretical planning literature has been evaluated to give a core reasoning for why the methodology for
this project was chosen. Sandercock’s (2003) theory on story telling is the main theory for this research as she suggests storytelling to be an effective method for ethnographic research.

**History of Gentrification**

Segregation has been a feature of the American landscape since the early 20th Century (Freeman, 2015). One major contributor to the persistence of segregation was white flight (Freeman & Cai, 2015, p. 303). Along with white flight, redlining, school desegregations, and the subsidization of white homeownership and the continuance for neighborhood discrimination allowed white residents to have their own space. As white individuals moved out to the suburbs using FHA administered loans, the African American and low-income population could not use these loans due to redlining. Redlining specifically kept these neighborhoods in distress at they were defined as areas where banks and insurers would not write loans for homeownership. This practice left black households to deteriorating neighborhoods in the cites (Benston). Because of white flight to the new suburbs in the last half of the 20th Century, communities that were once thriving areas were now neighborhoods of income disparities and lack of present and future investment. The concentration of poverty and disinvestment of neighborhoods was compounded by the flight of middle class African-Americans from inner city communities. Particularly it was “the outmigration of middle-income blacks” that made the communities that remained truly disadvantaged (Williams, 2012). Prior to this large exodus, the middle-class black families were still living in these
communities. Among residing in the neighborhoods, the black middle class were investing in the schools, churches, and businesses of the neighborhoods. These families stayed in the communities due to housing discrimination due to black middle-class families not having access to the suburbs due to discrimination in the housing market. However, once the Fair Housing Act of 1968 was passed by legislation, these middle-income African-American families received opportunity to move into the more desirable neighborhoods (Williams, 2012).

As time progressed, many individuals started preferring to live in neighborhoods that were closer to work and other cultural amenities. This movement was defined as the “back to the city movement” which brought a return of population to the city starting in the 1970s (Ulusoy). Through this concept, integration of neighborhoods began to take off and middle-class residents were now becoming attracted to living amongst the low-income households. Due to this desire to integrate, re-investment began in these distressed communities. Higher income individuals now had a demand for housing in these inner-city neighborhoods and due to this, homes in the area were bought at an affordable price and re-modeled at a higher quality (Ley, 1994). This movement into the city and the re-investment in the neighborhood continued to attract professionals to move back into the city and the movement became known as gentrification (Freeman & Cai, 2015).

Defined in 1964 by Ruth Glass, gentrification is the process in which middle class residents move into areas where the working class are residing. With this shift, new residents are moving to low-income neighborhoods, creating businesses,
and canvas for revitalization (Saracino-Brown, 2013). This definition is still affirmed by researchers today, particularly areas known as Central Business Districts (CBD) (Freeman & Cai, 2015). A neighborhood that is within close proximity to a CBD is most likely to be gentrified because it is closer to the upper-class place of business and has affordable housing. This became true in many low-income areas in the United States, and soon they were displaced and felt by long term residents to be “invaded by whites” (Freeman & Cai, 2015, p. 314). As upper class residents moved in, these low-income, predominately black neighborhoods were now known as areas becoming “improved and safer” for the city, thus making more whites desiring to move into the area (p. 307).

This migration of new residents to the urban neighborhoods impacted both the supply of housing affordability for low-income households and the social and cultural environments of their public spaces and community institutions. When new residents move in with the ability to buy the newly developed housing, low-income residents suffer. Gentrification brings in goods and services but in doing so, it also brings an increase in rental prices. As economic revitalization takes place into a neighborhood, property values increase and the low-income population once again get displaced from their environments. When an influx of new, middle-class residents move into a community, there is additionally a cultural shift in the area, causing long-term residents to not only be pushed out of their homes but to also lose the culture their neighborhood was once known for (Boyd, 2005).
Sense of Place Literature

With middle-class residents moving into these predominately low-income neighborhoods, boundaries were drawn on what was considered “old resident territory” and “new resident territory.” This differentiation between these boundaries directly affect the youth and their sense of place. Because residents are drawing these lines between the old and the new residents, youth are losing their sense of place and recreation. Using a real example from the community of Tyler Hill, this neighborhood reveals how there are dividing lines between old and new residents (Martin, 2008). Beginning to see redevelopment in the neighborhood, new residents lobbied for a park to be created in an abandoned lot in the neighborhood. Residents who were behind the idea for the park reasoned this green space would be beneficial to young residents because it would be an environment for positive activities while long-term residents saw it as another place for new residents. As it was developed into a new park, it became a place for the new residents and the children no longer felt they belonged on the property.

A research study in London has also found youth are losing their feeling of belonging in their neighborhood. Focusing on the gentrifying borough of Hackney in the East End of London (Butcher & Dickens, 2014), youth of the neighborhood have been engaged directly in regards to their sense of place. Many of the students responded in similar form stating that they no longer feel that they belong. Noting that it is “cool” to see the new architecture and buildings that are coming into their neighborhood, they are acutely aware that these shops and businesses are not
meant for them. The students expressed that they do not feel comfortable in these storefronts and have lost places where they once use to hang out and feel at home (Butcher & Dickens, 2014).

When public housing units are redeveloped as a mixed income community, residents also have a strong loss of place (Chaskin & Joseph, 2015). With redevelopment, the community ideally has areas that are considered spaces that are public and free to all. Based on conversations with residents who have moved back into the mixed community, they feel that these areas are no public but are “privately managed and staffed” (p. 21). Residents feel these are not public areas because need to be rented. The residents have noted that new community members say, “to the general observer, [they] might reasonably be seen as public space” (p. 23) but to the long-term residents, this makes the space to those who can get to it and at times, pay for it. With the privatization of the public space, low-income residents are not use to such restrictions of space. In interviews with residents they express that these spaces are so heavily managed, they do not even have the ability to utilize these areas that were meant to be communal.

The same low-income residents revealed how they felt their sense of place was further taken from them. In their interviews, some residents expressed how porch sitting and spending time in the of their homes are how they connect with their friends and neighbors. Through redevelopment, residents expressed that they were no longer able to do this. The authors not that the new residents see this as a form of loitering and that people should sit in their back, fenced in yard (Chaskin &
Reducing communal space to the backyard for these families leaves many of them out of their normal public space and because of this, youth are also unable to be in the places they once spent a copious amount of time.

Creating mixed communities have not just lowered crime rates (Newman, 1972) but they have also served the youth and their families as well. The City of Chicago serves as a prime example to how mixed-communities have aided to this concept of betterment. Residents who moved into mixed-income communities found that because housing qualities increased, residents felt safer and families had more access to amenities they did not have before living in a mixed area (Chaskin & Joseph, 2010). With this access to better services, children and families had access to programming to help with school and other basic needs they did not once have. Qualitative data from Chicago continues to support this idea of mixed environments keeping youth safer through the Geautreaux Program. Starting in 1976, this program helped public-housing residents move to mixed communities that had less than 30% of African American families currently living in a neighborhood (DeLuca, Duncan, Keels, & Mendenhall, 2010). Keeping in touch with families who were a part of the Geautreaux program, researchers followed up with the families many years later and were interviewed. According to the up to date interviews, the mothers interviewed stated they remain content with in these mixed communities and their children have a safe place to be both housing wise and in their sense of community (p. 11). These mixed-income results reveal that changes
have been positive in regards to safety but have not produced outcomes in jobs and other services.

In order to ensure that mixed-income communities are instilled, there must still be affordable housing for low-income residents. If there is a complete removal of affordable rentals, long-term residents are fully displaced and they are not able to reap the benefits that come with the concept of mixed-income communities. The Washington D.C. neighborhood of Columbia Heights serves as an example as a mixed-income area (Howell, 2016). Columbia Heights, a neighborhood that has been hit by ‘super gentrification’ (Lees, 2010) saw a great migration of white and middle income residents. Despite this shift in demographics, the community’s affordability stock remained, preserving over than 2200 units of affordable housing, having twenty percent of these units remaining income-restricted rentals. Because the City of Washington and the community of Columbia Heights sought after keeping affordable housing in the neighborhood, the area was able to become a mixed-income community and long-term residents have been able to enjoy the new developments that have come into the neighborhood (Howell, 2016).

This literature provides insight that, in regards to sense of place, the youth and their families can be impacted both positively and negatively. The children and their families can feel a sense of loss for their changing neighborhoods while they may also feel a sense of relief and contentment as they now have new access and safety. Likewise, community members are only able to enjoy the benefits of mixed-income neighborhoods only if an affordable stock remains.
Community Based Organizations

Neighborhoods like Church Hill have many Community Based Organizations (CBOs) that come into the neighborhood that have developed to address the needs of low-income households. Becoming popular during the Reagan Administration, CBOs come into in-need communities to offer support for social welfare needs (Marwell, 2004). Now, with an influx of youth, many CBOs are directed towards the young people. Many CBOs in the low-income areas are in place to provide a safe and positive place for students to spend time at when they are not at home or in school (Merry, 2000). At the same time, Community Based Organizations are also in place in these communities for students to get connected with mentors and positive role models. Pairing up with individuals during their time at these programs, students are often encouraged to think about their communities, what the problems are and what changes need to occur. In addition to being concerned for their communities, these relationships also help students receive aid in school and with help in the college and post-highschool process (Shiller, 2013).

Education and Gentrification

Gentrification has had mixed impacts on schools. For example, because gentrification causes increase in housing and displacement, families have become more likely to move multiple times a year (Addy, Engelhardt, & Skinner, 2013). Such research supports the idea that there is a linkage between housing stability and education (Brennan, 2011). Research has noted that that students who have to move around constantly are more prone to being behind in school and needing...
more one on one attention. Students who are more mobile also have more behavioral and anxiety issues with having concerns on what their housing conditions might be in the next month (Brennan, 2011).

Another way in which gentrification is affecting the education system are changes within the schools themselves. Many upper-class, white families are moving in and sending their children to local schools (Maddox-Posey, McDonough Kimelberg, & Cucchiara, 2014). Parental involvement in these urban schools have an impact not just their own children but the school as a whole. Parents who chose the urban schools are networking with similarly resourced parents with the belief and understanding they “would work together to improve the school and ensure its quality” (Maddox-Posey, McDonough Kimelberg, & Cucchiara, 2014, p.20). As a result of the collective networking among the middle-class families, the parents worked together to improve the schools their children were attending. As these schools were poorly funded, the parents made improvements happen through the Parent Teacher Association (PTA). These parents “were willing and able to make personal financial contributions, but also because they had access to social and professional networks that they leveraged strategically to secure corporate and non-profit funding” thus allowing change and improvements to occur (p. 14).

The Department of Education has also been focused on addressing the needs of high schools in the inner city (DeLuca & Amen-Deli, 2010). The Department of Education believes that offering Career Technical Education (CTE) and courses that lead to students to college is a positive solution for the education crises in the inner city. In response to this, researchers point out that such ideas are “illusionary” (p.
to think this is the solution for educating the underserved students. It is believed that CTE is not a resolution for further educating high school students as many do not have the skill sets to successfully attain a college degree. In regards to CTE training, many low-income students are unable to take these courses as there are attendance and GPA requirement to take advantage of the programs that many students cannot meet. Based on this standpoint and information given, the question brought to attention is how students in poverty can really take advantage of these opportunities in schools (p. 15).

**Mentorships and Gentrification**

Just as schools are seeking to improve in gentrified neighborhoods, so are the after school programs and activities. Researchers have found improvements in well-being resulting from relationships students have with more affluent individuals (Formoso, Weber, & Atkins, 2010). With higher income residents moving in, there have also been some improvements in recreation activities for the children of long-term residents. Many individuals who are new to the neighborhood wish to positively engage with the youth in their new communities, and to do so they are getting involved in after school activities, thus creating mentorship relationships with the participating students. Because these more affluent neighbors are volunteering in after-school activities, the programs are a great mediator for relationships to grow between old and new residents and can cause a positive cognitive effect on the youth. The article makes a point in stating that these relationships create mentorships that would not have been there had it not been for

The effectiveness of mentorship relationships depends on how attuned a mentor is with their mentee. Conducted research suggests that there are three different levels of attunement a mentor can have with their student: high, medium and low. Those who have a strong connection with their mentee have a bond that includes “mutual sharing and commitment” (Pryce, 2012). In this type of relationship, both the adult and the student share about their lives and they are dedicated to spending a particular amount of time together, averaging either weekly or bi-weekly. At the moderate level, mentors are still highly engaged with their students but the relationships tend to be one sided. In these particularly moderately attuned relationships, mentors are aware of issues their students are having in their lives but they do not have a consistency in meeting with them and often do not have a relationship where both sides are sharing. Finally, at the minimally attuned level, adults take the role as a mentor in the student’s life but they are not heavily engaged. Pryce concludes in her findings that these mentors are not hostile towards the students but they are not able to pick up on social cues and body language that the students utilize in their mentoring time (p. 286).

It is not just relationships and mentoring that occurs with youth and new residents but also between long-term adult residents and the new members of the communities. Kleit (2014) argues “income-mixing programs may provide access to social and economic opportunities through social relations is by offering greater opportunities for diverse sources of information” (Kleit p. 577). These relationships
may serve as opportunities for low-income residents by building social capital, helping them find jobs and have access to resources they did not have before they were in relationship with these new neighbors.

It is essential to note that these relationships do not always happen harmoniously. As mentioned previously, many adults do not trust their new neighbors. Similarly, new residents may be fearful of their neighborhoods due to differences in race, income or housing tenure. Because of this, these relationships do not often come quickly but take time, should they happen at all. With the youth engaged in community-based institutions such as after school programs, it may be easier to gain access and build relationships as they are able to engage with new residents (Martin, 2008).

**Youth Engagement and Planning**

Because youth are a part of the gentrifying neighborhood, and their space and schools are being greatly altered, planners and policy makers are beginning to see them as stakeholders in the planning process and planners are now arguing for youth engagement (Checkoway, 2010). Through engaging and inviting youth in the planning process, youth may be empowered and have a voice in their communities. This means that youth should not only be invited into public meetings, but, they should also be educated in what is going on within the planning process and what the end results intend to be. Checkoway supports this by referring to the Convention of the Rights of a Child instated by the United Nations. This declaration states that, once a child is able to coherently state their opinion on an issue, they
have a right to be involved in the policy and process (What is youth participation?, 2010, p. 340). However, the United States is one of two nations that has not instated this declaration so youth do not necessarily have to be included in public meetings (Cahill & Hart, 2007, p. 215). Unfortunately, there has been limited research in the field to explain what age youth should start participating, there are no proven strategies in youth participation that works best (What is youth participation?, 2010, p. 343).

Research also argues that engaging youth in planning also leads to mentoring. To put youth participation in perspective, research explains the importance of including youth in decisions (Checkoway, 2012). Studies point out that when youth are a part of the decision-making, they are being well-prepared to be civic leaders in the future. These efforts view youth as resources rather than seeing them as troubled or youth in poverty. This is an important differentiation because, when youth are classified negatively, they begin believing these stereotypes and it weakens them. To put this research in real perspective, the City of San Francisco offers as an example. Partnering alongside adult commissioners, the youth have their own commission and help make political decisions with these adults. This youth commission has allowed the young people to be leaders amongst their peers while also allowing them to learn about municipal policy. This partnership thus allows low-income students become in relationship with jurisdiction leaders, creating an alliance between students and political leaders (Checkoway, 2012).
A child being a part of the planning process is also laid out in the AICP Code of Ethics. Within the Code of Ethics, the document states that “[Planners] shall give people the opportunity to have a meaningful impact on the development of plans and programs that may affect them. Participation should be broad enough to include those who lack formal organization or influence” (AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, 2009). Because this is explained in the Code, youth have the right to participate. The problem is planners do not know how to properly incorporate them. Research argues that there are struggles of involving youth in the planning process deals with a development, romantic, and vulnerable view (Frank, 2006). It is a struggle from a development view because it is a question of whether or not the youth can really comprehend the planning process. Moreover, youth are in fact a vulnerable population, and adults have to make sure they are not belittling the ideas of the youth or forcing a belief on them. In other words, if planners do engage with youth, they do not know what to do with these ideas and how to plan with their ideas in mind. While there is difficulty in involving students into planning engagement, research has shown the positive effects participation has on the youth and suggests that planners continue to seek ways to include them in the planning process, as there is still no defined way to include them in the participation process.

The concepts of the just city also suggest a place for youth involvement (Fainstein, 2010). The just city theory focuses on three key areas; equity, diversity and democracy. Equity in planning, Fainstein argues, should “elevate the standing of weaker, poorer groups in terms of the impacts of specific decisions” (p. 36). In
regards to democracy and diversity, Fainstein says that each person's opinion should be heard and that no one group should have an advantage in speaking over another (p. 29). This quote speaks to diversity and democracy alike as every individual's opinion needs to be heard equally regardless of a person's age, race, gender, etc.

To understand students' experiences, story telling is also an essential method in order to gain their thoughts (Sandercock, 2003). As a part of community engagement, planners are connecting stories and from this, they should work “to find common threads that will help to draw up priorities” (p. 15). While finding common themes is essential for planners to gain a perspective on how to plan for a neighborhood and community, story telling allows for diversity of perspective and a more direct reflection of a community. Rather than getting a minor glimpse of what is currently happening or what the current needs are in a neighborhood, it is crucial to get the background and full story because without it there is a lack of multicultural literacy for a plan (Sandercock, 2003, p. 20).

Conclusion

Looking at the way the land is now being used and the effects of revitalization is also important as this provides a framework from what has already been examined by past research. As residents move into the community, and children spend time in schools and after school activities, they may have different opportunities than before. Conversely, many students may find their place in the community is shrinking with the change in neighborhood demographics. This
backdrop of information helps frame questions in my methodology to understand what is occurring in Church Hill and how it might compare. In regards to the information on youth engagement and participation, it is essential to show how the youth are affected by participation in the past, as their well-being is a large component in this research. My research also helps fill in the gaps that Barry Checkoway speaks of in his work as I have used methods that engage the youth with the hopes that they are effective across the planning process in general and further help other planners and organizations include the students in the planning process. This literature helps serve in asking the question on how the youth are impacted by gentrification in regards to their sense of place and new relationships they have gained with new residents.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

In this section, I present the boundary area for this study; the questions that will be asked to the focus group and interviewees are also presented along with an explanation as to why these questions and methods are used for this study. This chapter will also note the limitations and my personal position on this topic.

Area of Study

The area of research is the neighborhood of Church Hill, a neighborhood with history going back to the founding of the city. Located in the East End of Richmond, Virginia, the neighborhood of Church Hill has been rapidly changing over the past fifteen years.

As figure one shows, Church Hill is home to four of the six public housing projects of Richmond (Mosby, Creighton, Fairfield, and Whitcomb Courts), these parts of the neighborhood have a high concentration of poverty and low rents. The areas of public housing are located (tracts 201, 202 and 204) have retained a high concentration of poverty. In these specific tracts, the percentage of individuals living in poverty is higher than the rest of the community. Specifically, in tract 201, 94.3 percent of those under 18 are in poverty. In comparison to this, other census tracts in the neighborhood have seen a large change of rental prices and the poverty level for youth is significantly less. As table one expresses, tract 203, the rental rates
have changed from $507 per month to $1,125 per month, with the poverty rate
resting at 49% for those under 18 years old.¹

Table 1: Median Gross Rent by Census Tracts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Tracts</th>
<th>Median Gross Rent-2000</th>
<th>Median Gross Rent-2010</th>
<th>Percent of Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>201</td>
<td>$139.00</td>
<td>$177.00</td>
<td>27.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>202</td>
<td>$220.00</td>
<td>$270.00</td>
<td>22.73%</td>
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<tr>
<td>203</td>
<td>$507.00</td>
<td>$1,125.00</td>
<td>121.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>204</td>
<td>$259.00</td>
<td>$299.00</td>
<td>15.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>205</td>
<td>$600.00</td>
<td>$997.00</td>
<td>66.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>206</td>
<td>$569.00</td>
<td>$908.00</td>
<td>59.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>207</td>
<td>$365.00</td>
<td>$397.00</td>
<td>8.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>208</td>
<td>$521.00</td>
<td>$1,142.00</td>
<td>119.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>209</td>
<td>$453.00</td>
<td>$748.00</td>
<td>65.12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ The map below shows a breakdown of the neighborhood by census tract along with the location of parks and the public housing unit locations within Church Hill
Figure 5 Map of Church Hill Community

Legend
- Public Housing
- Parks
- Census Tracts

Whitcomb Court Public Housing Development
Fairfield Court Public Housing Development
Mosby Court Public Housing Development
Mosby Court South Public Housing Development
Jefferson Park
Ethel Reiley Furrman Park
Chimborazo Courts
Armstrong Playground
Libbie Park
Chimborazo Park
Bill Robinson Park

Garcia 31
Table 2 White Population by Census Tracts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Tracts</th>
<th>Year 2000</th>
<th>Year 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Census Tract 201</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Census Tract 202</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Census Tract 203</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Census Tract 204</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<td>Census Tract 205</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Census Tract 206</td>
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<tr>
<td>Census Tract 207</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Census Tract 208</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Census Tract 209</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Racial composition and educational attainment also saw drastic changes in the neighborhood. Based on census data from the American Community Survey (ACS), the white population grew significantly in the same areas that have undergone redevelopment and rental increase. Looking at table 2, for instance, in the same census tracts that saw a large rental increase (tracts 205, 206, and 208), they also saw an increase in the white population. In tract 208, the white population increased from 34% to 62% in 2010. As table three shows the data of educational attainment for individuals over the age of twenty-five, ACS data reveals that, as of 2010, more individuals have an associates or bachelor’s degree in the re-developed parts of Church Hill then in the past. Once again focusing on tract 208, educational attainment jumped from 17% of individuals over 25 having a 2 or 4-year college degree in 2000 to 67% of people obtaining a college degree in 2010.
Household median income has seen a great leap in the community. Specifically, in tract 206, where a vast amount of change has occurred, the median income grew from $22,723 in the year 2000 to $50,116 in 2010. This data suggests that demographics have changed dramatically in the southern part of Church Hill while remaining relatively unchanged in the north. The community is becoming gentrified at a fast pace with new restaurants, coffee shops, and new or redeveloped housing. Because it is an area that is developing at such a fast pace within a decade, the current teenagers have been able to witness this change and have valid opinions about them.

Census data reveals that there are some tracts that have not seen such rapid transition. Noting that areas that have public housing units have not had such great change in rent, race, or education, it is important to note that the City of Richmond and the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority (RRHA) plan to replace...
these public housing developments with mix-income communities starting with Creighton Court (Robinson, 2014). Through this revitalization strategy, the tracts that have not experienced such drastic change are likely to in the future.

**Methods**

Relying on both Sandercock’s argument on the need for storytelling in planning research and Checkoway’s focus on youth engagement, this research focuses on high school-aged youth and those who directly mentor them. This focus has allowed me to better understand the ways in which changes in the community have impacted their lives. Interviews were the primary method in collecting data for this research. Fifteen students were interviewed during this research. Ranging from fourteen year olds to twenty year olds, questions have been asked so students were able to comprehend and in a way that did not undermine them. These open-ended questions allowed students to give a relevant response and allowed them to speak how they wish. Along with interviewed students, ten mentors and stakeholders who work with the youth. In these interviews, the questions were also open-ended, allowing adults to go into any explanation they feel is relevant.

Students who are current participants with the non-profit after school program, Church Hill Activities and Tutoring (CHAT) were asked to participate in this research activity. Currently, there are approximately 125 students in the after school programming. Ranging from K-12 students, approximately forty-five of these students are of high school aged. CHAT also continues to have relationship with students who have finished high school as a way to follow up and to help continue
relationships between the youth and their mentors (Withrow, 2015). In order to gain access to these youth, the parents of the high school students who are enrolled in CHAT are going were notified through a document that explains the research and has the list of questions that I will ask the students. Once parents signed the waiver allowing their child to participate, interviews were set up with the student.

In addition to interviews, other methods were used as well. Observation and the analysis of quantitative data were the other main forms of methodology. The use of census data is used to provide concrete evidence that the neighborhood has altered. Current data on how many students have mentors through Church Hill Activities and Tutoring is also used to point out how many students have mentorships. Observations have taken place around the community parks and playgrounds to see who uses these public spaces and what sorts of interactions occur. I also analyzed the content of current plans to understand where the neighborhood is now and form my research and interview questions.

**Background of Respondents**

Out of the conducted twenty interviews, fifteen of the respondents were between the ages of 14-19. These students have lived in the neighborhood for the majority of their lives and out of the fifteen respondents, ten students are currently students at Church Hill Academy, three of the students have graduated from the Academy, and two of the students have not attended this school at all. Church Hill Academy is a small private high school that is under the umbrella of CHAT. Created in 2007 by three college graduate students, the school has the mission of “equipping
students from Richmond’s East End to achieve academic success, develop character and serve the community.” The Academy strives to achieve these goals through “programs encompassing academic rigor, career preparation, life-skills building, economic literacy and spiritual development.” The school currently has 40 students enrolled and each student has a mentor assigned to them at the beginning of the school year. The Academy currently has fourteen staff members and through regular curriculum, they provide students with the chance to develop skills such as job interview skills, professionalism in attire and attitude, work ethic, and networking skills (Church Hill Academy, n.d.). Out of the fifteen students, nine of the students live in rental homes, three of the students live in a home owned by their parents or guardian, two of the students live in public housing and one lives in a subsidized rental property. Ten of the students interviewed were male students and five of the interviewees were female.

Mentors interviewed for this study varied in age and amount of time they have lived in the community. Out of the five mentors interviewed, half of the respondents are adults who have been mentoring their students for multiple years while the other half have fairly new relationships with their youth. All of the mentors interviewed are full time workers and three out of five of the mentors have begun their current occupation within the last five years. These three mentors are also under the age of thirty-five. All of the mentors live in the Church Hill neighborhood and have been associated with CHAT for longer than five years.
Questions

This research focused on the youth and their sense of place, changing education, and mentorships created with new community members. The main theory questions are as follows:

- How has the sense of place changed for the youth?
- How have mentor relationships impacted the ways students experience gentrification in Church Hill?

These questions were not asked directly to the youth. Instead, there were open-ended questions based off of these theory questions to allow the youth to answer this overarching inquiry.

Sense of Place Questions

The following questions were presented to the students, family members and stakeholders to answer in regards to how the students’ sense of place is being affected by gentrification:

- How has your neighborhood changed over the last ten years?
  - Where do you hang out?
  - Do you know your new neighbors?
  - What’s different about your school?
- Where do you hang out to play sports other than basketball?
- What parks and playgrounds are you going to?
- What shops are you going to? What shops are you avoiding? Why?
These questions helped to gain an understanding for how students are losing their areas of recreation and provide insight for what stores and restaurants in which these students spend their time. With student and adults answering these questions in a similar way, I was able to see how the new development has both positively and negatively affected the youth of Church Hill.

*Mentoring Questions*

To understand how the relationships between students and new residents have developed, people were asked if they are being used as a catalyst between residents and students to create relationships. For the students who are in relationship with new residents, the following questions were asked:

- What are things you do with your mentor?
- Does your mentor help you with schoolwork or preparing for after high school?
- Has your mentor helped you with college or job applications?
- Do you talk about other events in your life with your mentor? If so, what?
- Has your mentor introduced you to new people?
- Have they encouraged you to participate in new things?
  - do you think you would have met them/participated if your mentor had not mentioned it?

Mentors were asked the following questions:

- What made you decide to be a mentor?
• In what ways are you involved in your mentee’s schoolwork, etc?
• What places are you taking your student to?
• Is your student talking to you about other things that are going on in their lives?
• Have you learned things about your student and neighborhood that you did not expect?

Because more than half of these mentors have been in the neighborhood less than five years, these interviews help illustrate some of the impacts of the new residents. This inquiry helped answer the question of how students are benefitting by being in relationships with the new residents and their mentors.

Triangulating Results

Triangulation is necessary in this qualitative research study to validate the study and to meet the “expectation that the meanings of situation, observation, reporting, and reading will have a certain correspondence” (Stake, p. 97). Triangulation lessens the likelihood of misinterpretation and multiple perceptions have been used to clarify meaning. Cross-referencing was heavily used in this research. The results have been triangulated through discussion groups and observations. Observations were recorded to cross-reference how students and adults are responding to the interviews. Group conversation helped students take a chance to have group discussion over one to one interviews. This has helped determine how the students react in an environment they may be more comfortable
in. On top of this, both students and adults have been interviewed. Due to the diversity of respondents and methods, different answers and types of responses were given. These interviews were compared to determine how students are responding differently from the adults.

All of the interviews were recorded on a sound device and transcribed. I loaded all of my transcriptions into NVivo software and searched for how often certain words came up in all of the interviews. From there, words or common phrases that came up multiple times became my themes for the analysis of the data. For observations, I took field notes. I also uploaded my field notes in the NVivo software to find common themes in order to determine what was similar about each time I observed. I also printed physical copies of my observation notes and highlighted the notes that came up multiple times and affirmed or disproved the information I collected in the interview portion of this study.

**Limitations in Research**

Like any research project, there were limitations within this study. As this study mainly focuses on the youth, there was a constraint with consent. Parents had to give approval for their child to participate in the interview process. Due to a short study period (3 months), not as many students were interviewed as initially planned due to a lack of parental permission. Another factor limiting this research was access to unaffiliated youth. In the Church Hill neighborhood, there are over two thousand youth in the community. The amount of interviews conducted was significantly less than two thousand, leaving out a large representation of students.
who were not engaged with CHAT. Because I worked with a particular subset of students, there is a limitation of perspective. The students interviewed are youth who are not just a part of CHAT but they are the youth who have a deeper involvement with the organization. Many of them are student workers for CHAT or have been in the past. With this distinction, they are likely to have a far different viewpoint in comparison to youth who are not a part of CHAT or are not as heavily involved with the inner workings of the organization. With this distinction, their views on gentrification may be different from the rest of the youth population in Church Hill as they have been exposed to mentorships and cultural differences.

Other limitations include a bias and a level of trust. I have lived in worked in this community and with CHAT for the last four years. As I have worked with and for the main agency where I met interviewees, I have needed to be critical of my personal bias. While I do have established relationships with some of these students and their families, I am not a native from the community, nor am I African American. Coming in with an outside, white middle class perspective limits what I understand and might have limited how much families and students were willing to share.

In order to overcome these limitations, I have relied on the data I collected in the research process by memo-writing and triangulation. I have taken the results and looked for the counterfactual. Memos allowed me to critically reflect on my experiences in the field on a frequent basis to understand themes as they change. By looking for common themes and triangulating my results, I have relied on my data collection and not my own personal thoughts.
Conclusion

Focusing specifically on Church Hill, I interviewed youth and those who are in relationships with them to understand the complicated relationship of youth to their changing community. Through semi-structured interviews and making observation, questions were asked about the youth’s sense of place, education, and relationships with new residents to see how they are being impacted by gentrification. Church Hill made a great study for this research as the personal relationships are in place and there were enough students involved in Church Hill Activities and Tutoring to provide excellent insight on how their lives have been directly altered by gentrification.
Chapter 4: Analysis

Introduction

In this section, I present the common themes found in the interviews and observations made throughout the data collection process for this research. This analysis is based off of interviews conducted with fifteen high school and post high school students and five mentors who live in the Church Hill community. Out of these interviews, there were eight common themes that stood out amongst all of the conducted interviews. These themes have been triangulated against observations made around the community to test determine the similarities and differences of the responses.

Common Themes

Using the questions laid out in the methodology chapter, nine common themes arose throughout the interview process. Primarily, these themes related to the places the students spend time, their changes in their schools, their behavioral changes and the different perspectives they have on their changing community. These themes were triangulated against the observations made around the neighborhood through the data collection period to determine if the answers of the interviews correlated with what I saw around the community.
**Theme 1: “The Lighthouse”**

When asking the students where they hang out in their interviews, thirteen out of fifteen of the students mentioned that they spend majority of their time at The Lighthouse. Located on the corner of 31st and Leigh Street, the Lighthouse is a CHAT owned home. This house has office space for CHAT staff and there is ample of space for students to come in to hang out and do homework directly after school. In these interviews, the students also expressed that they enjoy coming to this open home to play basketball and spend time with the residents who live there. Because these interviews were open ended questions, I took the time to ask students more about their time at the Lighthouse. “Why is it you like coming here so much?” A student, Asante who was asked to elaborate on why he comes to this office space so much put it simply, “Well they don’t like, mind us being here. And I know everyone here who’s balling so I know that I am safe and I can just be myself.” In such conversations with the students interviewed, the majority of the students also pointed out that they feel safe at this space and know
that they are welcomed. With discussions such as this one, it became very apparent that the students found a sense of place through this community based organization and feel welcomed and comfortable spending time at this home.

Given that students feel at home and comfortable with their place at community based organizations also coincides with what Merry (2000) expressed in her explanation of what Community Based Organizations are (Shiller, 2013). As mentioned in the literature, CBOS’s are within communities similar to Church Hill as a way to “provide safe and positive options for the time they spend apart from family and school” (2000, p. 3). CHAT is not only allowing students to use this home space as a place to play basketball and hang out but it is a space where the youth know they are safe and the organization ensures that all activities in their space is positive and family friendly.

During my data collection, I observed at the CHAT offices and spend time at the Lighthouse. During the school hours, the office was a full business place with work being completed by staff to prepare for the after school events. Once the school hours were over, students come in off their respective buses to spend time at the Lighthouse. Some of them would just spend time in the living and dining room areas until tutoring time began while others would go outside and immediately pick up a basketball to play. Staff would come out of the office space to say hello to the students and to make sure that the students were going to be participating in certain afterschool activities that were going to be taking place. Conversation remained informal between the staff and students and in the time I was visiting, there was an unspoken understanding that students needed to remain respectful to
the home and staff members. If there was work to be done in the office, some of the
students would volunteer to do administrative work like stuffing envelopes and
carrying snacks into the home. My observations suggested that the students did
enjoy being at the Lighthouse and with no locked doors, they knew they could
always stop by after school.

Theme 2: “Boundaries of ‘ghetto’”

As I asked each of the students what stores they are going to within Church
Hill, many of them were quick to inform me that they do go to the corner stores
around the community however, they are going to corner stores within certain
areas. For instance, in conversation with many of the youth, they expressed that the
corner stores around the Mosby Court area are stores they define as “ghetto” and do
not like going into these stores at all. When asked why they felt these shops were
ghetto, I received varying answers. Some students mentioned that there is gang
violence that surrounds these stores and because of such violence there is a fear of
being “shot up” or “getting caught in the middle of something.” Students mentioned
that you just “know not to go into places like this.” Following such comments, I
probed students to tell me exactly what stores they are going to if they are avoiding
the stores that are within a close proximity within Mosby Court. Freshmen at the
Academy, Rus’shawn made it particularly clear when he stated that he goes “to the
stores that are near the Lighthouse, like Clay Street Market and Chimbo Market.”
Other students also mentioned these stores along with Night and Day Convenience
Store and The Blue Wheeler Market.
As all of these shops are still deemed as corner stores, what is interesting about these particular stores is that they are all located around re-developed areas. As a student mentioned in an interview, both Clay Street Market and Chimborazo Street Market are both located near the main CHAT headquarters and surrounding both stores are newly developed homes. Similar to this, The Blue Wheeler Market is located on Marshall Street and not only is it located by newly renovated homes but it is also in proximity to where new coffee shop, The Urban Farmhouse was located before the café closed in late January to re-locate outside of the community. Likewise, Night and Day corner store is located near The Robinson Theater. A community arts center in Church Hill that was newly developed in 2009. The Robinson Theater is similar to CHAT as many of the youth expressed they enjoy spending time at this neighborhood organization that offers dance and art classes along with monthly live concerts particularly geared towards teenage students (Hart, 2016). Such answers reveal that the students are now made aware of the areas that are more desirable and like their new neighbors, they are also seeking to frequent shops that are in these newly revitalized spaces.

With the students openly stating that they prefer going to the convenient stores that are placed in the more gentrified areas, this contrasts the findings that Martin (2008) found in her study in Tyler Hill. In this specific neighborhood, the long term residents explained how they have sense of a dividing line. With this line, the adults and children alike are keenly aware of where they will feel comfortable and where they feel more displaced. In contrast, the youth in Church Hill are instead feeling more comfortable in these re-developed areas and are not gaining a
sense of “dividing lines.” The information provided by the students suggest that, like parents in mobility programs like Geautreaux Program see safety as a valuable piece of neighborhood redevelopment (DeLuca, Duncan, Keels, & Mendenhall, 2010).

**Theme Three: Older v. Younger Students**

To go along with the frequent visits of corner stores, another theme that derived from this question of “what stores are you going to?” varied depending on the students age. For instance, majority of students who were in the freshmen and sophomore years of high school expressed that they had no business nor care to be in the newer restaurants and cafes that are within Church Hill. Conversely, the older students interviewed stated that they enjoy spending time at the newer bakeries and coffee shops when they have the time or they are meeting with someone for homework help or mentoring time. One student expressed that they enjoy spending time at places like Sub Rosa as “those chocolate croissants keep me coming back but only when the funds are right.” Such example reveals that the older students enjoy being patrons of the new bakeries but they are aware of income discrepancies. “I can’t be paying $5.00 for some chocolate bread daily but when the day is right and my check comes in, I have to go.”

Similar to the previous findings, answers from the older students who are a part of Church Hill Activities and Tutoring differ from the findings of Melissa Butcher (2014). As the youth of Hackney expressed that the shops were “cool” they also had a particular understanding that these shops were not meant for them and with this knowledge, they did not frequent the new shops. For the fourteen and
fifteen year olds of Church Hill, this is true as they prefer walking into the long-time corner stores but the older high school students and post-graduate students are not feeling the same. Instead, they will go into the bakeries as patrons, with the knowledge that their items are at a higher cost so students are not frequenting these businesses as much as the new adult residents of the neighborhood. Implications for students spending time here could also be due to their mentors exposing them to these places. As students typically spend time in local coffee shops with their mentors, this could suggest that cafés like Sub Rosa are now comfortable to them because of adult exposure.

Theme Four: “Chimbo Courts, Libbie Park, Old Armstrong, Ethel Bailey”

Students explained that they spend much of their time at the Chimborazo Basketball Courts, Libbie Park, Old Armstrong Park and Ethel Bailey Furman Park. Noting that most of the students do not live close to these particular basketball courts as they are on the opposite side of Broad Street, I asked students to explain why they are using these basketball courts over the ones that are closer to homes. A current college student in his second year of school, Meoleaeke, expressed that, “these are the
nicest courts in the neighborhood, it’s even and perfectly laid out,” he explained. Once some of the most broken courts within the neighborhood, the basketball courts at Chimborazo Park were re-paved with new basketball nets and rims in May of 2013. These are the only basketball courts that have been re-done in the neighborhood and the remainder of the courts remain are less than desirable, particularly to the students.

Some students did point out that they spend time at the Old Armstrong basketball courts as they are “not that bad and close to home.” Here it is important to note that the students found this spot to be a place they have made their own. When asked to explain, one student, Christopher, noted that “no adults come to this court. At Chimborazo, sometimes there are adults there and they take over the nets but at Old Armstrong, it’s our place with no one taking charge of our games.” Old Armstrong Playground is currently planned to be redeveloped by the the Richmond Redevelopment Housing Authority (RRHA). With support of the City of Richmond, this recreational area is set to be redeveloped and transformed as a part of the East End Transformation plan. The RRHA has a plan set forth for this land to become the first phase of the transformation plan and instead of being a location of recreation for the students, approximately 1,500 homes would be developed on the property (Moomaw, 2014).

With such transformation set to take place at this recreation area, in interviews conducted I asked students how they would feel if these basketball courts were no longer available for them to spend time at. To this question, Christopher replied, “I mean, it would suck but it is what it is, and we’ve been
hearing a lot about the [housing] projects going away. It’s not like anyone is going to really care all that much if they take these courts away when there are others in the community.” Such response here shows once again that students are aware of their neighborhood changing while revealing that the youth feel that though they are impacted, they do not have the voice nor the capacity to change such plans.

With the response given by Christopher, this coincided with the work found by Chaskin and Joseph (2015). Because this playground is going to be a part of public housing redevelopment, the authors discuss that when public housing is redeveloped, many individuals lose their sense of place and struggle to adjust to the new environments. Like these residents, the youth of Church Hill will be losing a playground and basketball court that they call their own due to new housing units being developed on the land.

*Theme Five: Relational Teachers*

One of the interview questions asked the youth how their school was different in comparison to public high school. As majority of the interviewees have been or are currently students of Church Hill Academy, many of the students noted how their relationships with the teachers are much different from the relationships they would have with teachers at the public school within the community. A current student of the Academy, Shakim states that, “all of the teachers live in the neighborhood so if I need help, they’re willing to meet up with me and go over my work” he explains. Many other students echoed this statement, mentioning that they are able to meet up with their teachers and because their school is smaller than
a mainstream public school, the students are also able to get more attention in the classroom and receive the necessary help.

This type of relational activity between the teachers has not been explored in the literature found. Even in research with new Charter School’s that have been instilled in low-income neighborhoods through gentrification, I have not found that other communities foster the same types of relationships between the students and teachers. In personal observations within the community, I did find this answer to be consistent. As I observed at the Lighthouse, I noticed that there was a student who was meeting with their teacher to receive help with mathematics. This rang true once again in my time observing at one of the local coffee shops. While I was sitting in a Church Hill café, a student I knew walked in with an adult. The student preceded to say hello to me and as I asked how things were they explained that they were receiving help with some science work they did not comprehend. This interaction and observation illustrated the ways in which the students were able to receive help from teachers after school, particularly within their own community and in a place that they do not have to worry about getting transportation.

_Theme Six: Independence_

As interviews moved away from discussing the youth and their sense of place, students were open to discussing their relationships with their mentors. Particularly when asking the students if they receive help with homework and post high school plans, the students expressed that they do not receive that much help from their mentors in these areas. Not all answers were cohesive responses but many of the students mentioned that in this area they would rather do this
independently. “My mentor asks me if I need help with my college applications but I’m always like ‘I got it!’” high school senior, Shakim mentioned in his interview. Other students expressed that they already have plans in place for post high school so they do not need this help.

In addition to such responses, half of the students mentioned that this is not a question that comes up in their mentoring time. One student, a post graduate student from the Academy, Will, mentioned that this did not come up in their mentoring time despite his mentor being aware that the student was in undergoing the application process. “But to be fair,” the student adds, “I never asked so it could be that he didn’t think I needed help.” With these responses, it is clear that many of the students are not often speaking about their future plans with their mentors and these conversations are not taking place as many of the student prefer to do this on their own.

These particular answers do not tend to match up with the information found in the literature nor with the desires Church Hill Academy has for mentor and mentee relationships. The literature suggests that mentorships are meant to help students network and prepare for their future. In addition to this, mentor coordinator, Mallory Henson from Church Hill Academy stated that mentors are meant to have a vital role in a student’s academic life, including college applications. Mentors are not just present for a student’s character development but they are also there to help the students with any academic needs they have. As students like Will make the claim that they never asked for the help, one might wonder if the student should have to ask for help as this role is laid out in the mentor explanation.
In contrast to this, the interviews with the mentors did not correlate in the same way. As the mentors were asked about how they have helped their students with school and post-high school plans, the mentors mentioned some of the work they have done. “I had my mentee filling out college applications with me during his senior year as a way to keep him accountable for applying to school and making sure all his questions were answered,” one mentor, Daniel expressed. This contradiction to what many of the students expressed could be due to varying circumstances. Just as research conducted by Pryce (2005) mentioned, the level of involvement could be different. For instance, Daniel shared in his interview that he is a very involved mentor with his student, revealing he is a highly attuned mentor. Having mentored Meoleaeke for over three years now, Daniel made sure to meet with his mentee on a consistent basis to ensure the work was being done. In addition to this, their relationship had been established before well before his senior year in high-school. “I know I can go to my mentor for anything, especially when I needed help with applications,” Meoleaeke explained. This example shows that with a sense of trust, students felt able to depend on their mentors with this type of life planning.

Theme Seven: Mobile vs. Non-Mobile Mentors

In conversation with the youth regarding their mentor relationships, a clear theme was also drawn between the age of their mentors. For instance, many of the students mentioned that they have gone through many mentors in the last few years and many of these mentors were younger mentors. When asked what happened with these mentoring relationships, students explained that a lot of times the
mentors they are paired with move away or will begin work and no longer have
time to be in a mentoring relationship with them. In contrast, many of the students
who have mentors that have made the decision to settle into the neighborhood have
had these mentors for a longer period of time. These students expressed that when
they have long-term mentors, they are more likely to talk to them about more
serious events in their lives while those who had new mentors more often do not
feel comfortable going into deep conversation with their mentors. “I've gone
through like, three mentors in three years, it's hard to go deep with someone
knowing I may get a new mentor again,” one student pointed out as they expressed
why they do not want to go into having earnest conversation with their mentor at
this time.

This concept of having a mentor correlates with the literature from Formoso
et. Al (2010). Their research points out that just by being in relationship with
individuals who have high educational attainment, the youth from low-income
communities have a tendency to fare better in comparison to the students who are
not in a mentoring relationship. In this literature, what is not pointed out is if this
fairing is better for the students who have mentors who are more mobile and likely
to follow the job market instead of remaining in one place. The research also does
not mention the amount of time that the new neighbors have been in relationship
with the youth of community. Both concepts are playing a factor with the youth of
Church Hill as the amount of time they have had with a mentor correlates with how
willing a student is to being open with the adult placed in their life.
In addition to the connection with the literature, my observations found this similarity. As I observed in a classroom and held discussion with the students’ multiple times, I noticed the level of respect the different staff members received. One week while I was observing, staff member, Murray Withrow was present for class time. A long term staff member since the early beginnings of CHAT, the students gave him the utmost respect by listening while he was speaking and not shouting out when they had something to add to the discussion. Contrary to this, the following week Mr. Withrow was not present in class and there were only new staff members who have worked at CHAT for less than three years. In this class time, the students were holding side conversations and talking over the new staff members. Here, it was apparent that the students did not have the same level of trust and respect with the newer staff members as they did with their long term staff.

*Theme Eight: A Face to the Story*

As mentors were also interviewed for data collection, there was one particular theme that arose in each interview with all five mentors. In the interviews with the mentors, a major question that was asked regarded what the youth have taught them about the neighborhood that they did not know. In response to this question, all of the mentors explained that there was now a face to the common stories. One mentor explained:

“you know, you think a student might be lazy for not going to school or they’re irresponsible for not setting an alarm to wake up on time to catch the
bus. But, when you’re really in relationship with these students, you begin to know the background for why they’re not in school. For example, I thought my mentee was just being lazy for not going to school every so often but, being in that relationship with them, I learned that between them and another sibling, they only had one pair of pants so the siblings had to decide which of them would go to school that day.”

Other mentors like Paul explained home life as well, noting that:

“once you get to know the teenagers, you’re realizing they’re not just the statistics but like oh, now I understand why they respond that way, especially when it comes to like trauma things. Like I’ve talked to teens when there was different forms of abuse and things like that where as, earlier, when things are more surface level, it’s just a thought where they’re just trying to be cool or they’re just trying to be this that or the other. When you learn the back story you can completely understand why they’re being vulnerable because, you know, people have walked out on them before is why they don’t trust.”

Through these conversations with the mentors, it became clear that the long term mentorships are more preferable for both a mentor and a mentee as the mentor gains ability to understand that there is more than meets the eye to the students and their situations. Mentors like Daniel, also learned about the cultural differences he learned through spending time with his student.
“I had [Meoleaeke] live with me for a few months and from that, I learned there are huge cultural differences. You know, like having people over late, at times he wouldn’t even ask and I had to say something or he would have his must up really loud late at night and think nothing of it. Or he would do stuff like not lock the door behind him. We had to have a few conversations about that and he would be like ‘well my mom wouldn’t be bothered by it so I didn’t think it was an issue.’”

Conversations like the ones I had with these mentors are not laid out in the literature found for this study. More often than not, the literature on mentorships revolves around how the students are gaining over what a mentor themselves are in relationships with these students. It is important to note that the youth of low-income communities have much to add to these mentoring relationships, particularly because of where their mentors are coming from. As the authors explain (Formoso, et. Al 2010), mentors tend to be high-income, highly educated community member and because of this, their mentors have not been exposed to the varying challenges many of these youth have been exposed to.

*Theme Nine: ‘Whitemenizing’: A Loss of Culture*

In many of my informal conversations with the youth who were older students and have been affiliated with CHAT for five or more years, the topic of cultural loss came up a variety of times. The students refer to this as ‘whitemenizing.’

“Me and my older brother have been in CHAT for almost ten years and our younger brother isn’t involved anymore. So, he acts ghetto while we [my
bother and I] have been whitemenized. We leave the neighborhood and we know how to, like, belong in the places we be at. You know, like, we had our head of school teach us table manners and all that so we could sit with these people at the annual banquet and fit in.”

Other students, like KaMaya also spoke on this concept of whitemenizing. In a conversation with her she explained:

“Don’t get me wrong, like I love my mentor, she listens to me and like, the things that are going on in my life but she’s white. And most of CHAT’s staff is white. They like, bring in interns and will try and get black interns but they don’t come from where we came from. Like, they’re not from the same backgrounds usually so they don’t understand. And these interns are only here for either a summer or a year so how are we supposed to go deep? Instead, you know, like I had mostly white teachers and white people coming in my life and telling me like, the way I speak ain’t right or the way I reacted isn’t okay. And like to me, I feel like that’s taking away who I am. Did I need to grow up? Yeah but like, I don’t want to feel like I have to be like all these other white people, I wanna still be like me.”

Conversations with these students bring up the issue of social capital. As different classes and races move into the community, there is a shift in how the community should operate. Chaskin and Joseph (2010) mention this as the new residents had issue with porch sitting due to “loud conversing” but the long-term residents felt this was a loss of their culture and how they interact with their community members. For CHAT, this notion of teaching the students how to “fit in” at banquets
and other formal events is teaching them the concept of social capital, enabling them to navigate in the middle class world.

**Conclusion**

Based on the interviews and the observations that took place around the community, I have found that students are utilizing these community organizations that are within their neighborhood and are also realizing the change surrounding them. Noting what’s new and old (or in their words “ghetto”) students are able to internalize the places that are more desirable in their communities and the places that many should avoid (i.e, safe v unsafe areas). In addition to this, students are tending to hold onto their sense of independence by not voluntarily asking mentors for help with academic needs but are instead seeking to do many of these things on their own because they have a sense of being able to take on the school and post high school processes on their own. **This need for keeping independence could be due to the issues of cultural capital or the student now being fully aware of what they need help with.**
Chapter Five: Discussion

Introduction

As the data has been analyzed and compared to the literature, this section will discuss why these results matter in regards to gentrification. This chapter will discuss the correlation the results have with the theory questions presented in this thesis and how the questions were answered through the interviews with the youth, their mentors and the stakeholders in the community of Church Hill.

Theory Questions

The theory questions presented for this thesis were as follows:

• How has the sense of place changed for the youth?
• How have mentor relationships impacted the ways students experience gentrification in Church Hill?

Based on the data collected, I found answers that were both expected and unexpected.

As the literature explained, in gentrified areas, students tend to lose a lot of their sense of place and there are clear boundaries between the new and the old developed area. In my interviews with the students, they were able to note that there was a difference in their community but they did not feel as if there were places they were unwelcomed. Instead, due to gentrification the youth have been able to enjoy areas of their neighborhood in a safer manner. Students now have a
sense of place at CHAT’s central location, the Lighthouse and have made this location a place where they spend a copious amount of time.

What is important to note is that the students have an understanding that the redevelopment to come could take away their sense of place. As the City of Richmond is continuously striving to break up the concentration of poverty and turn the public housing units into mixed communities, students are feeling a potential loss to their sense of place. Armstrong Playground, the place where students feel they are most independent and on their own, is expected to be torn down as mixed income housing is set to replace it. These basketball courts are the ones that are the closest public courts to where majority of students are living and without them, students will have to consistently take a longer journey to basketball courts.
Student Christopher emphasized this as he said “yeah, I mean, I like going to Chimborazo Courts but when it’s late and I want to play basketball, Armstrong is a block away. You like, have courts near Franklin Military (Bill Robison Park) but you...
can’t play on those courts, there are tree roots popping out!” This conversation exemplifies that while sense of place has been given to the youth from gentrification, it is also taking away places where students are able to go that are closer to home.

Gentrification is allowing students to gain relationships with mentors. Because the school many of these students attend have a standard for each student to have a mentor they have gained relationships with new adults. These are relationships that many of the students would not have had if they did not attend Church Hill Academy. The issue with this, however, is the amount of investment mentors make with their students. There are mentors like Mackenzie who shared that he has been mentoring his mentee, Patrick, since he was twelve years old and is now almost twenty.

“You know; I’ve watched Pat grow up. I didn’t think coming into this relationship with a scrawny middle school student would end up with him living with me and me taking him to Butler University for college. Let alone, I never imagined a teenager to be the best man at my wedding.”

Mentors like Mackenzie end up investing multiple years with their mentors while other students like Shakim express they have had numerous mentors. There were other students who explained in my observational times that they have not yet met their mentors. Two high school freshmen said that they knew they have mentors but their mentors have not spent time with them yet.

If mentors are dedicating multiple years with their students, they are able to network in ways that the other students do not have access to. Students like Christopher have had their mentor for years and experience political events and
meeting members of Congress at the state and federal level while there are student like Will who have had multiple mentors but have stopped investing after a certain amount of time. Because of this pause in investment, students are not gaining the same networking opportunities and do not feel the same sense of investment as those with long term mentors are receiving.

The literature reviewed also did not speak on how the age of a mentor impacts the students. Students with older mentors are once again expressing how they are meeting individuals who work in their areas of interest and are gaining opportunities that their counterparts are not gaining. In an informal conversation with high school senior, Wyliek, he shared that his mentor not only takes him to football games in South Carolina but he has been able to get jobs outside of CHAT and go to a school outside of the Church Hill area. His own family members also mentioned that while they have mentors, they do not get the same opportunities. This information explains that students with mentors who are more invested and established tend to be more helpful compared to those who are more mobile and not yet as connected as the older community members in the Richmond area.

Students also expressed that in addition to gaining and losing a sense of place, they are also losing a sense of their culture. By learning these “social norms,” the students have felt a loss of themselves. While it is not the intention that CHAT has in teaching them table manners and speaking more formally, the students are aware of this concept of code-switching. Code-switching is the concept of moving from “a casual register to a formal register” so students can clearly communicate their thoughts and ideas in a more articulate manner (Payne, 2005). As this is
concept of code switching can be a beneficial knowledge for students to have for future employment, the students’ responses suggest that, at times, this switch makes them feel like they are losing a sense of their cultural identity while they are gaining these social abilities.

Conclusion

All of the data collected and reviewed played an important role in this study on gentrification and the impacts it has on the youth. This paper argues that students are not feeling as displaced as much of the literature expressed but they are noticing the change around them. At the same time, the collected data shows that for mentoring, age and level of investment matters. While it may be beneficial for youth to have some adult being invested in their lives, it is even more beneficial to have mentors who are willing to commit for a longer term and also choose to settle in the Richmond area for a longer duration of time.
Chapter Six: Conclusion & Suggestions

Introduction

Throughout this study, I have reviewed literature and examined the neighborhood of Church Hill through the lens of the youth. I have interviewed high school and post high school students to determine how they feel about this community shift and to what extent they are being impacted. The consensus appears to be that students are extremely aware of the redevelopment but they do not feel as heavily impacted as assumed. Instead, the youth are making the most out of their new community members and redevelopment by feeling at home at Church Hill Activities and Tutoring. Having this outlet has allowed them to have a sense of place where they are safe but still able to be themselves. While students are not being as directly impacted as presumed before this study, I offer suggestions to both Community Based Organizations like CHAT and to those as planners who are a part of community revitalization.

Suggestions to Community Based Organizations

Church Hill Academy is a school that cares for the development of their students both in academics and in character. This focus in curriculum helps prepare their students to be equipped when the time comes for the students to graduate from high school. To further capitalize on this goal, I suggest that the mentor program be re-evaluated. As many of the students shared that they have had multiple mentors or have had mentors that are not meeting with them regularly, I
advise the Academy to focus on finding mentors who are able to have the time commitment to meet with their students regularly. It is admirable that the Academy wants to have all their students paired with mentors but the focus could use a slight shift in finding mentors who are willing to commit to their students continuously. This can be done through multiple ways. The Academy could look for mentors who have committed to living in the neighborhood for at least four years (i.e., they could be homeowners, students who are going to be in the area for medical school or a master’s degree), mentors who are willing to commit to meeting with their students on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. While this is already a requirement for the mentoring program, it is advisable that the mentor coordinator and teachers alike check in with mentors regularly as a way of accountability in making sure the time investment is occurring. This aspect of accountability and finding mentors who are here for a duration of longer than a year could not only help students from the consistent mentor shifting but could aid in students’ needs being met more adequately.

For those who are considering a mentor relationship with students, it is important they also evaluate their ability to mentor. As mentors do have other commitments such as work, family, their own social expectations, etc., it is recommended that these life aspects be taken into consideration before investing heavily in a student. By doing so, mentors can evaluate if they have the proper amount of time to invest in a student and how effective their times can be. If a mentor is only able to meet irregularly or have too many other commitments, they may not be the most engaged mentor and attuned with the needs of their mentee.
In addition to ensuring long-term mentorship relationships, I also suggest Church Hill Activities and Tutoring to further their relationships with long-term residents and students in regards to sense of place. As students mentioned repeatedly that they are feeling “whitemenized,” I suggest that mentors and CHAT staff meet with students in grounds that fit to their culture more. By meeting students in places that are more prominent to their culture and background, this could not only allow students to feel a greater sense of their culture but it could further ensure that mentors are more attuned to their environments and sharing more common ground.

**Suggestions to Redevelopment Planning**

Communities are going to redevelop. New housing is going to be created, businesses and new neighbors are going to move into these areas as they become more attractive. While this concept is inevitable, it is advisable for planners and developers to consider not just the adults in the community but the youth as well. As literature suggests, youth participation in planning can be difficult but it is not a concept that is impossible. I suggest that planners and commercial development corporations (CDCs) take the time to engage the teenagers of the community through holding teen specific meetings and charrettes. This concept has historically worked in the past, particularly in the neighborhood of Church Hill. A local church in the community recently held a specific teen focused meeting for students to discuss the Black Lives Matter movement. In this meeting, the teenagers were allowed to have open and honest conversations with adult community members and did so in a way that was effective and respectful. This meeting shows that not only
do the youth want to be engaged in the important conversations, but they are able to be engaged in these conversations in a way that is beneficial for all.

Students in the City of Richmond in general are also showing a desire to be a part of important decisions that impact their lives. As the City’s school board addresses the education budget, there is discussion about shutting down three public high schools. High school students being aware of how this will affect them, went to the city hall meeting to protest outside of City Hall and share stories as to why they are against this budget decrease (Llovio & Oliver, 2016).

This can easily be done by planners by holding specific meetings for youth. Planners and developers could hold youth charrettes for big projects to get insight on what the youth think about this particular plan and invite them to be involved in the process. These concepts also fit in with Sandercock’s theory of storytelling. By allowing the youth to tell their stories and be a part of these important meetings, it is lending a space for students to be a part of the conversation and to speak openly about how their lives are being impacted by the changes in their environment.

To keep these youths in the community on Church Hill and speaking, there must be steps taken by the City of Richmond to ensure that affordable housing will not fully diminish in the community. With plans to redevelop the public housing units, affordable and low-income housing will take a large hit in Church Hill and displacement of low-income residents will increase more than it previously has. To prevent this high level of displacement from occurring once again, I suggest that the City of Richmond look to Washington D.C. as an example. As Columbia Heights was redeveloped, protection of affordable housing remained (Howell, 2016). If
Richmond were to do something similar, this would not only ensure residents may remain in place but the city would not deepen the problem of affordable housing in the Richmond region.

**Conclusion**

Gentrification has been an issue since the 1960s and it is a subject area that is not going to disappear. Gentrification can cause displacement of low-income individuals and with the displacement, higher income residents move in and new housing and shops come into the community. This alteration not only affects the adults of neighborhood but the youth as well. Positively, the youth are offered new places to spend time and have new opportunities to go to schools outside of the public schools available. Community organizations are bridging the gaps between new and old residents to allow for mentoring relationships to occur, particularly through community organizations and the students are able to gain networking and different aid they would not have received had it not been for gentrification. In this, it is advisable that mentors keep in mind that with mentorship comes commitment and investment. Students going through multiple mentors over a period of time reveals that students are not always receiving the adequate help and networking that they could. Should community members and organizations capitalize on youth involvement and heavily engaged community members, youth in communities are able to heavily benefit on the impacts of gentrification, lending their voice and concerns to the planning community.
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