Middle class poverty politics:

Making place, making people

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Abstract

In a context of rising inequality and economic vulnerability in the U.S., our paper explores links between class identities, urban place-making and poverty politics. We ask how class difference and poverty politics are made and re-made in neighborhood-level place making, and with what implications for boundaries and alliances between middle-class and poorer residents. Place-making refers to activities through which residents work to produce the neighborhood they want, such as participating in community organization or initiatives, interacting with their neighbors, and supporting or opposing particular changes in the neighborhood. We use a relational poverty framework to show that middle-class place-making reproduces normatively white middle-class place imaginaries, but always also produces poverty/class politics. We extend prior research on middle-class poverty politics, which focuses primarily on class boundary making, to investigate whether progressive, alliance-building moments ever emerge. Drawing on case-study research with two Seattle neighborhoods, we trace the ways that place-making practices situate middle-class and poorer actors in relation to one another. We show that these interactions may continue to govern poverty and poorer people; but may also challenge normative understandings of poverty and sow the seeds for cross class alliances. Through comparative analysis of the neighborhoods as dense sites of class formation we show how particular histories, place imaginaries and built/institutional infrastructures allow (or foreclose) questioning and reworking of normative class/race formations and poverty politics to pave the way for cross-class alliance.

Key words: cross-class alliance, middle class, poverty politics, relational poverty, whiteness

The U.S. Great Recession of the late 2000s centered national attention on the plight of middle-class actors as well as on deepening inequality and hardening class politics (Lubrano 2010; Erenreich 2011; Krugman 2013; Stiglitz 2013).[1] Commentators argue that many in the middle classes are at great risk of falling into poverty, cannot afford college for their children, and no longer anticipate a better future for the next generation. These difficult times raise questions about how middle-class actors respond. Specifically, where, when and how does rising vulnerability translate into greater defensiveness and class/race boundary making or into a sense of shared understanding and solidarity with those in poverty? We explore these questions about middle-class poverty politics in mixed-income urban neighborhoods in the aftermath of the Great Recession. Poverty politics refers to imaginaries, representations and judgments of who is poor and why, as well as laws, rules, policies and everyday practices that govern class subjects (Schram 2000; Puwar 2004; Lawson and Elwood 2014). Poverty politics do not always reinscribe difference and may entail more engaged understandings and actions built across class lines that destabilize privilege and question structural causes of poverty (Valentine 2008; Dixon and Durrheim 2011).

We conceptualize the "middle class" not as a fixed category in simple binary with "poor", but rather as an open, complex, and contestable position. Our concept of middle class is informed by three strands of research: one that constructs the middle class as a combination of socio-economic criteria and behavioral characteristics (Pressman 2007; Crompton 2008); another that theorizes the middle class as a position within social relations of production identified as "…an ambivalent position between capital and labor" (Jeffrey, 2008: 518); and third that understands the middle class as a process of identity formation, dispositions and differences in economic, cultural, educational, and linguistic forms of capital in framing the middle class

(Bourdieu 1984; Schram 2000; Sayer 2005). We study middle-class actors because of their complex and problematic ideological and material positions. From Marx to Galbraith, scholars have viewed the middle class as a "contented majority" (Galbraith, 1992, p. 15) advancing essentially conservative politics. In countries throughout the world, the idea of "the middle class" is a hegemonic political fiction framed through neoliberal rationalities, national identities, and consumer culture (Bourdieu 1984; Bennett et al. 2008; Bridge, Butler and Lees 2012). Zizek (2000) argues that middle-class normativity obscures major class fault lines, producing the middle class as a "non class" that defines itself "…by a double opposition to both 'extremes' of the social space - non-patriotic 'deracinated' rich corporations on the one side; poor excluded immigrants and ghetto-members on the other. The 'middle class' grounds its identity in the exclusion of both extremes…" (Zizek 2000, 187; see also Butler and Savage 2003; Davidson 2010; Zweig 2000). This "non-class" status de-politicizes the idealized 'middle class' by manufacturing consent to, and reproduction of, white, American, middle-class normativity.

Against this backdrop, our focus on the middle class is theoretically and politically significant in two ways. First, the middle class play a leading role in the de-politicization of poverty and class, especially in the rendering of poverty as exceptional, individualized, and unacknowledged. Theorizing middle-class poverty politics is an essential part of politicizing poverty differently. Second, we study the middle class because the category itself is unstable, contradictory, and heterogeneous. We ask whether middle-class agency ever leads to something other than consent to, or reproduction of, middle-class norms, hardening of class boundaries, and poverty politics of exclusion and governance? By examining the unacknowledged consensus reproducing middle-class norms, we seek to uncover openings for alliance-building moments

obscured in theorizations centered on difference and division (Gibson-Graham 2006; Larner 2013).

We explore links between middle-class identities, urban place-making, and cross-class politics by examining how middle-class people consolidate (or transform) their identities through interactions with poorer class subjects as they remake their neighborhoods. Benson and Jackson's (2012) notion of *place-making* considers how the production of urban landscapes re-inscribes middle-class norms and identities. In this framing, place-making refers to the ways that residents enact their imaginaries of what a neighborhood should ideally be. This occurs through their behaviors, interactions with and expectations of others, and priorities for certain neighborhood aesthetics, consumption opportunities, and so on (Ballard 2004; Bennett et al. 2008; Watt 2009; Benson and Jackson 2012). Place-making is the spatial and discursive practice through which middle-class residents consolidate their class identities in mixed-income neighborhoods, normalizing middle-class values, tastes, and aesthetics (Butler and Robson 2003; Trudeau 2006; Watt 2009; Bacqué, Charmes, and Vermeersch 2014; Jackson and Benson 2014). This conceptualization of place-making emphasizes the co-production of place identities and class identities through everyday life activities and interactions in residential neighborhoods, rather than the role of neighborhood residents in urban development.

Our analysis of the relations between place-making and class identity formation makes two contributions. First, we show that middle-class place-making is as much about poverty politics as it is about performing middle-class tastes and aspirations. Middle-class place imaginaries are rooted in sets of tastes, values, and customs often framed in contrast with distaste and a negative opinion of poorer others (Bourdieu 1984; Schram 2000; Watt 2009; Lawson et al. 2012; Ghertner, 2012). Drawing on a relational poverty framework we trace how middle-class

engagements with neighborhood planning, interactions with other residents, and support or opposition for particular changes, both reflect and produce certain kinds of poverty politics. Second, we extend prior research on middle-class poverty politics (which primarily considers class boundary-making) to show that openings for more progressive, alliance-building moments can also emerge through place-making. Place-making practices situate middle-class and poorer actors in relation to one another. As we will show, these interactions may continue to govern poverty and poorer people in neighborhoods. But they may also challenge normative understandings of poverty/poor others and trouble previously unexamined middle-class normativity and privilege.

We develop these contributions from a comparative case study of two mixed-income Seattle neighborhoods. Spruce Ridge[2] is a socially engineered mixed-income neighborhood uniformly structured around middle-class norms and aesthetics and governed by an aspirational cultural politics. As a HOPE VI redevelopment initiative, it was conceived with an explicit goal of making poorer residents into middle-class subjects by shaping their behaviors and is marketed through a discourse of diversity. Place-making efforts in Spruce Ridge seek to transform poorer residents, often with the involvement of middle-class residents as volunteers and teachers. Packdon is a historically mixed-income racially diverse neighborhood where many residents are actively trying to create the ideal neighborhood they imagine. Unlike Spruce Ridge, the Packdon built environment is eclectic, with a mix of housing stock that some residents characterize as "ghetto" or "poverty gulch." Place-making efforts seek transformation of the look and feel the neighborhood landscape. Nonetheless, this is not a seamless process in which all residents have similar priorities. In recent years, Packdon residents have been involved in heated struggle over changes in the built and social environment.

While Spruce Ridge is the product of social mix housing policy and changes in Packdon could be nascent moves toward gentrification, our analysis does not center on these processes. We examine these neighborhoods as sites of middle-class place-making to examine the consolidation of white middle-class normativity and the kinds of poverty politics produced in tandem. Further, we look for moments where the unacknowledged consensus that reproduces middle-class norms may be recognized and troubled in place-making, to uncover hopeful practices that open space for more inclusive poverty politics.

Making Place, Making Class Politics

Place-making - the cultural, discursive and material practices through which people imagine and transform places - matters to theorizing the politics of class difference (Pierce, Martin, and Murphy 2011; Benson and Jackson 2012; Hankins and Martin 2012; Goeman 2013). Massey (2005) traces the intimate connections between place, identity, and politics and her ideas about the networked and relational nature of space are foundational to our approach. Beginning from the proposition that people's identities are not pre-formed outside of social interactions, Massey asserts that the interactions producing identities take place in space and that furthermore "spatial identities…[are] internally complex, essentially unboundable in any absolute sense, and inevitably historically changing" (2004, 5). In related work on how US settlers mapped the space of the emergent nation, Goeman (2013) argues that making places is a deeply political activity that normalizes classed, raced, and gendered power relations and exercises representational and material violence on those marked as other (see also Leitner 2012). And yet, as places and identities are being made they inevitably encounter difference -- persons with other materialities and identities -- that must be negotiated by virtue of the "…very fact of shared turf" (Massey

2005, 8). These encounters are exercises of normative and political power but also simultaneously negotiations, as those named as other struggle for recognition and for space.

Place imaginaries are implicated in political struggles. Social movements employ place-framing to articulate a common identity and as a basis for collective political actions (Wilson and Grammenos 2000; Martin 2003; Trudeau 2006). Place-framing builds a narrative of how a place ought to be, often catalyzing residents to work towards a particular kind of neighborhood (Mitchell 1988; Martin 2003). Place frames articulate issues, values, and concerns that mobilize residents to, for example, redevelop their neighborhood, lobby for services, or evict poor others (Martin 2003). While this work foregrounds the importance of place imaginaries and identities in the articulation of a common politics, it does not consider how class identities and differences are themselves negotiated in urban neighborhoods. We extend Martin's explicit focus on the political strategies of place-making to a consideration of how residents' everyday actions and articulations of place-making constitute class identities (Benson and Jackson 2012).

Place-making refers to the representational practices and material interventions that produce or maintain a place (Pierce, Martin, and Murphy 2011; Benson and Jackson 2012). For us, place-making occurs in everyday acts through which individual and social groups demand or seek the kind of residential neighborhood they desire, whether in terms of neighbors, sense of community, retail and recreation opportunities, housing options, and so on. [3] These practices produce middle-class identities by transforming the ontological basis of middle class-ness from abstract discourses, values, and tastes into concrete expressions in places, naturalizing and materializing these class imaginings (Jarosz and Lawson 2002; Grimson 2008; Ray and Qayum 2009). For example, Pow (2009) illustrates links between middle-class identity and specific spatial aesthetics in gated communities in China. The construction of exclusionary urban spaces

produce middle class-ness in their repetitive performance of lifestyle choices and elite

consumption patterns, giving tangible form to the aspirational project of being middle class.

Butler and Robson (2003) explore gentrification in London, showing how middle-class groups

create urban neighborhoods that consolidate their prosperity and reproduce middle-class norms

of whiteness, nativity, homeownership, hard work, civic participation, personal responsibility,

and upward social mobility. These actors create social enclaves that reflect their middle-class

norms: housing aesthetics, preferences for home ownership, businesses such as coffee shops,

night clubs, yoga studios, and boutiques.

Place-making reproduces racialized as well as classed social difference. Historians,

sociologists, geographers and others have traced the complex co-production of class and race

identities and privilege in the US from the 20th century onward, specifically illustrating the

linking of whiteness and middle-class identities (Lipsitz 1998). Frankenburg (1997), Roediger

(2005), and Ignatiev (1995), for example, show how immigrants in the US have cultivated white

identities in part by pursuing ideals historically coupled to middle-class identities, such as

homeownership, education, and residence in all-white neighborhoods or in suburbs. Postwar

white flight to suburbs by middle-class households and broad societal idealization of these

manicured homogeneous environments further served to associate middle-class whiteness with

order, success, upward mobility, particular forms of residential consumption and respectability

(Jackson 1985; Hartigan 1999; Ruben 2001; Hoelscher 2003). These social and spatial ideals of

middle class-ness are held and performed by people of many races, but they are normatively

white because of the longstanding co-articulation of race and class identities and privilege in the

US.

In particular, geographers illustrate how struggles over landscape codify racialized belonging and exclusion. Trudeau's (2006) work on a land use conflict that pitted Hmong immigrants against a predominantly white rural community demonstrates how more powerful white residents invoke a seemingly stable and normatively white and American landscape to resist immigrants' alternative imaginaries of place (see also Leitner 2012). Delaney (2002) underscores that these performances of social and spatial dominance produce whiteness, while also producing and subordinating non-white racial formations and their spatial expressions. Taken together, this work suggests that race and nativity frame middle-class identities through imaginaries and performances of place, placing most attention on the concretizing of social difference and consolidating class boundaries.

Related questions of class identities and boundaries in residential neighborhoods have been considered at length in the gentrification and social mix literatures. Scholars have documented a multitude of social and political-economic exclusions set in motion when middle-class gentrifiers work to "improve" a neighborhood (Lees 1994; Ley 1996; Wilson and Grammenos 2005; Lees 2008). The failure of social mix strategies to foster meaningful everyday interactions or mutually supportive relationships between middle-class and poorer residents is well documented (Bridge, Butler, and Lees 2012; Davidson 2010; Joseph and Chaskin 2011). Other scholars have examined how various fractions of the middle class may respond differently to gentrification or social mix, most often comparing a "traditional" and a "new" middle class that self-identify through (respectively) their workforce position versus lifestyle practices (Butler and Robson 2003; Savage, Bagnall, and Longhurst 2005; Ball et al. 2004). We share in common with these literatures an empirical focus on mixed-income neighborhoods and a concern with the "non-class" status of the middle class. Our theoretical concern, however, is with the

coproduction of middle-class identities and poverty politics. The gentrification and social mix literatures tend to give less attention to the ways that the production of middle-class ideologies and privilege also produce and signify poverty and poor others. Here, we draw from relational poverty research.

Our study of middle-class poverty politics is rooted in relational poverty analysis, which foregrounds productions and contestations of class identity in the regulation of poor subjects. Relational poverty analysis explores the role of the non-poor (including the middle class) in the material and cultural reproduction or transformation of poverty (Hickey 2009; Mosse 2010; Lawson et al. 2012).[4] It emphasizes the need to examine how poverty and poorer people are understood, represented, and acted upon, as well as the co-construction of middle-class subjects, identities, privilege, and poverty politics. For example, some scholars demonstrate how middle-class identity and privilege are normalized when poverty is framed as a self-contained problem of flawed others (Fernandes and Heller 2006; Adamovsky 2009). This is accomplished through cultural projects of representation and judgment that produce deserving and undeserving poor subjects whose status is understood to stem from their individual actions and choices. The deserving poor are redeemable and worthy of short-term assistance assumed to lift them into the middle class (Watkins-Hayes 2009). The undeserving poor subject, by contrast, is a flawed person who is often racialized, represented and judged as criminal, threatening, trashy, deviant and/or lazy (Schram 2000; Goode and Maskovsky 2001; Lawson, Jarosz, and Bonds 2008).[5] Poor subjects imagined in these ways always stand in relation to an unmentioned normalized other: the successful, hard-working, orderly, white middle-class ideal (Watkins 1993; Puwar 2004). These representations are advanced through material practices, rules, laws, ordinances and policies that together regulate subjectivities and produce class boundaries (Mosse 2010;

Lawson and Elwood, 2014). As a processual theorization, this relational production of middle-class and poor subjects is incomplete and always open to contestation, including the formation of alliances across social boundaries.[6]

Relational analyses of poverty and class identities have illustrated how place-making reinscribes middle-class identities; producing normative middle-class white privilege in juxtaposition to social difference imagined as racialized, criminal, disordered, culturally strange, or immoral (Jarosz and Lawson 2002; Trudeau 2006). Jarosz and Lawson (2002), for example, show how cultural constructions such as 'redneck' (signified as poor, white, racist, trashy, and backward) simultaneously construct middle class white people and places as moral, cultured, non-racist, and so on. Along related lines, Ballard (2004) shows the reproduction of race/class orders of privilege via middle-class South Africans' opposition to poor black squatter settlements nearby. White privilege is normalized when middle-class residents construct poor black squatters as criminal, immoral, and unhealthy, and view their own affluence as normal and unproblematic.[7] They avoid outright racist statements and frame their opposition in terms of property values, yet declines in home prices reveal these wealthier buyers' attitudes to poor black residents. These findings raise questions about the ways in which race and class difference stand in for each other in specific grounded place-making practices.

Through these tenets of relational poverty theory we connect place-making and middle-class identity formation with an exploration of the kinds of poverty politics that emerge. Our investigation of place-making in Seattle traces the reinscription of middle-class norms, production of "poor others", and the racialization of poverty that other research has emphasized. We explore how and where middle-class place-making produces poverty politics by reinforcing middle-class norms through a defensive relationality that establishes their places as not "other",

not poor, not lazy, not disordered, and so on. Yet we also look beyond boundary making. Place-making and social identity formation are constantly in flux and open to renegotiation. In these negotiations, we find slippages and cracks in normative discourses and practices of class identity, showing that place-making can be more than just the reinforcement of middle-class norms and exclusions. In specific instances middle-class place-making might lead towards engagements, reflexivity, and even alliances that trouble normative middle-class assumptions and actions about poverty. Middle-class place-making always also produces poverty politics, but we argue that the type of poverty politics of middle-class actors are not a foregone conclusion.

Dense sites of class formation and poverty politics

We conceive of urban neighborhoods as *dense sites of class formation* in which place-making practices, middle-class identities and poverty politics work in and through each other as a complex bundle of processes. Dense sites refers to interactions in context that (re)produce a social position through the coming together of societal and political norms and values, class and race relations, and structures of feeling (Ray and Qayum 2009). Theoretically and methodologically, understanding neighborhoods as dense sites allows us to discern the (re)production of class boundaries *as well as* openings for cross-class alliances and hopeful practices in place-making. Further, examining neighborhoods as dense sites connects middle-class normativities, racism, and imaginaries of poor others enacted in specific sites and moments to the broader ways in which these practices constitute and code poverty politics and places. The spatial, discursive, and material practices that residents deploy in place-making exemplify how middle-class residents enact poverty politics in specific places, but with wide-reaching

implications for social and spatial imaginaries of poverty and middle class-ness, and for the
(re)production of cross-class boundaries and alliances.

From 2011-2013, we conducted a comparative case study of Seattle's Packdon and
Spruce Ridge neighborhoods. We selected Packdon and Spruce Ridge are home to both
impoverished and relatively privileged residents. Our study of these neighborhoods as dense sites
examined multiple places and relationships through which people encounter class and race
difference including public spaces (streets, parks and buses), community center programs,
meetings of neighborhood associations, volunteering at social service agencies, and
neighborhood events. These interactions are bound up with the normative social and spatial
imaginaries (re)produced in residents' place-making efforts, as well as in place histories and
meanings invoked to legitimate and perpetuate certain class and race relationships. Taken
together, they comprise the sites through which residents imagine the neighborhood they want,
and through which they work to produce a middle-class landscape, whether by changing the built
environment, governing other residents' behaviors, or excluding particular people.

Our analysis also draws on evidence gathered from neighborhood blogs and community
newspaper coverage; participant observation at neighborhood council meetings,
activities/celebrations, and community forums; and 20 semi-structured interviews (18 residents
of Packdon/Spruce Ridge and 2 resident/tenant association staff from Spruce Ridge).[8] Following
Burawoy's (1998) extended case method and other inductive approaches for theorizing from
qualitative data (McKian 2010), our interpretive analysis illuminates socially embedded
processes, meanings, and relationships - specifically the place and class identities and poverty
politics evident in residents' expressions and actions. We triangulate across sources of evidence,

examining consistencies and disjunctures in what people say and what they actually do, or what they say in an interview versus what they may express online in a community blog.

We identified interviewees through participant observation at community meetings and recommendations from community organization leaders. Some residents learned about the project from neighbors and asked to be interviewed. The interviewees include roughly equal numbers of men and women, ranging in age from 20s to 70s. Fifteen of the interviewees are white, and five others identified as Asian, East African, or African American, roughly consistent with the class/race composition of the neighborhoods (see Table 1 and further discussion below). Some have lived in Packdon or Spruce Ridge for as long as 20 years, while others are new arrivals in residence for only a year or two. All are engaged in place-making activities that include participating in their neighborhood council, joining community activities, speaking out at community forums, volunteering or receiving assistance from social service programs, and simply engaging other residents in everyday neighborhood activities.

We understand our interviewees as middle class based on their occupational status, education, housing tenure, lifestyle/consumption practices, and self-identifications. Nearly all are college-educated professionals (actively employed and retired), or were working toward undergraduate/graduate degrees. Professions included architects, city government employees (public health, social work, community development), property managers, loan officers, office administrators, and college instructors. Nearly all interviewees are homeowners[9], but their specific housing suggests differences in income and assets. Some live in single-family homes, some in townhouses, others in condominium apartments. The interviewees experienced different vulnerabilities in the Great Recession, with some expressing no direct effects and others talking about losing jobs and struggling to avoid foreclosure. We did not ask them to situate themselves

in terms of class, though many did so. All who self-identified framed themselves as middle class (unsurprising given the normativity of middle class-ness in the US national imaginary), but several noted that they had grown up in poverty. On the whole, middle-class residents of Packdon and Spruce Ridge are less secure and less advantaged than those in some other Seattle neighborhoods. Regardless of when they moved to Packdon or Spruce Ridge, nearly all interviewees mentioned being unable to afford housing in other parts of the city.

Packdon and Spruce Ridge have broadly similar socio-economic profiles. Both have larger non-white and immigrant populations than Seattle as a whole (Table 1), and substantial numbers of residents living well below the poverty line. Both neighborhoods are predominantly white, but have long been home to significant numbers of African American, Asian American, Asian, Pacific Islander, and Native American residents. The histories of their respective social and built environments are quite different.

Packdon has long had pockets of deep poverty as under-employed white, African American, and Native American residents located near factories in the area, or sought housing in subsidized units that are scattered through the neighborhood. At the same time, unionized jobs in nearby industry and shipping gave the neighborhood a substantial (mostly white) middle class. The built environment of Packdon shows evidence of disinvestment and decline, but also new structures and amenities aimed at more privileged residents (Figure 1 and 2). In the last decade, new homeowners arrived seeking affordable housing as costs skyrocketed in other parts of Seattle. During and after the 2008 housing crash, many were forced into foreclosure. The neighborhood includes a large forested area where some homeless residents lived and many social service agencies assisted impoverished residents. During our research, residents were vigorously debating a proposed housing facility for formerly homeless individuals with mental

illness.[10] Widely held imaginaries of Packdon bespeak these changes and struggles. Describing the neighborhood's past, a longtime resident said, "It was like the Wild West!" (Todd). Other residents characterized it today as "up and coming" or "in transition", articulating progress from a derelict and dangerous past.

From the 1950s until the early 2000s, Spruce Ridge was Seattle Housing Authority (SHA)

subsidized housing for low-income families. Then it was re-built under the HOPE VI program to transform public housing projects into mixed-income neighborhoods through public/private development schemes. Today, Spruce Ridge includes impoverished residents living in public housing, upper-income residents of large and expensive single-family homes, and middle-income residents of market rate townhomes and condominiums. "Old Spruce Ridge" (as residents call it) was home to white, Asian, African American, and Native American residents. Some residents of old Spruce Ridge returned, but a significant number were displaced because of the reduced number of low-income units and influx of middle-class residents. While still multi-racial, impoverished residents of new Spruce Ridge are different than the community's earlier incarnation: a large number are immigrants, many are east African, and many arrived as refugees.

The neighborhood's present income mix is achieved through subsidized SHA and market-rate rental apartments, affordable townhouse and condominium units, and single-family owner-occupied homes ranging from modest to expensive. Despite real differences in incomes, Spruce Ridge is a surreal landscape of strikingly uniform aesthetics (Figure 3). Parks, community gardens, playgrounds, and activities in the development are intended to build interaction across difference. Class and race diversity are touted in City of Seattle and private developer recruitment materials for homeowners. A large community center hosts many programs for poorer residents and involves more privileged residents as volunteers for these programs.[11]

The social and material transformations of Spruce Ridge are reflected in residents' place imaginaries, as a homeowner says:

"Spruce Ridge is…a little island…it used to be a slum island and now it's going the other way!" (Joanne).

Another respondent referenced prior imaginaries of Spruce Ridge as "ghetto" or "project" and its reincarnation through the commodification of diversity:

"Through redevelopment, crime has reduced. There is a sense of safety in the neighborhood. It's less of 'project' housing... a lot of homeowners are like 'Oh, now it's beautified… We want to move into it now because it's no longer the ghetto.' So there are a lot of homeowners who have bought into that. … the reason they moved into Spruce Ridge was this sense of community. They bought into diversity" (Amal).

In spite of their different development histories, Spruce Ridge and Packdon share broad similarities as mixed income, mixed-race neighborhoods with histories of concentrated poverty, and contemporary efforts to produce them as middle-class landscapes. Yet as we show below,

middle-class place-making practices vary between them, producing differing poverty politics, engagements with middle-class privilege, and openings for cross-class alliance.

Middle-class place-making and poverty politics

In Packdon and Spruce Ridge, relational place-making (re)produces white middle-class normativity and quietly reinforces the "othering" of poverty and poorer residents. Our comparative analysis reveals a range of discursive and material place-making practices in each neighborhood that (re)make class identities and produce particular kinds of poverty politics. Contrasts between the two neighborhoods are instructive in understanding when, where and why the middle class and poorer groups act in alliance or opposition to one another.

(Re)producing middle-class normativity

The boundaries of middle-class normativity are negotiated in struggles over neighborhood landscapes. In both Packdon and Spruce Ridge, place-making emphasizes creating a "good" neighborhood, the kind of place middle-class residents would like to live and that they imagine others (like them) will enjoy. Yet place-making unfolds differently. For Packdon middle-class residents, the good neighborhood they imagine and work for is defined by the look and feel of the neighborhood landscape itself. In Spruce Ridge, by contrast, where the landscape already has an overtly middle-class visual aesthetic, place-making acts more upon poorer people as a way to produce middle class-ness. Tracing these distinct avenues for the (re)production of middle-class normativity illustrates the ways that middle-class place-making and middle-class actors in each neighborhood are implicated in the material and discursive construction of social difference.

Place-making efforts by Packdon residents are directed towards creating an orderly, safe, beautiful, owner-occupied neighborhood, replete with consumer amenities. Indeed, some residents' very definition of "a neighborhood" is premised on this type of built landscape, as in this description of Packdon's past and present:

"… back then it was derelict houses everywhere. …[I]t has changed a lot. It has become a neighborhood." (Emma).

For Emma, a fortyish white professional and homeowner, defining Packdon as a neighborhood necessarily precludes a landscape with visible indicators of poverty. Referencing changes in the landscape that he and others are working toward, Kevin (a twenty-something white veteran now in college) said,

"Everyone wants to live in a neighborhood that they feel safe in, and one of those safety things is being able to show off the neighborhood. You want to be able to say, 'Hey I live in this neighborhood' and have them drive by and go 'Oh hey, that park was absolutely beautiful!' not, 'Hey, so that supermarket we drove by, I was going to stop and get some ice but I wasn't sure about that place.' … it's a perception thing. I want to both show off my neighborhood and I also don't want anyone to take my fancy [things]…" .

Concern about "showing off" the neighborhood and embarrassment over visible signs of disorder or dereliction reveals how residents' identities and self-image are bound up in this vision of a safe, beautiful non-threatening, non-poor landscape.

This vision itself and residents' ideas about how to produce the good neighborhood that "everyone wants" directly reinforce middle-class normativities such as homeownership. One longtime resident spoke positively about new owner-occupied townhouses, saying,

"It was bringing balance to the neighborhood, because we were out of whack. And I think

we still are out of whack. In terms of owner-occupied housing versus rental-occupied....

we <u>need</u> stability here. We need a stable population that feels invested and safe and that

they want to <u>stay</u>." (Todd)

Todd, a white middle-aged homeowner assumes that to be "stable", a neighborhood must have a

certain proportion of homeowners. Given Seattle's high housing costs, homeownership here

implies a middle-class income. Todd's praise of new townhouses reinforces that homeownership

is the norm for which "out of whack" neighborhoods should strive. Other residents laud new

recreation and consumption opportunities. Annie, a white professional and homeowner, speaks

enthusiastically about a public library and cultural center, saying:

"...[we are] seeing these different pieces of what most neighborhoods have already that

are being struggled for, and built, and become part of this neighborhood."

She went on to say:

"… once it starts to feel more like a neighborhood, then the little businesses come…",

identifying coffee shops, restaurants, and boutiques as the sort of businesses she hopes to see.

This framing of desired neighborhood amenities carries with it an imagined middle-class

consumer who has the time and money to patronize them. The normativity of this imaginary is

further reinforced through the phrase, "what most neighborhoods already have."

The desired landscape is also normatively white. Racial and ethnic diversity are

articulated as desirable, yet framed as an amenity to be enjoyed. Annie said,

"I still feel lucky on this street...because my neighbors are really diverse. There's all

different types of people at all different levels of income. Different cultures and crowds."

Later, she continued this point, speaking about her Ethiopian neighbors,

"…they'll have a big cultural celebration of some sort. And they'll open up the garage doors and they'll be roasting coffee and there'll be all these women in these beautiful, fabulous dresses. And I'm just like, 'wow! That's cool!'"

For Annie and others in Packdon, the good neighborhood they are working to produce is predominantly white, but diverse enough to be experienced and perceived as fun or "cool".[12] Their place-making engages race difference but in relation to dominant whiteness, evident in Annie's framing of racial/ethnic difference as an addition to an implicit white norm. Notably, this framing is asymmetrical. It is articulated in a celebratory way, but positions persons of color as a supplement that enhances a normatively white neighborhood (rather than seeing all groups, including whites, as equally different from one another – see Kittay, 1999). The place-making expressed here erases whiteness as also being a form of racialized difference and instead positions non-whites as a "cool" supplement to an idealized neighborhood: clean, orderly, owner-occupied, consumer-oriented.

Relational place-making in Spruce Ridge (re)produces a similar white middle-class normativity, yet through different means. Middle class-ness is rendered via collective efforts to produce the neighborhood as a "landscape of opportunity" through which poorer residents can and should become middle class. Here, place-making enrolls middle-class and poorer residents in a collective aspirational project oriented toward correcting the assumed behaviors and characteristics of poorer residents. In a neighborhood where the built landscape is already aesthetically middle class, place-making acts upon poorer people as a way to produce a middle-class place. Efforts to re-situate poorer residents as aspirational middle-class actors are on one level discursive. Community center staff, for example, refer to residents of subsidized housing as "tenants", not "renters" because, as Amal explained,

"A tenant is someone who might be a homeowner someday. It says to them maybe they

won't be a renter forever."

Efforts to re-situate poorer residents as middle-class-in-the-making are also material. Poorer

residents are expected to be actively engaged in a host of self-improvement activities aimed at

helping them become middle class, such as sewing, English language, civic education, or

parenting classes. Interviewees often spoke about the need for poorer residents to participate in

these classes and take advantage of the neighborhood's landscape of opportunity, such as using

outdoor exercise areas or consuming fresh produce from community gardens. In these

formulations, poor residents have a responsibility to proceed along a road to the middle class that

is assumed to be literally built around them in Spruce Ridge.

This place-making vision is deeply relational – also explicitly implicating middle-class

residents. As Cynthia, a property manager and thirty-something homeowner said,

"…part of the mission for subsidized housing is supposed to be that you're teaching

people how to become citizens capable of living outside of subsidized housing…that they

will bring with [them] some understanding of why the people around them have an

expectation that the yard is weeded, the trash isn't overflowing, that you don't have

broken furniture piled up on the front porch."

This statement assumes that middle class neighbors naturally expect and create a clean and

orderly landscape, and that these expectations and behaviors will teach poorer neighbors to do

the same. Some middle-class residents contribute to the production of aspirational middle class-

ness more directly by volunteering in community programs. In these programs, stratified roles of

middle-class and poorer residents are sharp and distinct. At one event we observed, all volunteers

helping stage and facilitate the event were homeowners and all attendees were renters. Middle-

class volunteers tend to understand these activities as "improving" poorer residents. Describing a sewing class, Louise says:

"…the Somali women… they tend to come and use it as a social event. And the women who are really serious about learning to sew, they kind of separate themselves out from that. Because there's a group of women that come in and it's a chance to get out of the house and they love to talk and everything."

Louise, a retired professor and homeowner, repeatedly emphasized that the sewing class is for job training and creating things to sell, not an opportunity for socializing or "craft" sewing. She specifically identifies poorer neighbors in the class as Somali (understood in Spruce Ridge to mean immigrant and refugee), a racialized framing that assumes the whiteness and nativity of its implied other.

Enrolling middle-class residents in the transformation of their poorer neighbors sets up deeply asymmetrical relationships, positioning middle-class actors as experts on how to live in the neighborhood. This unequal relation reproduces middle-class normativity by foregrounding it as the ideal to which poorer residents should aspire and reform themselves. It also reproduces middle-class privilege. For example, volunteers un-problematically claim the power to decide what kinds of participation are acceptable (e.g. sewing for profit), or who they will assist:

"I'm not going to help everybody…I'm gonna target and focus on the people that are just that little step above and have gotten that little step further along, that can grasp on and understand the value of what they are getting and make something out of it… It doesn't have to meet all my standards but it has to be effective for that person in some degree." (Louise)

This statement simultaneously performs middle-class privilege and constitutes a poverty politics of the deserving and undeserving poor. Only aspirational poorer people are deserving of assistance: those who are a "little step above" and able to maximize the supposed benefits of the class. Such expressions of an ideal of striving and personal responsibility reinscribe notions of a deserving poor who are aspiring to belong to this middle-class place.

In Packdon and Spruce Ridge, place-making produces a "good neighborhood" on middle class terms and reinforces dominant class and race norms, but through different means: an emphasis on landscape aesthetics to be enjoyed/consumed versus an emphasis on producing aspirational middle-class subjects. A relational theorization of class identities and poverty makes visible that place-making does more than just produce normatively middle-class people and places. Importantly, this reproduction of middle class-ness as an unquestioned norm also furthers the "non class" status of middle-class residents. Their particular and class-based politics and interests are framed as unquestioned, abstract ideals that can be achieved by everyone and in every place. These forms of place-making reveal the poverty politics of middle-class actors that re-inscribe the other-ness and non-normativity of poverty and poorer neighbors. As we will show below, these renderings of poverty and poorer people as "other" through place-making allows privilege (middle-class and white) to remain unexamined in the production of class identities and poverty, rather than something to be engaged as part of possible dialogues, politics, or solutions.

(Re)producing poverty and poor others

Middle-class place-making carries out an ineluctable twinning. Producing normatively white middle-class-ness always requires work to close the ruptures represented by the presence

of poverty and poorer others. The visible presence of poverty and difference (writ large) challenge the white middle-class normativity at the heart of neighborhood place-making in Packdon and Spruce Ridge. When residents encounter individuals they understand to be poor, observe behaviors that counter middle class-neighborhood norms, or see conditions that they interpret as signaling poverty, these are framed as disruptive, threatening, excessive, and troubling. From there, it becomes common sense that poverty and poor others must be contained, transformed, or excluded. Their status must be explained and addressed in ways that do not challenge the ideal imagined white middle-class landscape. These are (a particular type of) poverty politics.

The poverty politics of middle-class place-making are advanced differently in each neighborhood. In Packdon, the production of a "poor other" is accomplished through the discourse of an "excess of poverty" and a poverty politics of containment. In Spruce Ridge, the production of a "poor other" is accomplished through a racialized discourse, suggesting an "excess of diversity", and a poverty politics of governing the behaviors of these (assumed non-white) persons. These efforts reinforce middle-class white normativity by framing poverty and poor others as "excessive", or in the case of Spruce Ridge, assuming poverty to be non-white. Importantly, middle class-ness is almost never mentioned directly, rather it is present as a powerful, yet unspoken, normal against which the other-ness of poverty and poorer people is defined.

In Packdon, middle-class residents encounter class and race difference daily, and many struggle with social differences that deviate from their expectations of what neighborhood life should be. For some, lived encounters with difference are more difficult than they had imagined:

"… it was unexpected, they didn't really think that they were going to be having to deal

with it in quite the way they were…it's one thing to say 'I'm going to go live in one of

the most diverse neighborhoods in the city.' It's another thing entirely the first time you

try to ask their neighbor to move their car and no one in the house speaks English. It's

another thing entirely if you're middle-class and it's a newly married couple, recently

graduated, kind of white collar job, living across the street from a house that has 12

people—it's a 4 bedroom but there are 12 people living in it. That's normal for a lot of

people but that's not normal for them. I find often times that those are the quote, unquote

"drug houses." The ones leaving at all hours of the night are really just because 12 people

have 12 very different schedules. It's just…disillusionment." (Kevin)

Kevin interprets a large number of people sharing a home as a sign of poverty and understands it

as "not normal", or worse, as evidence of criminality. For these residents, class and race diversity

are desirable in the abstract, but problematic when they directly affect residents' daily lives.

"Too much" poverty and difference is viewed as a problem. Even middle-class residents who

express support for poorer neighbors reinforce the idea that an excess of poverty is problematic.

Speaking about a homeless encampment in the greenbelt, Emma says,

"My attitude is, you know what, if they need somewhere to stay, I don't mind if they're

back there, as long as they're not committing crimes. I don't, I don't feel unsafe if they're

back there. If it was [another large homeless encampment nearby] I would. I think that

many people would scare me. But yeah, some of our neighbors want to call the police and

get them out of there. It's like, where are they gonna go? … as a society we need to at

least give 'em space to sleep. But I would feel differently if there were 50 families back

there…there's a limit to how many people before I stop feeling that way."

In these examples, the presence of poor others threatens middle-class people and their neighborhood imaginaries, revealing that they understand poverty and middle class-ness as mutually exclusive. These attitudes produce a poverty politics of limiting, containing, or balancing the presence of poverty in the neighborhood. These dynamics were evident in struggles over the proposed residence for formerly homeless people with mental illness. Many middle-class residents bitterly opposed siting the facility in Packdon, while others supported it. But the poverty politics of both groups emerged through the discourse of an excess of poverty.

Annie, arguing against the specific location, underscored the idea that there is an appropriate income mix for a neighborhood:

"… it's <u>so</u> super saturated with really low-income people under a lot of stress. You know, we were always thinking if we were able to develop something in that area, we would really try to do workforce housing. You know, mix in some lower income, but not… exclusively highly subsidized units. So, you know…this feels like the wrong place for this. Not Packdon as a whole, but this little micro 'hood feels like the wrong place. I think farther north could support it. Farther south could support it. But right here there's just a lot of stress."

She eventually supported the facility, but still expressed reservations:

"I really don't think that the…project is going to have a lot of negative impact. I think the population's going to be pretty contained. They're really struggling a lot. They're going to be in their units a lot, which I think is negative in that it's not going to be a positive influence. … they've taken one of the most, the easiest to develop and available pieces of land in that tiny little neighborhood and kind of locked it up."

The presence of these poorer individuals is acceptable, but only because they will be "contained" in their apartments. This poverty politics of containment is inextricably linked to middle-class place-making. Providing a safe home for vulnerable people is *not* viewed as positive, because allocating land for this purpose "locks it up" and prevents development, perhaps especially the forms of development that middle-class residents desire. Helping poorer residents is acceptable only if it does not impede middle-class place-making opportunities.

Middle-class residents of Spruce Ridge also frame poverty and poor others as problematic and at odds with tacitly assumed middle-class norms. Unsurprisingly, given the collective imperative of producing middle class-ness by transforming poorer residents, this othering targets behaviors in neighborhood space rather than the aesthetic landscape (which in Spruce Ridge already clearly signals middle class-ness). When asked about her interactions with poorer neighbors Joanne, a sixty-something white homeowner, referenced conflicts over behaviors in shared spaces, such as renters who littered or did not pull weeds.[13] When asked whether middle-class residents' stereotypes about poverty might be reinforced through these struggles, she said,

> "Right, right. And the other thing is the kids in the alley…their mothers aren't out there
> with them. And they are running around the alley and cars are coming through the alley.
> You know, that might work in Somalia but it does not work here in Seattle."

When asked about poverty, Joanne seamlessly substitutes race and nativity, offering the figure of a non-white immigrant/refugee mother who does not supervise her children. Poverty is identified through problematic behaviors in neighborhood space, reinforced as foreign and deviant through the specter of bad parenting, and differentiated from an unspoken white, native-born, norm through reference to East African refugees. This pushback against race/class

difference is especially notable given that many middle-class residents of Spruce Ridge

mentioned that they chose to live there because of the neighborhood's diversity. Joanne moved

to Spruce Ridge precisely because it was a mixed-race community, saying that she loves,

"…to be around different cultures and things, so I thought it would be fun."

She notes that some homeowners are disillusioned about the community and when asked what

these residents are upset about, says,

"I think it is race". Hesitating, she then says, "Class is layered in there too …but um, (long

pause) but I think a lot of its race" and finally, "I think they just didn't realize how mixed it

was."

Here we see the limits of diversity imaginary used to sell Spruce Ridge to middle-class actors.

Too much racial diversity (tightly bound to poverty) impinges on a normatively white middle-

class space and must be contained or transformed. A certain degree of diversity is "fun" for

middle-class homeowners, yet an excess of diversity is a threat.

The co-production of a middle-class actor and a deficient poor other is also wrought

through an imperative of participation in place-making. In spite of the widely articulated vision

that all residents will help produce a middle-class place through their participation in

neighborhood activities and community center programs, in reality comparatively few residents

participate. Over and over, residents and community center staff suggested this failure to engage

stood in the way of achieving ideal visions for the neighborhood. Yet their explanations reveal

the inextricable links between place-making practices that target an undeserving poor other and

the re-inscription of white middle-class privilege. Prior quotes about poorer residents'

responsibility to engage the landscape of opportunity toward their own betterment situate non-

participation as irresponsibility or bad choices (i.e., socializing in sewing class). Yet the

explanations given for non-participation by white middle-class homeowners are different:

"...why isn't there more participation from the...white, middle-class community in

Spruce Ridge? I don't think it has to do with they don't want to. They don't know how,

and when they do, they don't understand it. They don't understand what they are seeing

and they get turned off because it's not user friendly for them." (Louise).

Joanne echoed similar sentiments:

"I think, a lot of the... whether the economic diversity or the... ethnic diversity, it's just

people don't know what to do, they are uncomfortable."

Non-participating poor are wrong, irresponsible, or threatening, but the non-participating middle

class are just confused. Their choice to opt out is justifiable because the environment is not "user

friendly" for them. Middle-class privilege and poor others are tightly coupled here. Both quotes

are haunted by an imagined poor person who is so far from the norm that his/her behavior cannot

be understood by a middle-class person. This middle-class actor is afforded the power to choose

whether or not to get involved, and can choose not to participate if s/he does not feel

comfortable. The poor other *must* participate to demonstrate his/her middle-class aspirations,

regardless of how uncomfortable the environment may be.

Seeds of alliance, hopeful practices

Our story of relational place-making is more complex than the reproduction of class

boundaries and politics described thus far. We also ask whether middle-class and poorer groups

ever engage one another in more mutualistic ways and in doing this, we find slippages in the

class and race norms and boundaries negotiated in middle-class place-making. When relational

place-making involves engaged struggle with difference and inequality, actors may begin to recognize, articulate, and question race/class norms or poverty politics that were previously invisible and taken for granted. These insights and questions are the seeds of potential cross-class alliances. From them, residents may begin to recognize unequal consequences of middle-class place-making, challenge normative understandings of "disruptive" people and behaviors, or create deliberative spaces where a different poverty politics is expressed. Given Spruce Ridge's idealized vision of cross-class contact and the considerable resources invested in realizing it, one might expect to find these insights emerging there. Yet we found the opposite. Disruptions in normatively middle-class place-making and its problematic poverty politics occurred in Packdon. These challenges emerging in Packdon were for the most part liberal and non-radical, yet their presence is significant. They trouble the notion of middle class-ness as a normative ideal of landscape and everyday neighborhood life that "everyone wants", and in so doing, allow openings to recognize class and race privilege.

For instance, some middle-class Packdon residents are conflicted in their desire for a normatively white middle-class neighborhood and the changes this might entail. Many who are deeply engaged in middle-class place-making also speak positively about a neighborhood landscape that departs from a manicured beautiful aesthetic:

Annie: "… there's so much more diversity in terms of what people do with their houses, what they do with their yards… Like, my neighbor. He's got the junkiest yard in the world, right? And no one complains!

Emma: It's kind of lower expectations. It's true.

Annie: I don't want to say it's lower expectations. I think it's different expectations. You know, everyone has a certain independence, whether that's good or bad. People who are

in a neighborhood where there are more people who are like them, I think they have more

sense of the need to conform."

Annie resists the suggestion that deviations from a middle-class neighborhood aesthetic are

the result of "lower expectations," refusing to make a normative judgment. Later, she

underscored that appearance of people's houses is not a lifestyle choice, but a consequence of

material resources:

"How it actually works is that you need enough energy and time in your life, and money,

to make that kind of sacrifice for your yard."

This voicing of more systemic explanations for deviations from a middle-class aesthetic stands in

stark relief to the explanations offered by some Spruce Ridge residents, as in Joanne's

castigation of supposedly lazy renters who do not pull their weeds.

Emma and Annie are conflicted. They both want and don't want a middle-class built and

social environment. Of the neighborhood's race/class diversity and mixed landscape aesthetic,

Emma says,

"…I like the fact that I am forced to look at my own assumptions all the time. I'm forced

to be around people of a different ethnicity and think, "Does that make me

uncomfortable? And why?" And I'm forced to do that. Would I rather live in a more

upscale neighborhood? Probably! I don't and I'm happy to embrace that… But again,

would it be my choice, if I had a choice? Probably not. I'd rather live somewhere where

the lawns were all nice."

Here, Emma complicates the earlier narrative of racial/ethnic diversity as a fun spectacle to

be enjoyed. Diversity is also valuable because it makes her uncomfortable and because this

discomfort forces self-reflection. In Spruce Ridge, the discomfort of white middle-class

residents is framed as a justifiable reason for their non-engagement, as a "natural"

consequence of their exposure to a strange and deviant poor. Class and race privilege are

allowed to remain unexamined and untroubled. In contrast, Emma embraces this discomfort

and uses it to catalyze self-reflection – a move that troubles middle-class normativity and

begins to recognize class and race privilege.

Such reflection arises from residents' recognition that their desires for the neighborhood

are not uniformly held. This realization sometimes happens when they engage different

neighbors on their own terms. Kevin says that:

> "The best way to do that is in daily interactions and you get daily interactions with your
>
> neighbors. [I am] seeing people who move in and were uncomfortable with non-English
>
> speakers start to learn Spanish or pick up a couple of Spanish words to hang out at a
>
> BBQ, opening themselves up to new experiences." He goes on to say, "That's a really
>
> good place to be. I think even the people who are somewhat sequestered are starting to,
>
> if not open up, **at least they're starting to realize that some of their ideas are**
>
> **singular ideas**." (Kevin, emphasis ours)

This recognition of multiple perspectives paves the way for residents to consider their own

normative thinking; that what they want for the neighborhood may not be what everyone wants.

Emma reflects on the kinds of housing and businesses she is working to bring to the

neighborhood,

> "I don't have a sense of whether everyone in this neighborhood wants that kind of
>
> development or not."

In the breaking open of unquestioned ideals of a "good" neighborhood, residents

sometimes arrive at new, norm-challenging interpretations of neighborhood space. Many

Packdon residents complain about the built environment and disorderly behavior, especially pedestrians in the middle of neighborhood streets. Yet the recognition that their own norms are not everyone's opens the possibility of alternative readings:

"… there'll be some African American youths, like 16, 17, walking around the middle of [the street] on our way home, and they won't get out of the way… We decided this is their only avenue for striking back at society. For being like, "Screw you, society". And we need to let them have that! … You just have to slow down until they get out of the way, but it's, it's (hesitates)… I swear, it's them being like, 'Nope, we're gonna do our own thing. Screw you.'" (Emma)

Rather than seeing deviant behavior, Emma wonders whether she is seeing an intentional spatial strategy by the teens. Recognition that her own expectations are not everyone's leads her to question her own interpretation of their behavior. Emma does not explicitly name racism and marginalization, and she is hesitant and halting in her account of what she is seeing. But she nonetheless recognizes a wider range of acceptable ways to exist in neighborhood space and validates this: "We need to let them have that". In contrast, when black children are playing in the alleys in Spruce Ridge, Joanne can see only the failures of the children (and their parents) to fit themselves to white middle-class norms that remain unreflected upon and unchallenged. From Emma's position, a poverty politics that questions structural inequalities could someday grow, while Joanne's position can only give rise to a poverty politics of blame.

Insights like Emma's matter because they de-center middle-class norms, moving them from unexamined priorities assumed to be universally held toward priorities/practices recognized as one of several possibilities, and perceived as contradictory instead of only "good." To wit, many Packdon residents recognize that achieving their desired middle-class landscape has

negative consequences for poorer residents and come to modest insights about class and race

privilege. Marshall, a white mid-sixties banker and homeowner, frames changes to the built

environment as an improvement, but also a problem:

> "Well, good or bad… there have been several things that have…changed the landscape.
> They have pushed some of the lower income folks out of our neighborhood…One of the
> things that worries me is as we see things improve, I worry that we are gonna lose the
> diversity that we have…"

He continues, pointing out that the loss/retrenchment of NGOs serving poorer residents has,

> "…had a detrimental impact on our neighborhood. Those resources that were previously
> available are not available anymore. So what do those folks do when those resources
> aren't available to them anymore?"

Marshall sees that neighborhood "improvement" is a matter of perspective from a position of

socio-economic privilege, realizing that elements of the neighborhood landscape needed by its

most vulnerable residents are being replaced with amenities serving the more privileged. While

he does not directly articulate this as class privilege, Marshall is nonetheless recognizing the

asymmetrical inter-relation of poverty and middle-class privilege. The production of a

normatively middle-class landscape is no longer an un-problematized "good" for all, but is also a

threat to a more supportive landscape for impoverished members of the community. Marshall

and Emma stop short of saying that their own privilege is intimately related to the vulnerability

of others. But importantly, they directly engage typically unexamined spatial norms, social and

spatial inequalities, and differential consequences to middle-class place-making. In the questions

they ask about race, privilege, and the consequences of potential futures for their neighborhood,

some Packdon residents step back from an unquestioned reproduction of middle-class

normativity in place-making. These insights are political and significant: They are cracks in the unacknowledged consent that secures the "non-class" status of the middles classes.

Such insights also matter because they can be the basis for less hierarchical engagements across difference, progressive poverty politics, and spaces for more inclusive place-making. In Packdon, these hopeful practices were evident in an extended struggle over the new supportive housing residence. Some residents offered vociferous "Not In My Back Yard" responses, demonizing and criminalizing homeless people and the mentally ill. Yet driven by their own questions about whether the neighborhood they want is what everyone wants or is even "good" for everyone (especially poorer residents), other Packdon residents sought to create spaces where singular neighborhood imaginaries could be questioned and more inclusive futures sought. Several residents organized a community forum about the development that sparked a huge turnout and strong statements for the facility; not just against it. Emma speaks with pride about their effort to create an inclusive space for dialogue and pain about its contentious nature:

"We worked so hard. We really did. And it was a disaster… we made a lot of mistakes…I want to cry when I think about it…We didn't know what we were doing… The one thing I did like about it is that we leafleted the whole neighborhood. And we <u>got</u> people, I mean, people who couldn't speak barely English to come out. We got people, older immigrants coming out, clutching these little leaflets that we left on their doors, to the meeting. And I was like, 'whoa, we <u>did</u> something.'"

In spite of the antagonisms, this initial forum led other residents to create additional spaces for deliberation:

"….as time went along, there were a couple of other folks that decided it was time to maybe reign in the dialogue a little bit. So there were two individuals that held living

room conversations. They invited a diverse group of folks from the most outspoken critics of the project to people like me and people in between. And so that kind of started a dialogue and…then [the neighborhood council] decided to start…an advisory group." (Marshall).

Notably, the living room hosts were people deeply invested in creating Packdon as a normatively middle-class landscape. The advisory group included residents both strongly opposed to, and in favor of, the development. The living room conversations and meetings of the advisory group involved conflictual, often painful debates about different neighborhood futures. Yet through these struggles, some residents began to see the supportive housing facility and its residents as legitimate parts of the neighborhood, rather than as threats to its "stability" or middle class-ness. At a neighborhood council meeting we observed shortly before the facility opened, residents intently questioned a staffer about how to best support their new neighbors when encountering them at the bus stop, in neighborhood shops, and near their new home. One member reminded others that transitioning from the street or a shelter might be difficult for them, making their first few months in the neighborhood especially challenging. Although some residents' questions showed misconceptions about homelessness and mental illness, their expressed desire to engage their new neighbors suggests a multi-layered enacted poverty politics that pushes beyond containment, exclusion and transformation strategies.

It is important not to overstate the transformation of middle-class actors or poverty politics in Packdon. Our respondents remain conflicted and contradictory. At one moment they are able to see structural inequality and privilege, and the next they suggest that if poorer neighbors would only be more orderly or stop hitting their children, their poverty would be alleviated. Some residents still suggest poorer people are lazy and refer to "those drunk bums"

who sleep in the park. Nonetheless, non-poor residents' active engagements with, and reflections on, social difference in their place-making efforts also contain moments of insight, critical reflection and recognition of privilege. These openings are significant because they counter the hegemony of middle-class superiority and open the possibility of different understandings of class and poverty.

Why do we see these openings, engagements and reflections in middle-class poverty politics in Packdon? Many middle-class residents came to Packdon because it is the only place in Seattle where they could afford homeownership. They have experienced housing choice constraints stemming from their class position and seen themselves as less advantaged in relation to more privileged others. In Packdon, they are privileged compared to poorer neighbors, yet also less privileged relative to middle-class homeowners in most Seattle neighborhoods. These complicated relational geographies of class and privilege experienced by Packdon homeowners render them more likely to reflect upon their class identities and on their privileged role in changes that threaten poorer neighbors. Also important, Packdon's built environment and the place imaginaries harnessed to it remain open for active negotiation. Because of its chaotic built environment, the neighborhood's material and social futures remain obviously open for struggle. Abandoned/dilapidated and newly built homes and businesses, often side by side, literally make visible to middle-class residents the presence of poverty *and* prosperity in their neighborhood, and the ongoing negotiation of changes for better *and* worse. Place imaginaries that frame Packdon as transitioning reinforce this sense of flux and comparative openness to multiple ways of being and engaging in the neighborhood. The Packdon landscape does not express an absolute and already-achieved middle class-ness, nor do the experiences, identities, and aspirations of its residents.

In contrast, life in Spruce Ridge is structured around an asymmetrical model of relational place-making expected to achieve an idealized vision of inclusion, diversity, and support of marginalized people that undergirds its place-making goals. This vision is pre-configured in a built environment that reflects a thoroughly realized middle-class aesthetic. Further, the founding principle of the community (as with HOPE VI and other socially engineered mixed-income communities) is aspirational middle class-ness. Poorer residents, specifically their behaviors and engagements with various initiatives, are conduits for producing a middle-class place. The enrollment of middle-class residents in these initiatives sets up hierarchical and pedagogical relations as necessary and important parts of this place-making project. For example, Louise spoke in glowing terms about a garden project that allows residents to sell what they grow:

"It's efficacy. It's beauty. That garden is beautiful…and [the gardeners] can earn money….So the same element - basically give it value and it can bridge the gap. So that is a perfect project that bridges the gap, because I shop there and all the middle-class residents go and buy their arugula 'cause it's organic! … Then once week we hand out coupons [for purchases at the garden] to improve the diets among renters."

Everyone has a clear and unquestioned role in this vision: Low income gardeners earn money, low income renters get better diets when they are given coupons, and middle-class homeowners get organic arugula and a beautiful neighborhood. Within these fixed inter-relations, a host of boundaries and unequal social relations remain unquestioned. The essentialization and naturalization of middle class-ness means that poverty cannot be directly named or structurally engaged, nor middle-class privilege problematized. The framing of diversity as something to be consumed by white homeowners obscures the privilege that enables them to embrace forms of diversity that are "fun," but reject those that are unwanted, unfamiliar,

or make them uncomfortable (unsupervised children, weeds). Material inequalities along lines of race cannot be discussed, even as residents' seamless substitution of race for (refugee) poverty reveals their unrecognized assumption that poverty is always non-white and exceptional or circumstantial. In total, these kinds of interactions fail to consider that those named as poor might have a different analysis of class relations or might argue for different actions and engagements than the "helping" around which cross-class relations in Spruce Ridge are scripted.

Conclusions

Examining residential neighborhoods as sites of class identity formation reveals how class difference and poverty politics are made and re-made – not just in labor organizing, workplaces, and street protests but also in the place-making efforts of neighborhood residents. We show that class politics are articulated through multiple sites and subjects. Drawing on relational poverty theory, we demonstrate that the discursive and material practices producing "poverty" are politically significant. Our analysis of middle-class consent or refusal of the "non class" normativities advanced in place-making traces how poverty politics constitute class politics. In some respects, our research re-affirms long-held arguments that class and race boundaries are re-inscribed in the face of difference in urban residential neighborhoods. We have shown how this rich complex of factors normalizes a culture of domination that constitutes and perpetuates middle-class white identities.

But theorizing neighborhoods as dense sites also moves us beyond a persistent focus on the reinforcement of class and race boundaries. Place-making always involves encounters with persons who trouble dominant materialities and identities. These encounters sometimes produce negotiations (rather than dominations) over the future of that place. Examining these negotiations

reveals disruptions in dominant narratives of poverty that can lead to more reflexive interactions, sowing seeds for cross-class alliance. These complex, place-specific negotiations of difference contain nascent challenges to a poverty politics of exclusion. Specifically, engaging in everyday place-making practices, some residents began to recognize race/class privilege, and some initiated cross-class/race engagements (even when this is personally painful and difficult). A relational analysis of place-making reveals how different encounters, identities and politics get woven together in ways that open up the possibility for renegotiating poverty politics.

Our analysis shows that place-making can both reinforce *and* trouble middle-class privilege, and begins to tease out when, where, and why one or the other may take center stage. We find that communities coalesced, or literally built (such as Spruce Ridge) around a project of aspirational middle class-ness simultaneously amplify and obscure middle-class and white privilege. Place-making interactions and everyday encounters between residents are structured and governed in ways that do not trouble white middle-class privilege nor individualistic and blaming representations of poverty and poorer people. In such contexts, place-making leaves little room for questioning the founding assumptions or ideals about middle-class people and places, or even for recognition that cross-class boundaries are being reproduced and ultimately re-inscribed. We also show, however, that place-making can also involve engaged struggle with grounded actually-experienced forms of difference that cross class lines and trouble middle-class normativity and privilege.

Our analysis suggests these openings are likely to emerge when subjects' emplaced experiences of class/race privilege highlight their own (unequal) position relative to others. This appears where there is a combination of a mixed built environment and also contested place imaginaries that together make visible the ways in which place, poverty, and privilege are being

actively negotiated, with multiple possible futures. Struggles over these futures can be painful

and difficult, leaving lasting animosities, yet when they lead to reflection on class and race

privilege, they are the nascent articulations of alternative poverty politics, and hopeful practices

that may pave the way for cross class understandings or even alliances.

Our analysis makes several larger contributions. We develop detailed insights into *how*

middle-class residents secure and reproduce their class advantages. They do so through

hegemonic framings of middle-class privilege as normative and through discursive and material

efforts that fix white middle-class norms onto neighborhood residents and landscapes. Our

relational analysis shows that these modes of middle-class place-making situate poverty and

poorer people as 'other', exceptional, different, foreign, and abnormal; fostering a poverty

politics of exclusion, containment, or aspiration/transformation. Further, these modes of place-

making reproduce the depoliticized (i.e. non-class) status of the middle class. The construction of

their own aesthetic preferences, homeownership aspirations, and consumption desires as the

aspirational ideal for everyone work to obscure the ways in which these priorities are advanced

through class/race privilege with negative consequences for poorer residents. We have shown

how these interlocked dimensions of middle-class place-making situate poverty *and* middle-class

privilege outside the realm of politics, rendering them unquestionable and intractable.

These middle-class politics are not a foregone conclusion. Looking for something other

than a poverty politics of difference and exclusion reveals the presence and possibility of other

kinds of middle-class agency. Middle class residents do not always consent to normatively

middle-class place-making priorities and practices. People experience and engage place-making

through complicated layerings of class/race privilege and marginalization shaped through their

current circumstances, over the course of their life histories, and in relation to imaginaries of

other places with which they identity or dis-identify. For some middle-class residents, the place-making process – especially when it involves engaged struggle with difference – prompts questioning of previously unexamined norms and new insights into class and race privilege.

These insights may be tentative and contradictory. But they are notable and significant in the face of a pervasive de-politicization and obscuring of middle-class actors as having particular interests and privileges. When middle-class actors articulate their own privilege and the differential effects of their place-making priorities, this creates openings that begin to politicize middle class-ness itself. In social science research predominantly focused on reading the reproduction of class boundaries, such openings where middle-class agency creates alternative understandings of poverty have remained theoretically unseen. In a post-crisis US where social and political consensus around aspirational middle class-ness and individualized poverty are being powerfully re-secured in many arenas, recognizing and theorizing these openings is of the utmost importance.

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[1] In addition, our approach understands middle-class position as produced through intersectional process of race, religion and gender.

[2] We use pseudonyms for the neighborhoods, and all interviewees quoted here.

[3] This is a partial subset of possible activities and interactions that could be considered place-making. Massey (2005) and others suggest all practices constitute place, not just the everyday actions that residents perform and argue for a part of the neighborhood they desire. We focus on these more specific forms of place-making because they are central to the negotiation of class identities and relations, the central concern of our project.

[4] Relational poverty research focuses on political-economic relations and a range of social positions, identities and processes (such as racialization, criminalization, adverse incorporation in to the labor market, neoliberalization of the public sphere, and so on) as they either produce material poverty and/or contribute to the production of poverty discourses of difference (Hickey 2009; Mosse 2010; Lawson et al. 2012).

[5] As O'Connor (2002), Schram (2000) and others have noted, these constructions of worthy and unworthy poor are centuries old, found in Elizabethan poor law, colonial US poor relief, and other times and places.

[6] The agency and resistance of those named/signified as 'poor' against these framings is a deeply important part of relational poverty analysis, but it is not our direct concern in this article.

[7] See also Lemanski (2006), Ballard and Jones (2011) and Scheurmans (2013) on South Africa, and Lawson, Jarosz, and Bonds (2008) on the US.

[8] The interviews were open ended, 45-90 minutes, audio recorded and transcribed. Interviews were structured around foundational questions prompting interviewees to talk about the neighborhood, their history or relationship to it, current activities, perceptions of the neighborhood's positive/negative elements, patterns of change, and so on. Follow up questions probed to elicit further discussion, especially around themes of class, race, gender, place imaginaries present in interviewees' initial responses to open ended questions.

[9] Three interviewees rent their homes. Notably, all three are pursuing undergraduate or graduate degrees, and articulated clear middle-class aspirations in their interview remarks.

[10] This facility opened in December 2013.

[11] The community center programming is modeled on the late 19th/early 20th century settlement house movement in the US and UK and is formally linked to the NGO that operates a network of similar 'neighborhood houses' across the region.

[12] These expressions mirror findings from other research on a liberal middle class desire for "diverse" neighborhoods (Lees 2008).

[13] Because nearly all impoverished residents of Spruce Ridge live in subsidized housing, "renter" is often used as a synonym for "poor."

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Figure captions:

Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of Packdon, Spruce Ridge, and Seattle (Source: American Community Survey, 2011)

Figure 1: Older housing in Packdon (Source: Authors)

Figure 2: Newer housing in Packdon (Source: Authors)

Figure 3: Housing in Spruce Ridge (Source: Authors)