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Preserving racial hierarchy amidst changing racial demographics: how neighbourhood racial preferences are changing while maintaining segregation

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ABSTRACT

Despite long-term, documented declines in racialized attitudes, racial inequality persists. Scholars have theorized why this dissonance exists but few have empirically demonstrated how views can become more progressive while simultaneously maintaining inequality. The present study uses neighbourhood racial preferences and their influence on racial residential segregation to demonstrate how in a diversifying context residents can become more “accepting” while simultaneously maintaining the racial hierarchy, the opposite of what most of the literature currently assumes. Using data from three distinct sources in the United States, this research finds that U.S. residents are increasingly willing to live amidst diversity yet whites still concentrate in white neighbourhoods. In short, white Americans are more willing to live in diverse neighbourhoods than in the past, but they are not willing to desegregate. We argue this preserves racial inequality. We conclude with a discussion of our findings and their implications for future research and practice.

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KEYWORDS Racism; neighbourhood preferences; racial segregation; racial inequality; racial diversification; quantitative methodology

Introduction

In the United States and around the world, the election of Barack Obama sparked optimism that racism was on the demise and racial equity was obtainable. However, over time this enthusiasm has dampened as racial wealth gaps continue to grow, racially motivated hate crimes persist, and the racial overtones in the 2016 Brexit vote and U.S. presidential election highlighted ongoing antagonism. The juxtaposition of progress and persistent inequality¹ illuminates the complexity inherent in the racial positional hierarchy. In fact,

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race scholars have long argued that racial stereotypes, attitudes and actions continually emerge, transform and disappear and it is this adaptation that enables racial hierarchy to persist (Blumer 1958; Bonilla-Silva 1997; Feagin 2010). Yet, it remains unclear exactly how this occurs.

The present study is an in-depth investigation into how one mechanism that perpetrates racial inequality – residential racial preferences – has changed over time yet still upholds the racial hierarchy. We examine how and to what extent racial attitudes about racially diverse neighbourhoods are becoming more progressive while simultaneously reinforcing racial segregation. To conduct this empirical investigation, we utilize data from three sources: hypothetical examples, the first longitudinal neighbourhood preference factorial experiment, and the decennial U.S. Censuses. This multidimensional approach enables us to empirically demonstrate (1) how preferences regarding immediate neighbourhood composition change but can still reinforce segregation and (2) the extent to which this is occurring within the contemporary United States. We conclude by discussing the implications of these findings for future studies and policy.

Theories of racism: beliefs verses structure

Initial theories of racism conjectured that racism was a psychological abnormality wherein individuals believed outgroups were biologically, morally or socially inferior (Allport 1954; Wilson 1978; Emerson and Woo 2006). These theories presumed whites were the majority and thus adverse beliefs about nonwhites scaled upward to perpetuate racial inequality. Hence, studies finding decreasing proportions of whites affirming the biological inferiority of people of colour optimistically concluded racial discrimination was disappearing (Schuman et al. 1997; Pettigrew et al. 2011). However, research on racial discrimination and inequality finds racial biases and inequality persists in schools (Van Ausdale and Feagin 2001; Lewis 2003), the work place (Pager 2003; Royster 2003), the criminal justice system (Alexander 2010; Bobo and Thompson 2010) and the housing market (Bobo and Zubrinsky 1996; Emerson, Yancey, and Chai 2001; Charles 2003). In response to this dissonance, scholars realized their theories of racism were incomplete.

Racism is not a specific set of illogical beliefs but a social structure that transforms over time preserving the racial hierarchy (Feagin and Vera 1995; Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997; Bonilla-Silva 1997). The mechanisms that enable this preferential treatment adjust over time enabling inequality to persist. Empirically substantiating how specific racial attitudes morph to maintain racial inequality remains a methodological challenge. We choose to use racial residential segregation to illuminate this empirical predicament of racism research and provide a theoretical interpretation of the seemingly contradictory results.

Neighbourhood preferences and racial residential segregation

In the United States, racial residential segregation is a key factor perpetuating racial inequality in education, employment, income, health and incarceration (Wilson 1987; Dwyer 2010; Sampson 2012; Lareau and Goyette 2014; Quillian 2014) and is maintained through historical legacies, discrimination within the housing market, and individual beliefs and preferences (Jackson 1985; Clark 1992; Charles 2000; Charles 2003; Squires and Kubrin 2005; Crowder, Hall, and Tolnay 2011; Farley 2011; Lareau and Goyette 2014). Since segregation is partially perpetuated by individual beliefs and preferences, it is an ideal case study into how attitudes change over time to maintain the racial hierarchy.

Research on neighbourhood racial preference began with Farley and his colleagues exploring residents' unwillingness to live with racial others (Farley et al. 1978; Farley et al. 1993). Utilizing a series of flashcards with hypothetical neighbourhoods, these studies asked respondents whether they would move into neighbourhoods of various racial demographics. Results indicated blacks were willing to live with both whites and blacks, whereas whites' ideal neighbourhoods were majority white. Consequently, Farley and his colleagues argued racial residential segregation would decrease as whites were more willing to live with people of colour. In fact, when Farley repeated his study in 1992 and 2004 he concluded that whites' increased willingness to live with blacks was contributing to decreasing segregation levels (Farley et al. 1993; Farley 2011).

Desiring to unpack whether these neighbourhood racial preferences were the result of racial prejudices or non-racialized preferences, scholars utilized a variety of experimental methodologies (Bobo and Zubrinsky 1996; Charles 2000; Emerson, Yancey, and Chai 2001; Harris 2001; Krysan et al. 2009; Lewis, Emerson, and Klineberg 2011). Specifically, these researchers examined whether neighbourhood preferences were the product of socioeconomic preferences, crime levels, poor schooling, the desire to be with same race others or racial prejudices. The majority of these studies provide evidence that neighbourhood preferences are racialized. In particular, all residents no matter their own racial identification prefer living with racial groups that are atop the racial hierarchy (Bobo and Zubrinsky 1996; Charles 2000; Emerson, Yancey, and Chai 2001; Krysan et al. 2009; Lewis, Emerson, and Klineberg 2011).

However, like Farley et al.'s (1978) initial research, these studies focus on the factors shaping neighbourhood preferences *and* assume residents' willingness to live in more diverse neighbourhoods will correspond to their willingness to desegregate. Much like initial theories of racism, the neighbourhood preference literature has primarily focused on an overt marker of racial beliefs – willingness to live with neighbourhood diversity – and

assumed progressive racial beliefs will foster desegregation. We ask, is this the case?

Research questions and hypotheses

To explore how residents' neighbourhood preferences can change while remaining resistant to residential integration, we first use hypothetical examples to consider the question: *Can residential preferences be more favourable towards neighbourhood racial diversity while maintaining segregation?* We then use a longitudinal factorial experiment to examine changes in residents willingness to live with racial others asking: *Are residents more willing to live with racial others in the 2010s than in the 2000s? And, at the end of the decade are residents more willing to desegregate than they were at the beginning of the decade?* Based on theories of racism we suggest three possible answers to these questions.

Hypothesis 1a: Gradual Acceptance. Over time residents are becoming more willing to live amongst racial diversity and more willing to desegregate.

Hypothesis 1b: Token Tolerance. Although residents are increasingly accepting of some diversity, residents still resist desegregating (equally distributing across all neighbourhoods).

Hypothesis 1c: Racial Stagnation. Residents are neither becoming more willing to live amongst racial others nor desegregate.

Building off these first three questions, we then ask: *Do changes in residents' preferences over time reinforce racial group positionality on the racial hierarchy?* Once again drawing on theories of racism, we propose two possible hypotheses.

Hypothesis 2a: Outgroup Aversion. As initial theories of racism presumed, residents' aversion to outgroups is driven by ethnocentrism and thus residents are equally averse to living with all outgroups.

Hypothesis 2b: Reinforcing Racial Hierarchy. As recent theories of racism assert, no matter residents' racial identification, they will prefer white neighbourhoods over Asian neighbourhoods followed by Latino and black neighbourhoods.

Finally, we examine *whether changes in neighbourhood diversity over the last three decades correspond with residential desegregation.* We use a multidimensional, multi-data approach to illuminate how neighbourhood racial preferences are changing and influencing segregation in the contemporary United States.

Data

The data from this study come from three sources. First, we use simulated data for our hypothetical examples. Second, we mirror previous studies on

neighbourhood preferences and utilize telephone administered factorial experiments that systematically vary neighbourhood crime levels, school quality, housing values and neighbourhood racial composition (Emerson, Yancey, and Chai 2001; Lewis, Emerson, and Klineberg 2011) collected in one metropolitan area (Bobo and Zubrinsky 1996; Charles 2000; Krysan et al. 2009; Farley 2011; Lewis, Emerson, and Klineberg 2011; Swaroop and Krysan 2011). Third, we use the U.S. Decennial Censuses to examine trends in racial residential segregation.

Factorial experiment survey data

Our data comes from the 2003, 2005, 2013 and 2014 waves of the Kinder Institute for Urban Research's Houston Area Survey (HAS). Respondents for this annual telephone survey of the Houston metropolitan area were selected using a two-stage random-digit-dialing procedure of landlines and cell-phones.² Houston has the most equitable distribution of whites, blacks, Latinos and Asians of all U.S. metropolitan areas (Emerson et al. 2012). Thus, surveying Houstonians ensures respondents can reasonably imagine neighbourhood racial diversity.

In the selected years, the survey included a factorial experiment of neighbourhood racial preference (Lewis, Emerson, and Klineberg 2011). Respondents were given the prompt,

Imagine that you are looking for a new house and you find one that you like more than any other house. It has everything that you've been looking for, it's close to work, and is within your price range. Checking on the neighbourhood, you find that ...

Then, respondents were given facts about the neighbourhood's crime rate (low or high), school quality (low or high), housing values (increasing or decreasing) and racial demographics; the factors all varied randomly and the order in which the factors were mentioned was also randomized.

The hypothetical neighbourhood racial demographics varied depending on the respondents' racial identity. For example, white respondents were told the neighbourhood was ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty, ninety or one hundred per cent white and the remaining percentage was either black, Latino or Asian.³ Similarly, black respondents were told the neighbourhood was a given proportion black and the remaining proportion was either white, Latino or Asian. Although multiracial neighbourhoods exist, we use binary neighbourhood compositions because we are interested in isolating the implicit racial discrimination of particular groups rather than projecting possible patterns of future neighbourhood integration. Even with these simpler neighbourhood types, each racial group had a total of 248 possible vignettes.⁴

To clarify what respondents heard, consider an example vignette given to a Latino respondent.

Checking on the neighbourhood, you find that the crime rate in the area is low, the neighbourhood is eighty per cent Latino and twenty per cent white, the property values are decreasing, and the public schools in the area are of low quality. How likely or unlikely do you think it is that you would buy this house? Do you think you'd be very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, or very unlikely to buy the house?

U.S. decennial census

To compare neighbourhood preferences to actual residential segregation, we use the 1980, 1990, 2000 and 2010 Decennial Census of the Houston Metropolitan Area. We operationalize neighbourhoods as census tracts and normalize all tracts to the 2010 census tracts boundaries using Logan, Xu, and Stults' (2014) cross-walk files.

Measures and method

Our examination of how changing racial preferences influence racial inequality entails the measurement of two key concepts: racial beliefs and inequality. For our study, we operationalize racial beliefs as neighbourhood preferences and racial inequality as residential racial segregation.

Measures of neighbourhood racial preference

We conceptualize neighbourhood racial preference as *the amount of diversity residents are willing to live with in their residential neighbourhood*. For our hypothetical examples, we pre-select white's neighbourhood racial preferences. When using the U.S. Census data, we examine the proportion of residents living with racial others in their neighbourhoods. In our factorial experiments, we measure neighbourhood racial preference as the proportion of respondents' willingness to live with racial others.⁵ Specifically, whether respondents were or were not likely to buy a house⁶ in a neighbourhood with racial others controlling for the neighbourhoods' crime rate, school quality and housing values as well as respondents' race,⁷ educational attainment, gender identity, year of birth centred at the samples' median, marital status, nativity and home ownership.⁸ Controlling for these factors disentangles changes in racial attitudes from changes in the sample's demographics (Table 1).

Measures of racial residential segregation

The unequal dispersion of racial groups across space – not immediate neighbourhood diversity – leads to the unequal distribution of infrastructure,

Table 1. Descriptive statistics by respondents' survey years.

| | 2003/2005 | 2013/2014 |
|------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Dependent variable | | |
| Willing to buy home | 0.43 (0.01)* | 0.47 (0.01)* |
| Respondent's race | | |
| <i>White</i> | 0.35 (0.01)* | 0.50 (0.01)* |
| <i>Black</i> | 0.32 (0.01)* | 0.21 (0.01)* |
| <i>Latino</i> | 0.33 (0.01)* | 0.29 (0.01)* |
| Neighbourhood factors | | |
| Proportion of "other" race | 0.50 (0.01) | 0.50 (0.01) |
| Neighbourhood "other" race | | |
| <i>White</i> | 0.28 (0.01)* | 0.17 (0.01)* |
| <i>Black</i> | 0.30 (0.01)* | 0.26 (0.01)* |
| <i>Latino</i> | 0.23 (0.01) | 0.24 (0.01) |
| <i>Asian</i> | 0.19 (0.01)* | 0.33 (0.01)* |
| High crime | 0.51 (0.01) | 0.50 (0.01) |
| Low quality schools | 0.49 (0.01) | 0.50 (0.01) |
| Decreasing housing values | 0.50 (0.01) | 0.50 (0.01) |
| Demographic characteristics | | |
| Education | | |
| <i>Less than high school</i> | 0.15 (0.01)* | 0.12 (0.01)* |
| <i>High school</i> | 0.24 (0.01)* | 0.20 (0.01)* |
| <i>Some college</i> | 0.31 (0.01)* | 0.28 (0.01)* |
| <i>Bachelors' degree</i> | 0.19 (0.01)* | 0.23 (0.01)* |
| <i>Graduate work</i> | 0.11 (0.01)* | 0.17 (0.01)* |
| Female | 0.55 (0.01)* | 0.51 (0.01)* |
| Birth year | 1961 (0.29) | 1962 (0.33) |
| Child in house | 0.48 (0.01)* | 0.42 (0.01)* |
| Married | 0.52 (0.01) | 0.54 (0.01) |
| Foreign born | 0.21 (0.01) | 0.21 (0.01) |
| Renter | 0.36 (0.01)* | 0.28 (0.01)* |
| <i>N</i> | 2,976 | 2,693 |
| Total <i>N</i> | | 5,669 |

Note: Standard errors are presented within the parenthesis. The * denotes a statistically distinguishable difference between the years' proportions. *P*-value is ≤ 0.05 .

educational resources and public services which in turn perpetuates socioeconomic inequality (Sampson 2012; Sharkey 2013; Quillian 2014). Thus, we utilize racial residential segregation as a measure of racial inequality.

In our hypothetical example and use of the U.S. Census data, we employ the Segregation Index (Gorard and Taylor 2002). The Segregation Index matches our theoretical conception of segregation – the even distribution of groups across all neighbourhoods – and is adventitious for our purposes because it can be used with multiple racial groups across cities with varying racial demographics. The Segregation Index (denoted as *S*) is calculated as follows:

$$S = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=0}^N \left| \frac{a_i}{A} - \frac{t_i}{T} \right|$$

where *i* is the census tract; *N* is the total number of census tracts, *a_i* is the number of the selected racial group in the *i*th census tract; *A* is the number

of the selected racial group in the entire metropolitan area; t_i is the total population in the i th census tract; T is the population in the metropolitan area.

In our factorial experiment, we operationalize racial residential segregation as *resident's willingness to disperse evenly across all neighbourhoods regardless of racial composition* (i.e. their willingness to desegregate). We estimate this willingness using our neighbourhood race coefficient. When holding all else constant, this coefficient represents the influence racial composition has on residents' willingness to live in various areas. We operationalize a null effect as willingness to desegregate.

Results

Hypothetical example – examining neighbourhood preferences verses segregation

Can residential preferences be more favourable towards neighbourhood racial diversity while maintaining segregation? The link between neighbourhood racial preferences and segregation requires examining residents' willingness to live in diverse places *and* distribute across space evenly. Although related, these two concepts are distinct.

Empirically speaking, no matter residents' neighbourhood preferences a one hundred per cent white city cannot be segregated. Conversely, residents in a city that is twenty-five per cent white, black, Latino and Asian could be more willing to live in diverse neighbourhoods than the aforementioned city but still be more segregated. For instance, white residents in this city might be willing to live in neighbourhoods that are twenty per cent nonwhite. Yet, given the city's racial demographics, complete integration would require white residents to live in neighbourhoods that were seventy-five per cent nonwhite.

This relationship between city racial demographics, neighbourhood preferences and residential segregation means that the relationship between residents' preferences and residential segregation transforms when a city diversifies. To help illustrate this point, consider a hypothetical city at two time points. In both periods, the city has 50,000 people living in nine neighbourhoods. At time one, whites make up seventy per cent of the population and prefer to live in neighbourhoods where there is only one nonwhite resident for every ten white residents. As visualized in [Figure 1](#), this means whites live in neighbourhoods with 5,000 whites and 500 nonwhites. At time two, whites make up fifty per cent of the population. In this latter time, whites are twice as willing to live with racial others. That is, whites prefer to live in neighbourhoods that have two nonwhite residents for every ten white residents. Thus, whites live in neighbourhoods with 5,000 whites and 1,000 nonwhites.

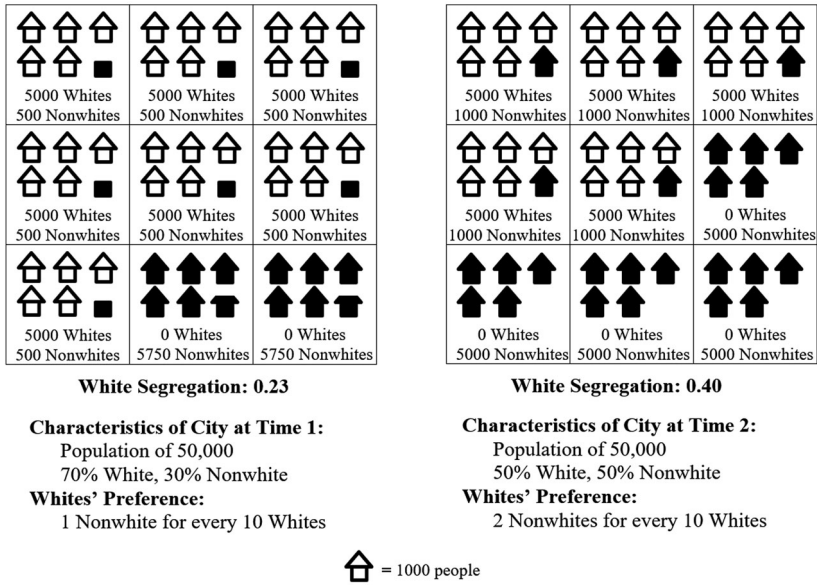


Figure 1. City simulation at two points in time. Note: The *White Segregation Index* is interpreted as the proportion of whites that would need to move to be equally distributed across all neighbourhoods. Using the traditional measure of evenness, *Index of Dissimilarity*, results are comparable. Segregation in Time 1 is 0.77 and rises to 0.80 in Time 2. See the *Measures of Racial Residential Segregation* section for a discussion of why we choose to use the Segregation Index.

However, from time one to time two, the even distribution of whites across the city dropped. In time one, the White Segregation Index was 0.23, meaning that twenty-three per cent of the population would need to relocate for whites to be evenly distributed across all nine tracts. By time two, the White Segregation Index *nearly doubled*, with forty per cent of the population needing to relocate for whites to be evenly distributed across the nine tracts. In other words, over time whites were twice as willing to live with nonwhites yet this increased willingness did not keep pace with the racial diversification in the city. This hypothetical example demonstrates even without constraining factors (i.e. availability of housing, access to credit, etc.) that curtail residents from obtaining their ideal communities, whites increasing preferences for diversity can still maintain the racial hierarchy when a society is diversifying.

Factorial experiment – examining residents’ willingness to live amongst diversity and spread evenly across all neighbourhoods

Using our longitudinal factorial experiment, we examine to what extent residents’ neighbourhood racial preferences are changing over time and whether

these changes are also correlating with residents' willingness to spread evenly across all neighbourhoods (that is, desegregate). Specifically, we begin by asking: *Are residents more willing to live with racial others in the 2010s than in the 2000s?* The short answer is yes. Specifically, when using descriptive statistics we find the proportion of residents willing to live in neighbourhoods where they would be ten per cent or less of the total population increased from thirty-seven to forty-two per cent – a statistically significant increase. Additionally, when we estimate a logistic regression controlling for personal and neighbourhood characteristics, we find respondents in 2013/2014 were statistically significantly more willing to buy houses in diverse neighbourhoods than they were in 2003/2005 (see [Table 2](#)).

This finding contradicts the racial stagnation hypothesis (1c) – that residents are neither more willing to live with racial others nor distribute across space evenly. That is, residents are more willing to live with racial others. To evaluate whether residents are also willing to spread evenly across neighbourhoods, we turn to our next question: *whether residents at the end of the decade*

Table 2. Coefficients from logistic regression predicting all residents likelihood of buying a home in given neighbourhood.

| | Coefficient (Stand. error) |
|--|----------------------------|
| Proportion of "other" race | -0.50 (0.13)* |
| Year (<i>Reference</i> – 2003/2005) | 0.35 (0.11)* |
| Respondent's race (<i>Reference-White</i>) | |
| <i>Black</i> | 0.12 (0.09) |
| <i>Latino</i> | 0.28 (0.10)* |
| Neighbourhood controls | |
| High crime | -1.55 (0.06)* |
| Low quality schools | -1.11 (0.06)* |
| Decreasing housing values | -0.55 (0.06)* |
| Neighbourhood race (<i>Reference-White</i>) | |
| <i>Black</i> | -0.29 (0.09)* |
| <i>Latino</i> | -0.23 (0.10)* |
| <i>Asian</i> | -0.06 (0.09) |
| Demographic characteristics | |
| Education (<i>Reference-Some College</i>) | |
| <i>Less than high school</i> | 0.25 (0.11)* |
| <i>High school</i> | 0.31 (0.09)* |
| <i>Bachelors' degree</i> | 0.04 (0.09) |
| <i>Graduate work</i> | 0.08 (0.10) |
| Female | -0.15 (0.06)* |
| Birth year | 0.01 (0.00)* |
| Child in house | -0.18 (0.07)* |
| Married | -0.23 (0.07)* |
| Foreign born | -0.20 (0.10)* |
| Renter | 0.18 (0.07)* |
| Interaction | |
| Proportion of "other" race*year | -0.25 (0.19) |
| Constant | 1.68 (0.15)* |
| Log likelihood | -3,269 |
| <i>N</i> | 5,669 |

Note: The * denotes coefficient is statistically distinct from zero with a *P*-value ≤ 0.05 .

are more willing to desegregate than they were at the beginning of the decade? To answer this question, we examine whether residents are equally willing to live in neighbourhoods of every racial combination. In mathematical terms, we are examining the slope (i.e. the coefficient), estimating the influence neighbourhood racial proportions has on residents' willingness to buy a house.

As visualized in [Figure 2](#), in both time periods more residents are willing to live in neighbourhoods where they are the racial majority than neighbourhoods where they are the racial minority. Alone this finding is not surprising. But what we are interested in is whether this negative slope is becoming horizontal over time. The more horizontal the slope the less the racial composition of the neighbourhood is influencing residents' decisions, indicating that residents are more willing to evenly spread across all neighbourhoods and thus desegregate (see Hypothesis 1a). In our sample, the slope did not become more horizontal over the decade. In fact, it increased slightly. In other words, over time the racial proportion of the neighbourhood continued to have an effect on residents' decisions. This finding rejects the gradual acceptance hypothesis and lends support for the token tolerance hypothesis (1b) – that the willingness to desegregate is not increasing over time.

These initial findings nuance the assertion that increases in residents' willingness to live in racially diverse spaces corresponds with desegregation. However, they do not take into consideration that residents' preferences

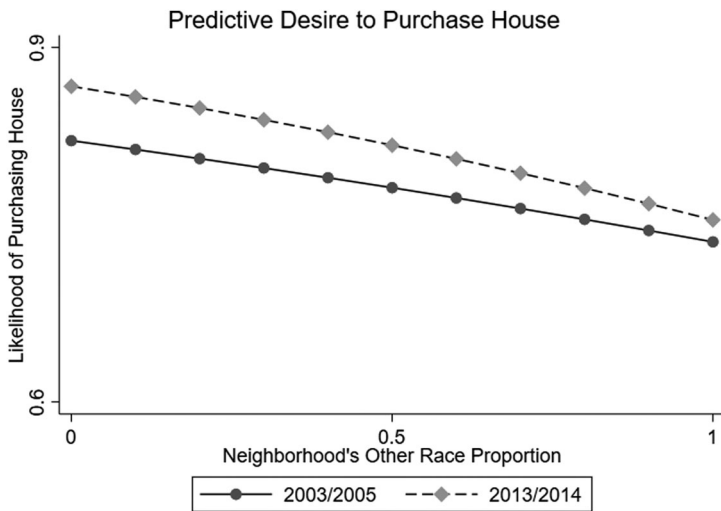


Figure 2. Predicted probabilities of respondents willingness to buy homes. Source: [Table 2](#). Predicted probabilities were calculated for single, childless, white, native, home-owning men with some college education born in 1960 who were asked about neighbourhoods with a low-crime rate, high-quality school and increasing home values.

might differ by the race of the neighbourhood in question. We now turn to examining our fourth question: *Do changes in residents' preferences over time reinforce racial group positionality on the racial hierarchy?* To answer this question, we stratify the model by the neighbourhood racial composition.

Using descriptive statistics, we find in both time periods the proportion of *all* respondents willing to live in ninety to one hundred per cent white neighbourhoods was higher (fifty-seven per cent in 2013/2014) than the proportion willing to live in ninety to one hundred per cent Asian (forty-five per cent), ninety to one hundred per cent Latino (thirty-five per cent) or ninety to one hundred per cent black (thirty-five per cent) neighbourhoods. Our logistic models confirm this result. Holding all controls at their means, the models in [Table 3](#) predict eighty-five per cent of respondents would buy homes in white neighbourhoods, while eighty-three per cent would buy in Asian neighbourhoods, seventy-two per cent in Latino neighbourhoods and only sixty-nine per cent in black neighbourhoods. These findings contradict the notion that respondents are merely adverse to outgroups.

To help visualize the results presented in [Table 3](#), we graph the predicted probability that residents would buy a house in each type of neighbourhood

Table 3. Coefficients from logistic regression predicting residents likelihood of buying a home by neighbourhood race.

| | Neighbourhood race | | | |
|--|--------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | White | Asian | Latino | Black |
| Proportion of "other" race | -0.27 (0.24) | -0.15 (0.29) | -0.78 (0.13)* | -0.78 (0.24)* |
| Year (<i>Reference</i> —2003/2005) | 0.36 (0.25) | 0.42 (0.23) | 0.24 (0.24) | 0.45 (0.21)* |
| Respondent's race | | | | |
| <i>White</i> | | <i>Reference</i> | <i>Reference</i> | <i>Reference</i> |
| <i>Black</i> | <i>Reference</i> | 0.24 (0.15)* | 0.16 (0.15) | |
| <i>Latino</i> | 0.24 (0.16) | 0.31 (0.19)* | | 0.21 (0.16) |
| Neighbourhood controls | | | | |
| High crime | -1.56 (0.13)* | -1.61 (0.12)* | -1.70 (0.13)* | -1.43 (0.12)* |
| Low quality schools | -1.26 (0.13)* | -0.97 (0.12)* | -1.25 (0.13)* | -1.06 (0.12)* |
| Decreasing housing values | -0.27 (0.13)* | -0.67 (0.12)* | -0.78 (0.13)* | -0.54 (0.12)* |
| Demographic characteristics | | | | |
| Education (<i>Reference</i> – some college) | | | | |
| <i>Less than high school</i> | 0.13 (0.20) | 0.13 (0.23) | 0.42 (0.30) | 0.42 (0.20)* |
| <i>High school</i> | 0.39 (0.17)* | 0.32 (0.17) | 0.26 (0.19) | 0.26 (0.17) |
| <i>Bachelors' degree</i> | -0.07 (0.20) | 0.25 (0.17) | -0.02 (0.17) | 0.01 (0.17) |
| <i>Graduate work</i> | 0.14 (0.26) | 0.11 (0.19) | -0.02 (0.20) | 0.19 (0.19) |
| Female | -0.02 (0.13) | -0.11 (0.12) | -0.26 (0.13)* | -0.21 (0.12) |
| Birth year | 0.01 (0.00)* | 0.00 (0.00) | 0.01 (0.00) | 0.01 (0.00)* |
| Child in house | -0.19 (0.14) | -0.03 (0.13) | -0.15 (0.14) | -0.37 (0.13)* |
| Married | -0.14 (0.14) | -0.42 (0.14)* | -0.08 (0.15) | -0.23 (0.13) |
| Foreign born | -0.22 (0.18) | -0.04 (0.19)* | -0.45 (0.30) | -0.19 (0.17) |
| Renter | 0.23 (0.14) | -0.05 (0.15)* | 0.29 (0.17) | 0.24 (0.14) |
| Interaction | | | | |
| Proportion of "other" race*year | 0.17 (0.41) | -0.24 (0.38) | -0.46 (0.41) | -0.54 (0.36) |
| Constant | 1.39 (0.25)* | 1.39 (0.27)* | 1.90 (0.27)* | 1.55 (0.23)* |
| Log likelihood | -749 | -844 | -730 | -917 |
| <i>N</i> | 1,301 | 1,452 | 1,325 | 1,591 |

Note: The * denotes coefficient is statistically distinct from zero with a P -value ≤ 0.05

across both periods. To calculate the predicted probabilities, we hold all covariates constant enabling us to illuminate the role of the neighbourhood race on residents' willingness to buy homes. In the first panel of Figure 3, we see respondents of colour were equally willing to buy a home in an all-white neighbourhood as they were to buy in a community that was exclusively their own racial group. This pattern holds in both time periods. In fact, the slightly more horizontal slope in 2013/2014 suggests residents of colour were less influenced by white neighbours at the end of the decade compared to the beginning. Likewise, in both time periods the slope denoting residents' willingness to live across Asian neighbourhoods is not significant. However, it is steeper than the slope associated with white neighbourhoods. This suggests residents are more willing to distribute across white compared to Asian neighbourhoods.

Conversely, in both periods, the proportion of black and Latino neighbours did influence residents' willingness to buy a home in a given neighbourhood, as evidenced by the statistically significant coefficients in Table 2. In fact, as visualized in Figure 3, although residents in 2013/2014 are more willing than their 2003/2005 counterparts to live in neighbourhoods with small

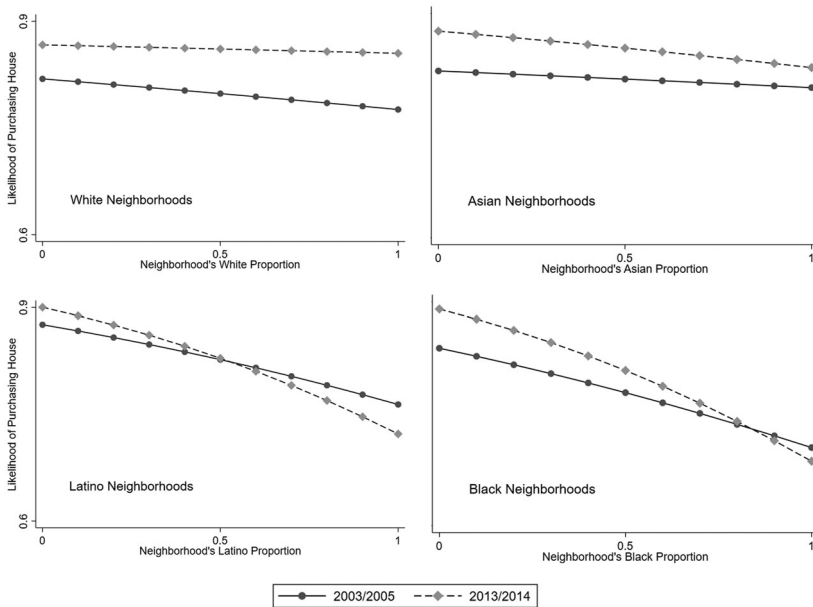


Figure 3. Predicted probabilities of buying homes across years and by neighbourhood racial composition. Source: Table 3. Predicted probabilities were calculated for single, childless, native, homeownership men with some college education born in 1960 who were asked about neighbourhoods with a low-crime rate, high-quality school and increasing home values.

proportions of Latino or black residents they are *less* willing to live in majority Latino and black neighbourhoods.

In short, although residents are more willing to live with a token number of blacks and Latinos they are still unwilling to distribute evenly across black and Latino neighbourhoods. Furthermore, supplemental models, available upon request, found no matter their own racial identification residents are most willing to live with and distribute equitably across white neighbourhoods, followed by Asian, Latino and then black neighbourhoods. This finding provides support for the hypothesis stating that neighbourhood racial preferences are reinforcing the racial hierarchy (Hypothesis 2b).

U.S. decennial census – examining Houston’s racial residential segregation

The dissonance between residents’ preference for diverse neighbourhoods but unwillingness to desegregate is noteworthy in and of itself. In fact, it illuminates how the mechanisms perpetuating residential segregation are shifting over time. Yet, we take our work one step further and examine whether the pattern of increased neighbourhood diversity *and* increased segregation appears in Houston’s residential patterns. Specifically, we investigate *whether changes in neighbourhood diversity in Houston over the last three decades corresponds with residential desegregation*.

Like the majority of U.S. cities, Houston metropolitan area has undergone substantial shifts in its racial composition over the last three decades. Houston’s white population decreased from sixty-six per cent of the population in 1980 to forty per cent of the population in 2010. Simultaneously, the Latino population has risen from fourteen to thirty-five per cent of the population, the Asian population has risen from two to seven per cent of the population and the black population has remained at seventeen per cent of the population. Thus, it is likely that neighbourhood diversity has increased but it remains unclear whether this has corresponded with an increasing equal distribution of racial groups across neighbourhoods.

As expected, the average Houstonian lives in more diverse neighbourhoods today than in 1980. For example, the average white Houstonian in 1980 lived in a seventy-nine per cent white, eleven per cent Latino, seven per cent black and two per cent Asian neighbourhood. In 2010, the average white Houstonian lived in a fifty-eight per cent white, twenty-five per cent Latino, ten per cent black and seven per cent Asian neighbourhood.

However, as we have already demonstrated, increases in neighbourhood diversity do not necessitate desegregation. In fact, whites became more segregated over this time period. In 1980, whites, on average, lived in neighbourhoods that were thirteen per cent more white than the average Houstonian. By 2010, whites lived in neighbourhoods that were eighteen per cent more

white than the average Houstonian. Another way to capture this change is the White Segregation Index, which has steadily increased every decade starting at 0.19 in 1980 and ending at 0.30 in 2010. In summary, whites are living amongst more diversity – a reality that can hardly be avoided in a diversifying city – but they continue to disproportionately concentrate in white majority neighbourhoods.

On the other hand, Latinos and blacks are increasingly distributing across all Houston neighbourhoods. The average Latino went from living in a neighbourhood that was thirty-three per cent Latino to fifty per cent Latino. This increase is smaller than the increase in the overall Latino proportion, meaning Latinos became more evenly distributed across the metropolitan area. Specifically, the Latino Segregation Index decreased from 0.38 in 1980 to 0.27 in 2010. Similarly, the black proportion in the metropolitan area did not change and yet the average black Houstonian went from living in a neighbourhood that was sixty-two per cent black in 1980 to only thirty-seven per cent black in 2010. This caused the Black Segregation Index to decrease from 0.58 to 0.39. In short, Latinos and blacks are living in more diverse neighbourhoods and distributing across the Houston metropolitan area more evenly in 2010 than in 1980.

These patterns have multiple implications. First, they support the notion that both neighbourhood diversity and distribution across space shape segregation levels. That is, although all Houstonians are living in more racially diverse neighbourhoods, these neighbourhoods do not reflect the racial diversity of the city as diversification at the neighbourhood level has not kept pace with the diversification at the metropolitan level. In fact, whites are more concentrated than in 1980. Thus, they continue to perpetuate racial segregation. In addition, whites hyper concentration compared to the dispersion of blacks, Latinos and Asians illuminates segregation patterns continue to reinforce the racial hierarchy.

Discussion and conclusion

The present study provides an empirical explanation of how racial attitudes transform but maintain racial inequality. In particular, this research sought to explain how despite more progressive attitudes towards neighbourhood diversity, negative attitudes towards racial integration persist. Utilizing three distinct data sets, we were able to mathematically demonstrate how increasingly progressive neighbourhood preferences can correspond with increased segregation. We then illuminated how this pattern is playing out in the contemporary United States. Specifically, using the 2003, 2005, 2013 and 2014 HAS, we find that over time respondents say they are more willing to live in diverse neighbourhoods but continue to be unwilling to desegregate. And finally, using actual segregation patterns from the U.S. Census Data, results

indicate diversity is increasing faster than residents' willingness to live amidst that diversity, thus maintaining high levels of segregation. In short, this evidence rejects the gradual acceptance (1a) and racial stagnation (1c) hypotheses and provides support for the token tolerance hypothesis (1b). Additionally, we reject the hypothesis that residents' aversion to outgroups is driven by ethnocentrism or personal comfort (2a) and provide support for the notion that preferences mirror and reinforce the racial hierarchy (2b).

What this means for racial residential segregation is that most neighbourhoods have more token diversity but each racial group – whites in particular – are still disproportionately concentrated in neighbourhoods with same-race neighbours. And herein lies the key: since it is the uneven distribution of groups – not the racial diversity of specific neighbourhoods – that drives the relationship between segregation and socioeconomic inequality, this finding illuminates that *preferences continue to maintain white segregation and advantage*. This empirical example demonstrates how racism, an outcome of a racialized social structure, continues to adapt over time (Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997; Bonilla-Silva 1997). As metropolitan areas diversify, residents' neighbourhood preferences adapt. Yet, they often do so enough to resist looking exclusionary but not enough to reconfigure the historic power hierarchies.

Moving forward

Like all studies, this research has its limitations. For example, HAS has adjusted its methodology to account for the rise in cellular telephones yet our study is likely still influenced by these shifts over time. Additionally, our study was restricted to eleven years, one metropolitan area and did not include Asian respondents. Future studies should expand upon this research to address these limitations. Yet, even without these future investigations, this study suggests that neighbourhood racial preferences, especially white's racial preferences, still contribute to U.S. segregation levels. In fact, even more than we thought in the past, residents' evaluations of places to live are based upon deeply entrenched beliefs about the racial hierarchy. The complex and evolving relationship between neighbourhood preferences and segregation requires scholars to be continuously reflexive about how we measure and theorize racial inequality. Additionally, it stretches academics and policy-makers to reconsider plausible paths towards racial integration. Attention must turn towards national Desegregation Acts which advocate for equal investment in all communities rather than housing acts or neighbourhood investment programmes for select communities.

As seems evident in both the United States and Europe, racial diversification has changed residents' overt discussion on race but it has also changed the mechanisms perpetuating racial inequality. In the case of

housing, neighbourhood-level initiatives focusing on diversity are not enough to encourage integration. Instead, the very notion that some neighbourhoods are desirable while others are subpar needs to be deconstructed. Reimagining the city (or metropolitan area) as a whole and fighting for equal investment in all communities will help residents rethink their neighbourhood preferences. Broadly speaking, racial equality will not be achieved merely by positing that humans are biologically, morally or socially equivalent, or even with the passage of fair housing laws. The racial hierarchy is deeply entrenched and moving towards equity requires not just changing beliefs but changing social structures.

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Notes

1. We define racial inequality as social disparities along racial lines including wealth, employment opportunities, educational resources and residential neighbourhoods.
2. As with all telephone surveys, completion rates have decreased over time from seventy to fifty per cent of those who answered their phones. Additionally, over-sampling of blacks and Latinos was stopped in 2013 because of their growing proportion. Thus, the sample's white proportion is slightly larger in the later waves – a fact controlled for in all models.
3. In the 2003 survey, Asian neighbourhoods were not included.
4. Following Lewis, Emerson, and Klineberg (2011) precedent, we combined the 2003 and 2005 samples and the 2013 and 2014 samples to increase the count in each category.
5. Racial others range from zero to one in increments of 0.1. Previous researchers using fewer categories found a “tipping point” at which the likelihood of a respondent remaining or moving into the neighbourhood dramatically declined (Davis, Strube, and Cheng 1995; Farley et al. 1978). We employed Vuong's (1989) non-nested model test to explore whether a tipping point exists. Results suggest a continuous variable best captures the observed variation.
6. We simplified the five point Likert scale into a dichotomous variable – those who would buy (likely or very likely) and those who would not buy (very unlikely, unlikely or uncertain). Supplemental models, available upon request, were run with the dependent variable as an order categorical variable and a continuous variable – all results were comparable.
7. Respondents were asked, “Are you Anglo, black, Hispanic, Asian, or of some other (specify) ethnic background? [If R names more than one ethnicity:] Which ethnic group do you generally identify with?” Respondents answers were coded as white, black, Latino or other. ‘Other’ respondents were not included in the factorial experiment or this analysis.

- Supplemental models considered interviewer's race, respondent's income, duration in current housing unit, and urban versus suburban residential location. None of these variables are statistically significant nor do they change our presented results.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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