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I See Black People Everywhere: The Effect of Perceived Neighborhood Racial Composition on Middle-Class Blacks’ and Whites’ Social Interactions

Biography:
Paul Martinez is a senior majoring in sociology at Sonoma State University in Rohnert Park, California. He was born in Los Angeles and raised in San Diego. Paul’s research interests include race/ethnicity, gender, immigration and class issues and their impact on social inequality. His goal is to pursue a doctoral degree to conduct research promoting social equality and to become a sociology professor. With the help of SRI, Paul hopes to gain the training and experience he needs to succeed in graduate school. As a participant in the McNair Scholars Program, Paul has conducted research on a multicultural awareness-training program. His research focuses on helping students increase their awareness by learning about inequalities in society and motivating them to become agents of change.

Abstract:
Racial residential segregation is one of the main factors that contribute to racial inequality in the United States. Blacks at all social class levels tend to be more racially segregated than Whites. The racial segregation and discrimination literatures argue that institutional discrimination contributes to the hyper-level of racial segregation among Blacks. However, there are some Black families who manage to integrate into predominantly White neighborhoods. Most of these families tend to be middle-class moving into affluent White neighborhoods. Many White residents believe that an influx of Black families lead to more crime, lower property values, and worse schools. In turn, they engage in white flight by leaving the transitional neighborhood for predominantly White neighborhoods. Little research has explored how perceptions of neighborhood racial composition may affect social interactions among neighbors. Using a sample of middle-class Blacks and Whites living in urban and suburban areas, this study investigates how the perceived racial composition of neighborhoods lead to different outcomes among these groups. Results show that all groups (Whites more than Blacks) overestimated the perceived amount of Blacks in their neighborhood. Based on this overestimation, participants reported problematic social interactions with their neighbors. Black Women, compared to other groups, reported experiencing more benign neglect and hostility from their neighbors. This study has implications for the experiences of middle-class Blacks partaking in supportive neighbor relations, high quality schools for their children, and community engagement through environmental stewardship and physical activity.

Faculty Mentor:
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