

# Race guides neighborhood evaluation, study says

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Race is a powerful determinant of how whites regard a neighborhood, according to a recent study at the University of Illinois at Chicago and the University of Michigan.

The investigation, appearing in the latest issue of the journal *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, indicates that neighborhood evaluations are socially constructed and contribute to ongoing racial segregation.

"We sought to determine whether whites are colorblind in their evaluations of neighborhoods, or whether racial composition still matters -- even when holding constant the quality of the neighborhood," said Maria Krysan, professor of sociology at UIC and the report's lead author. Co-authors are Reynolds Farley and Mick Couper of the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research.

The survey-based experiment involved more than 600 randomly selected white adults aged 21 and older living in the Chicago and Detroit metropolitan areas.

Participants were shown videos of various neighborhoods -- lower working class to upper class -- with actors posing as residents. Residents were portrayed doing exactly the same activities in each neighborhood, such as picking up mail or talking to neighbors.

While the survey participants viewed the same neighborhoods in the

videos, they were randomly assigned to see white residents, black residents or a mix of both.

Participants were then asked to evaluate the neighborhoods in terms of housing cost, property upkeep, school quality, safety and future property values.

Whites who saw white residents in the video rated neighborhoods significantly more positively in four of the five dimensions when compared to whites who saw black residents in the identical neighborhood. Racially mixed neighborhoods fell in between.

"These findings demonstrate that 'objective' characteristics such as housing are not sufficient for whites to overcome the stereotypes they have about communities with African-American residents," said Krysan, who is also affiliated with the University of Illinois Institute of Government and Public Affairs.

Participants were also questioned regarding their endorsement or rejection of racial stereotypes. Whites who held negative stereotypes about blacks as a group were more likely to produce disapproving neighborhood evaluations.

According to the researchers, property value stagnation is one consequence of whites excluding neighborhoods solely due to the presence of black residents.

"This segregation limits occupational opportunities for blacks, ensures that blacks and whites will seldom have the chance to attend school together, and seriously limits the acquisition of wealth by African-Americans," said Michigan's Farley, who noted that racial segregation remains common in the older metropolises of the Midwest and Northeast.

Harvard University sociologist Lawrence Bobo, editor of the Du Bois Review, lauded the new study.

"It is rare to find research that combines high-quality new data with such grounded, real-world issues," he said. "Thanks to this highly innovative piece of research, we now understand far better than ever before the factors that create and sustain racial segregation of neighborhoods in America."

Source: University of Illinois at Chicago

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