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"Because the World Consists of Everybody": Understanding Parents' Preferences for Neighborhood Diversity

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Previous research, primarily using survey data, highlights preferences about neighborhood racial composition as a potential contributor to residential segregation. However, we know little about how individuals, especially parents, understand neighborhood racial composition. We examine this question using in-depth interview data from a racially diverse sample of 156 parents of young children in two metropolitan areas. Prior scholarship on neighborhood racial preferences has mostly been animated by expectations about in-group attraction, out-group avoidance, the influence of stereotypes, and perceived associations between race and status. However, we find that a substantial subset of parents expressed a desire for racially and ethnically mixed neighborhoods—a residential preference at odds with racial segregation. Parents across race conceptualized neighborhood diversity as beneficial for children's development. They expressed shared logics, reasoning that neighborhood diversity cultivates skills and comfort interacting with racial others; teaches tolerance; and provides cultural enrichment. However, these ideas intersected with racial segregation and stratification to shape parents' understandings of diversity and hinder the realization of parents' aspirations. Beliefs about the benefits of neighborhood diversity were rarely a primary motivation for residential choices. Nonetheless, parents' perceptions of the advantages of neighborhood racial mixing reveal the reach of discourse on the value of diversity and suggest a potential opportunity to advance residential desegregation.

Understanding the forces that reproduce racial residential segregation has been a central challenge of social science research (Alba and Logan 1993; Krysan and Crowder 2017; Logan and Molotch 1987; Massey and Denton 1993; Sharkey 2013). Scholarship has identified dynamics at multiple levels that sustain segregation, with individual preferences about neighborhood racial composition among the most common explanations. A large literature is devoted to understanding individuals' neighborhood composition

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preferences (Charles 2000, 2006; Krysan and Farley 2002; Krysan et al. 2009), how these preferences may shape housing searches (Havekes et al. 2016; Krysan and Bader 2007), and their ultimate impact on patterns of residential segregation (Adelman 2005; Bobo 1989; Bobo and Zubrinsky 1996; Bruch and Mare 2006; Charles 2006; Schelling 1971).

This research shows how preferences about neighborhood racial composition contribute to residential segregation. Scholars typically explain neighborhood racial composition preferences by drawing on social psychological theories about in-group preferences and out-group avoidance, including avoidance based on racial stereotypes or perceived status differences (Charles 2000, 2006, 2007; Clark 1992; Farley et al. 1978; Krysan et al. 2009). Yet this work provides little insight into alternatives—specifically, the existence of preferences for more racially integrated neighborhoods that some may hold. Furthermore, while existing research on neighborhood racial preferences reveals patterns in respondents' ideal or suitable residential destinations, few studies directly address the reasoning behind such preferences.

In this study, we draw on 264 in-depth interviews with a racially diverse (primarily Black, White, and Hispanic) sample of 156 parents of young children living in neighborhoods across the Cleveland and Dallas metropolitan areas to examine how they think about neighborhood racial composition. While previous research on neighborhood racial preferences has largely examined the preferences of individuals without regard to parenthood status, we focus on the preferences of parents with young children, as segregation in the United States is higher among families with children, compared to households without children (Iceland et al. 2010; Logan et al. 2001).

We find that across race, a sizable share of respondents explicitly, and typically without interviewer prompting, voiced a desire for neighborhood racial and ethnic diversity. Parents often motivated this preference by describing the benefits of diverse neighborhood environments for their children: cultivating skills interacting with racial or ethnic others that will be useful in the "real world"; nurturing tolerance and a propensity to "see beyond" color; and offering enriching experiences of ethnic difference. Parents' desires for neighborhoods with residents with a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds are consistent with the relatively stable integration patterns of "global" neighborhoods in the United States, in which Black, White, Asian, and Latino residents are represented (Logan and Zhang 2010). Our findings speak to why parents might want to live in such contexts.

These ideas about diverse environments as beneficial for child development intersected with racial segregation and stratification in ways that shaped parents' understandings of diversity and hindered the realization of parents' neighborhood ideals. Parents often framed diversity in reference to homogenous environments they or their peers had experienced, such that neighborhood diversity could convey relative advantage for Black and Hispanic parents—shielding them from the structural disadvantages of all-Black or all-Hispanic areas and the racial isolation of all-White areas—but create tradeoffs for White parents, for whom pursuing diversity often meant conceding preferences for areas near workplaces and preferred public school districts. In this article, we take seriously parents' expressed desire to live in diverse neighborhoods, detailing the specific reasons for these aspirations. Yet appreciation for neighborhood diversity, as reflected in parent discourses, may not advance efforts to remedy systemic racial inequality if it does not strongly inform residential decisions (Berrey 2015; Howell and Emerson 2018; Smith and Mayorga-Gallo 2017). For most of our respondents, racial inequality produced

conditions in which parents' positive views about neighborhood diversity remained idealized and aspirational.

BACKGROUND

The structural sources of segregation—such as federal housing policy and associated patterns of investment and divestment, public housing siting, White violence against non-White would-be neighbors, and racial discrimination by residents, landlords, and real-estate interests—are well-recognized (Goetz 2018; Hirsch 2009; Jackson 1987; Massey and Denton 1993). Likewise, racially patterned economic inequality circumscribes the housing options accessible to Black and Hispanic parents, relative to White parents, on average (Adelman 2005; Alba and Logan 1993; Iceland and Wilkes 2006).

In addition to these important factors, there is also a near consensus that neighborhood racial composition preferences, however constrained, play a role in shaping residential patterns (Bobo and Zubrinsky 1996; Bruch and Mare 2006; Charles 2000, 2006; Quillian and Pager 2001). Though families do not move only according to their stated preferences (Adelman 2005; Havekes et al. 2016), these preferences are associated with neighborhood racial composition outcomes (Charles 2006) and hypothetical models show that even slight differences across groups in individual preferences for same-race neighbors can result in persistent segregation (Bruch and Mare 2006; Schelling 1971; Xie and Zhou 2012). Racial composition influences people's assessments of neighborhoods as well as their propensities to move or leave specific places (Bader and Krysan 2015; Goyette et al. 2014; Krysan 2002a, 2002b; Krysan et al. 2009). However, we know less about how parents understand the meaning of neighborhood racial composition and how these understandings matter for neighborhood aspirations and outcomes.

NEIGHBORHOOD RACIAL PREFERENCES

A considerable body of research has examined how neighborhood racial composition preferences vary by race. Typically, this work analyzes how respondents evaluate hypothetical neighborhoods,[1] often asking which of several levels of racial mixing at the block level they would prefer (Charles 2000, 2006; Farley et al. 1978; Krysan 2002b; Krysan and Farley 2002) or asking respondents to draw their ideal neighborhood racial mix (Bruch and Mare 2006; Charles 2000). This literature finds that, on average, White individuals prefer neighborhoods with a plurality of White residents, with estimates ranging from about 50 to 80 percent White, depending on the metropolitan area (Charles 2000, 2006; Farley et al. 1978; Krysan 2002b). Black individuals' ideal neighborhoods demonstrate slightly lower in-group preferences compared with Whites'. Studies converge around the finding that Black respondents' ideal neighborhoods range from around 40 percent (Charles 2006) up to a slight majority of Black residents (Farley and Frey 1994; Farley et al. 1978; Zubrinsky and Bobo 1996). Black individuals also often report *willingness* to live in predominantly White or even all-White areas (Charles 2006; Krysan and Farley 2002). Although this research has identified patterns in neighborhood racial preferences among representative samples, it is less suited to exploring the beliefs and frameworks underlying these preferences. In-depth interviews that draw out people's ideas about the benefits

and drawbacks of different neighborhood compositions are needed to complement these findings.

To interpret the findings from survey research, the literature on neighborhood racial preferences has largely focused on why individuals might prefer same-race neighbors and/or avoid racial others. Drawing on social psychological theories, some have posited strong "in-group identity"—sometimes conceptualized as racial solidarity or "neutral ethnocentrism"—as a reason that some individuals might seek relatively homogenous neighborhoods (Clark 1992; Clark and Ledwith 2007; see also Charles 2007 on Latino preferences).

For White people, avoidance of Black and Hispanic neighbors may be motivated by the belief that Black or Hispanic presence reflects undesirable neighborhood characteristics (Charles 2007; Krysan 2002b). Research shows that White people view Black residents as a proxy for neighborhood crime, poverty, and risk of property devaluation (Clark 1992; Emerson et al. 2001; Harris 1999; Quillian and Pager 2001; Sampson and Raudenbush 2004). However, the role of direct racial prejudice cannot be discounted (Charles 2006; Zubrinsky and Bobo 1996). White people's stereotypes about Black and Hispanic neighbors, as well as a sense that integration lessens their group's dominant position in the neighborhood (e.g., a desire to not be in the minority), predict lower preferences for Black and, to a lesser extent, Hispanic neighbors (Bobo and Zubrinsky 1996; Charles 2006, 2007; Krysan 2002b; Krysan et al. 2009; Zubrinsky and Bobo 1996).

As with White people, Black and Hispanic individuals may view a greater share of White residents as indicating greater neighborhood resources and status, reflecting the dominant position of White Americans and relatively White neighborhoods (Charles 2006, 2007; Harris 1999; Howell and Emerson 2018). However, for Black families, large shares of White residents may also present risks such as hostility or discomfort (Charles 2006; Krysan and Farley 2002). Therefore, for non-Whites, a desire to avoid racism from neighbors or authorities or to minimize hostility, stereotyping, or profiling may drive preferences for same-race neighbors (Feagin and Sikes 1994; Krysan et al. 2009:5; Krysan and Farley 2002).

The research described above draws on social psychological theories, and views of race as a proxy for neighborhood resources to explain neighborhood composition preferences. However, we know little about how individuals themselves understand and describe the motivations underpinning their neighborhood composition preferences. Krysan and Farley (2002) use brief open-ended responses in survey data from the Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality, fielded in the mid-1990s, to explore how White individuals explain why they would leave integrated neighborhoods and how Black individuals articulate their neighborhood composition preferences (Krysan 2002b). This research provides perhaps the fullest understanding to date of how individuals think about neighborhood racial composition. Our qualitative interview data allow us to update and expand on these findings. Additionally, we include Hispanic respondents, adding to the growing body of research examining racial preferences beyond Black and White (Charles 2006, 2007; Hall and Krysan 2017).

Our analysis further extends the literature on neighborhood composition preferences by focusing on families with children, who are more racially segregated than other households (Ellen 2007; Iceland et al. 2010; Logan et al. 2001). Moreover, households with children have housing needs and preferences that may fundamentally differ from those of families without children (Owens 2016; Rossi 1955). Researchers have hypothesized

that parents may prioritize child safety and school quality, which they may link to neighborhood racial make-up given prevailing racial stereotypes (Harris 1999). Additionally, parents may seek to influence their children's racial identity formation through neighborhood choices (Lacy 2004; Sweeney 2017). Yet the role of parental ideas about racial composition has not been sufficiently explored in the neighborhood preferences literature—a notable shortcoming given the consequences of residential location for children's trajectories (Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2000; Sharkey 2013).

Previous research has examined parents' ideas about race as related to decisions about schools (Billingham and Hunt 2016; Condliffe et al. 2015; Johnson and Shapiro 2003; Kimelberg and Billingham 2013; Lareau and Goyette 2014; Posey-Maddox 2014; Roda and Wells 2012; Saporito and Lareau 1999). In this article, we focus on neighborhood assessments. Particularly in urban areas, school and neighborhood racial compositions differ (Bischoff and Tach 2018), as not all parents use the neighborhood schools and not all residents are parents of school-aged children. Moreover, recent research finds that school districts offering more school choice options are less residentially segregated (Rich et al. 2018), suggesting that parents may conceptualize neighborhood and school racial composition differently. We focus on parents' discussions of neighborhoods as places of residence that offer resources, social contacts, role-models, and neighboring relationships that matter for parents and children (Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn 2000). Though neighborhoods serve as far more than just school catchments, parents' school choices may play an important role in residential decisions, potentially creating tradeoffs.

Existing studies offer mixed evidence about whether and how the presence of children affects residential mobility into or out of racially mixed neighborhoods. While some analyses suggest that parenthood is associated with greater avoidance of Black neighbors (Goyette et al. 2014), others, based on different data sets and measures, show negative associations (Krysan 2002b) or no association (Crowder 2000; South and Crowder 1998). Yet, as noted above, such studies do not allow investigation of the attitudes, preferences, strategies, or tradeoffs underlying observed aggregate outcomes for parents.

APPRECIATING DIVERSITY

While expectations that people favor same-race neighbors drive previous research, less has been done to investigate and theorize alternatives. Why might parents prefer neighborhoods with at least some other-race neighbors? A broad range of studies shows that individuals' ideal neighborhoods demonstrate preferences for some level of same-race neighbors, but rarely for a fully homogenous neighborhood. Krysan's (2002a) analysis of brief open-ended survey responses finds that African American respondents identified "positive effects of integration," including a view that multiracial neighborhoods foster improved race relations. Overall, however, existing frameworks are less suited to explaining why survey results consistently show preferences for racially heterogeneous neighborhoods.

The literature on colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2003) leads us to expect that White respondents would express colorblind ideologies when describing neighborhood preferences. Colorblind ideologies expressed by White people and dominant institutions like courts and corporations deny the salience of race and its role in stratification (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Hughey et al. 2015). In the residential preferences context, Whites subscribing

to colorblind ideologies might express a willingness to live in heterogeneous neighborhoods in the hypothetical—claiming race is unimportant in their decision-making—while nevertheless gravitating toward predominantly White, privileged spaces.

A growing literature in critical diversity studies offers another angle that may help explain why individuals' stated ideal neighborhoods are rarely fully homogenous. This research has identified a "diversity ideology" as an alternative to or variant of a "colorblind ideology." Diversity ideology conceptualizes racial and ethnic diversity as an asset within White spaces (Embrick 2011; Mayorga-Gallo 2014). Research finds that corporate managers, elite college students, gentrifiers in urban or rural neighborhoods, and middle-class White parents sending their children to urban schools express such views (Berrey 2015; Brown-Saracino 2004, 2010; Embrick 2011; Kimelberg and Billingham 2013; Mayorga-Gallo 2014; Posey-Maddox 2014; Underhill 2018; Warikoo 2016). One line of this research shows how a dedicated contingent of middle-class White parents seek cross-race exposure for their children, sending them to more racially integrated schools or spending time in multiracial public spaces like parks in order to nurture "non racist" children or provide cultural enrichment (Kimelberg and Billingham 2013; Underhill 2018). This literature focuses on efforts of middle-class White parents to expose their children to non-White spaces. How might these views extend to neighborhood preferences among both White and non-White parents? While previous research suggests that positive views about "diversity" are now mainstream (Bell and Hartmann 2007), we know less about the broader reach of diversity ideology among parents and its relevance for neighborhood choice.

In this study, we examine understandings of neighborhood racial composition among a class- and race-diverse sample of parents. Based on our finding that a substantial share of parents expressed a preference for neighborhood diversity, we focus on two research questions. First, how do parents perceive neighborhood diversity and its potential benefits? Second, how do parents' understandings of neighborhood diversity vary by race and how do these views inform residential outcomes?

DATA AND METHODS

This study draws on 264 in-depth, semistructured interviews with 156 parents, interviewed in two waves. We selected a random sample of Cuyahoga County, Ohio, and Dallas County, Texas, census block groups, stratified by income and racial composition and with an oversample of lower- and middle-income block groups. From these block groups, we randomly selected addresses and invited households with at least one child between the ages of three and eight to participate in the study. The total two-year response rate was 79.6 percent. (See Table 1 for information about respondents' demographic characteristics.)

Cuyahoga County and Dallas County were chosen because they provide considerable variation in terms of region, economic development, population composition, housing stock, and residential segregation. Cuyahoga County encompasses the city of Cleveland, a traditional Midwestern rustbelt city, and some surrounding suburbs. Cleveland is a relatively poor city within a relatively poor regional economy, which impacts landlord behavior and rental options (Garboden et al. 2018). Cuyahoga County's residents are predominantly non-Hispanic White (61 percent) and Black (30 percent). By contrast, Dallas County is a large Southwestern metropolitan county, with a growing regional economy

TABLE 1. Respondent Characteristics ($N = 156$)

	Count	Percent
City		
Cleveland	73	47%
Dallas	83	53%
Race/ethnicity		
Black/African American	80	51%
Hispanic/Latino	40	26%
White	34	22%
Asian	2	1%
Current marital status		
Married	69	44%
Unmarried	87	56%
Education level		
High school or less	57	37%
Some college/associate's	64	41%
Bachelor's or higher	32	21%
Income		
10th percentile	$8,520	
Median	$28,500	
90th percentile	$98,000	

Note: Missing education level for three respondents.

and lower poverty. It also has a larger Hispanic population (39 percent), along with Black (23 percent) and non-Hispanic White populations (32 percent) (U.S. Census 2014). The Cleveland metropolitan area has among the highest Black-White segregation in the country,[2] while Dallas has lower Black-White segregation but relatively high Hispanic-White segregation (Logan and Stults 2011). While our analysis was open to differences between metropolitan areas, we found similar themes in both field sites.

A team of interviewers, including the authors, completed initial interviews in the summer of 2013 and follow-up interviews in the summer of 2014. Researchers interviewed the person identified as the primary caregiver of the child(ren), typically the mother. Interviews were generally between two and three hours long and conducted in the respondent's home.

In the interviews, we took an inductive approach, encouraging respondents to reveal the logics and meanings behind their neighborhood preferences and aspirations. Interviewers also asked direct questions about respondents' housing and neighborhood preferences and about their perceptions of their current home and neighborhood. All interviewers received training in narrative or empathetic interviewing techniques (DeLuca et al. 2016), which are designed to elicit open-ended stories. Interviewers listened attentively as respondents narrated the story of their lives, on their own terms. We indicated interest in the full range of respondents' perspectives and sought to minimize risks that respondents would feel judged or persuaded to say things we wanted to hear. We deepened rapport through repeated engagement with respondents over the course of the study. This research approach has yielded insights into normatively laden features of social life, making it well suited for studying ideas about neighborhood racial composition (DeLuca et al. 2016).

TABLE 2. Share of Parents Expressing a Preference for Diversity, by Race/Ethnicity

	Desiring Diversity
All parents ($n = 154$)	40% ($n = 62$)
By race/ethnicity	
Black ($n = 80$)	51% ($n = 41$)
Hispanic ($n = 40$)	20% ($n = 8$)
White ($n = 34$)	38% ($n = 13$)

Note: Table does not include two Asian American parents. These percentages reflect the proportion of parents who expressed a preference for neighborhood diversity during the interview. However, because our interview guide did not include direct questions about neighborhood diversity (as described in the data and methods section), these numbers do not necessarily reflect the total number of respondents who might feel positively about diversity.

Interviewers were trained to ask about the "mix of people" in the respondents' actual neighborhoods and the "mix of people" respondents would prefer for their neighborhoods, as well as to ask directly about racial and ethnic composition if respondents did not bring up race in response to these questions.[3] Interviewers were instructed to elicit detailed responses and ask follow-up questions. Though the interview guide did not include direct questions about respondents' preferences for or beliefs about diversity, it was designed to allow constructs of this kind to emerge.[4]

All interviews were transcribed verbatim. We analyzed similarities and differences across racial group and income. The racial categories used throughout this paper (including "Hispanic," which may also be considered an ethnic identity) refer to respondents' self-identification. We inductively identified themes through reading and discussing interviews. From these themes, we developed a detailed codebook and coded transcripts using qualitative data analysis software. Codes captured respondents' perceptions and preferences with respect to neighborhood composition. For example, the code "DIVERSITY" captured positive statements about neighborhood diversity, whether applied to a specific neighborhood or in general. During the coding period, we held weekly meetings to discuss coding and clarify decision rules; 12 percent of transcripts were read by multiple team members to ensure consistency.

FINDINGS

PREFERENCES FOR DIVERSITY

When discussing neighborhood preferences, a substantial share of respondents from each racial group—51 percent of Black respondents, 38 percent of White respondents, and 20 percent of Hispanic respondents—raised racial diversity as an ideal, sometimes repeatedly and spontaneously (i.e. not in response to a specific question) (see Table 2). For example, when asked about her preference for "the ideal mix of a neighborhood," Rhonda, a Black mother from Dallas, said, "a little bit of Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, Indian, African, Jamaican, uh a little bit of everybody." She spoke approvingly of several specific suburbs where she would consider living, as having this "nice mix." These parents offered more than a straightforward denial of the salience of race as anticipated by previous research on colorblindness. Instead, across our two research sites and across race,

TABLE 3. Reasons for Valuing Neighborhood Diversity among Respondents Who Expressed a Preference for Neighborhood Diversity, by Race

Neighborhood Diversity Logics	Description	Parents Valuing Diversity Who Expressed Each Logic, by Race	
Preparation for the Real World	Diversity will nurture human capital, useful for children's future	Black	32% ($n = 13$)
		Hispanic	25% ($n = 2$)
		White	54% ($n = 7$)
Teaching Tolerance	Diversity will teach children to respect others and avoid racial stereotypes	Black	29% ($n = 12$)
		Hispanic	13% ($n = 1$)
		White	54% ($n = 7$)
Cultural Exchange and Enrichment	Diversity provides enrichment through exposure to different cultures	Black	42% ($n = 17$)
		Hispanic	25% ($n = 2$)
		White	38% ($n = 5$)

Note: Logics are not mutually exclusive. Total of 8 cases (5 Black, 2 Hispanic, 1 White) state that they value neighborhood diversity, but we have limited data on their reasoning. Percentages do not reflect the percent of parents who might subscribe to each logic, but rather the percent who brought them up during their interview.

they articulated preferences for neighborhood diversity, often rooted in understandings of diversity as beneficial for children.

Ideas of child development were often central in the accounts of parents expressing a desire for diversity. When we asked Jessica, a White mother living in Dallas, about her neighborhood preferences, she clarified, "Are we talking about me by myself or are we talking about me with my child?" She then shared her view of the ideal neighborhood racial mix for her daughter:

> Okay with my child, a real even mix, not too much of any one thing. I would like it to be real even. If I lived on a street and I could choose I would say let's have Caucasian, Black, Hispanic, Asian, Caucasian, Black, Hispanic . . . just like that. If I was in a perfect world that is how I would do it. Culturally diverse.

A larger proportion of Black respondents expressed a desire for neighborhood diversity relative to White and, particularly, Hispanic respondents. Yet, among those respondents who expressed an appreciation for diversity, we saw parallels in the reasoning underlying these preferences and in their shared views about diversity's import for child development. Across race and class, three themes (summarized in Table 3) repeatedly emerged as parents described the benefits of diversity: first, diverse environments provided valuable preparation for the "real world"; second, engaging with racial and ethnic others could teach children to be tolerant and look beyond stereotypes; and third, diversity could provide multicultural learning and enrichment. We consider these to be shared logics about the value of neighborhood diversity, which we detail below.[5]

Preparation for the "Real World"

Parents envisioned neighborhood diversity as providing a source of capital for children to draw upon as they enter the "real world." They described how growing up in a diverse neighborhood would make their children more comfortable in future racially mixed contexts. Gail, a Black grandmother in Dallas, told us that she wished to live in a more "mixed neighborhood," one "where there's options" for her grandson. Gail described her reasoning:

> Because the world consists of everybody, everyone . . . he can go in any surrounding and . . . he feels comfortable with anyone. And that's what we want him to be able to . . . Because sometimes if you just in that box of just one, and then you out of that box, then you're like you know how kids stare when they see somebody that's different. I don't like that.

Gail believed that her comfort with people of other races resulted from her upbringing: "I have never had a problem with race . . . there was no one that my mom couldn't ever talk to. It didn't matter who you were, how much money you made." Gail hoped to nurture this sensibility in her children and grandchildren, saying she wanted them to "be the same. They have all kinds of friends. It don't matter. . . . *I want them to be comfortable where they go"* (emphasis added).

Parents envisioned their children entering a world in which cross-race interactions were inevitable and saw neighborhood diversity as a way to prepare their children for this reality. Kenya, a Black mother in Cleveland, said that she would prefer to live in a "mixed race" neighborhood. Kenya described wanting her children to grow up around "a whole bunch" of racial and ethnic groups so they would "know how to deal in society with different people." She elaborated:

> Because if they grow up with all Blacks they're not going to know how to deal with other races . . . if I grow them up around all Caucasian people they ain't going to know how to act around other African-Americans and Puerto Ricans. It's going to be a different situation. But if they can grow up around different people. They friends with a Puerto Rican. They got an Arab friend down the street. You know what I mean? They learn of different cultures and know how to deal with different people in society.

Parents like Kenya understood racially mixed neighborhoods as a training ground for a diverse world. Parents described how such training would benefit their children in their future pursuits, including in college and the workplace. Samantha, a Cleveland-area Black mother, voiced this reasoning:

> I would prefer that my children be exposed to all different types of people because when I go to work I'm exposed to all different types of people. If they go to college they're going to be exposed to all different cultures and so growing up around one culture and not knowing how to interact or anything with other cultures would actually be a stifle for them, I think.

By contrast, parents perceived that growing up in a racially homogeneous environment would handicap their children when they entered the "real world." Rocío, a Hispanic mother in Dallas, reflected, "Why am I gonna make it even harder for them? To get acquainted to just a certain race, and then have them grow up and have life hit them like, 'That's not how it works.' So it's like, might as well teach them that now." Likewise, Jim and Melinda, a White couple in Dallas, worried that their homogenous neighborhood would not prepare their daughter to enter a diverse world. Melinda explained:

> I like the idea of my daughter growing up knowing a ton of different kind of people. . . . I just think it would be great for her to have a more diverse environment. And I think that would make somebody more prepared for being an adult and living in the real world and not thinking, hey, life is the same 10 White kids you know? I just, I don't, I don't like that.

Parents like Melinda thought that socializing across race was important to prepare children for adulthood. This logic, then, motivated parents' interest in raising their children amidst neighborhood diversity.

Teaching Tolerance

Parents also viewed racially mixed neighborhoods as springboards for values of tolerance, empathy, and interpersonal respect, as well as for nurturing their children's ability to "see beyond" color. Justin, a White father from the Cleveland suburb Shaker Heights, liked his neighborhood, which he described as "real diverse." He told us: "I think that's important. . . . Just for the boys growing up, they've got to learn that you have to treat everybody with respect, even if they come from a different background than us." Justin believed that through living in such a "diverse" place, his children could learn tolerance and a sense of how to get by in the "melting pot" of the United States.

Parents wanted to show their children that people in other racial and ethnic groups were not so different from themselves. Nikki, a Black mother living in the Cleveland area, said that her ideal neighborhood would exhibit "a mixed culture" so her children could "get to know different ethnic backgrounds and stuff." She continued:

> It's fun sometimes to go down to your Puerto Rican friend's house and they got them beans, going on, and they partying. You know it's fun to see that. You know y'all are like us. *You all aren't so much different from us, this is what we do* (emphasis added).

Parents explicitly rejected racial prejudice and hoped to teach their children the same. For example, Tonya, a Black mother in Cleveland, told us that she considered diversity when thinking about where to live. When we asked her to explain further, she told us:

> I just want a diverse neighborhood. I want [my kids] to be able to, I don't want them to have any judgment or stereotypes about different people. And if you grow up around [diversity] then that kills that immediately. Cause you don't get a chance to build that stereotype in your head because now you're playing with this kid every day and that's exactly who they are. [It] is like you will see it and be like, if it's comical you might laugh, but you won't take it to heart because you know that's not the case because you grew up around this kid. So that's one of the main things, the diversity of the neighborhood.

Similarly, when we asked Jessica, a White mother from Dallas with mixed-race children, introduced above, "what would your ideal mix of people in the neighborhood be like?" she told us:

> I do not want [my daughter] to think that these people only do this and these people only do, because you hear it all the time, "Well, Black people only eat chicken and watermelon and Mexicans only eat beans and rice." I do not want her to grow up with that mentality whatsoever. I want her to be culturally diverse and be able to fit in wherever she wants because she is Hispanic.

Parents like Jessica, Tonya, and Nikki thus revealed a logic shared by others: that diverse neighborhoods nurture cultural fluency, tolerance, and open-mindedness in their children; and that interracial contact can uproot prejudice before it sets in.

Cultural Exchange and Enrichment

Finally, parents described a belief that diverse neighborhoods could offer enriching exposure to cultural difference. For example, Bernice, a Black mother from the Dallas suburbs, told us, "I wouldn't dare just want to stay around a bunch of African American people ever." She explained that living near a diverse group of people, one can "learn

new things" or "try new foods and experience different cultures." She opined, "It's good when you're around different races and stuff."

In addition to providing enrichment, parents described cross-cultural exchange as beneficial for their children's education. When June, a Black mother from the Cleveland suburb Garfield Heights, spoke to us about her "ideal neighborhood mix," she said, "Pretty much all the different races . . . to get to know different cultures and different backgrounds . . . if you actually think about it, that will teach your child different languages and other upbringings and stuff, and it can easily rub off and make them a better person." Similarly, when asked about her ideal neighborhood "racial mix," Regina, a Hispanic mother from the Dallas suburbs, responded:

> I would really want near me . . . Italians or just different cultures, so I wouldn't want just one specific [group]—Hispanic or White people. I want mixtures of them just so the kids can know other cultures to where 'Oh, look, let's go eat this type of food' . . . And I want them to eat other stuff and see other people, look at their religions, look at their culture-wise, their history, their side of the wars, what they look up to, and how their life expectations are compared to our expectations. I want them to see all that stuff.

When discussing their preferences for diversity, especially around themes of cultural enrichment, most parents highlighted ethnic diversity beyond the Black/White (or, in Dallas, Black/White/Hispanic) divide characteristic of their metropolitan areas. Susan, a White mother in Dallas, commented that it had been "really neat" for her children to learn about "all these different cultures and religions and things that—you know, we grew up one way and they're like, what is Diwali day? It's very interesting. It's great education for them. . . . It's just fun, you know." Likewise, Annalise, a White mother, spoke approvingly of her Cleveland neighborhood, saying, "a family of Chinese people live down the street, there's actually a couple of them, we see them all the time walking with their kids. There's Puerto Ricans down the street, there's Whites, like it's a diverse street. You see a lot of everything on this street." Annalise described how her daughters "can learn a lot from . . . different cultures and foods and stuff like that—values, beliefs."

RESIDENTIAL SEGREGATION AND PARENTS' UNDERSTANDINGS OF DIVERSITY

Though parents across race spoke similarly about the benefits of neighborhood diversity for their children, parents' understandings were based in dramatically different residential experiences in segregated spaces. These structural realities contextualized the three logics discussed above. White parents generally framed neighborhood diversity in contrast to all-White neighborhoods, describing diversity as an abstract ideal or a desirable, though not essential, amenity. White parents rarely described racial diversity as a marker of relative advantage, perhaps reflecting the taken-for-granted nature of their relative neighborhood and racial privilege. By contrast, Black respondents in both metropolitan areas, and especially in Cleveland, lived in a context of high racial isolation and segregation. Our interviews reflected this: For Black parents, segregated and disadvantaged Black neighborhoods generally served as a reference point when discussing diversity. Some Black and Hispanic respondents explicitly voiced a view of diversity as an indicator of neighborhood quality, often reflecting firsthand knowledge of

how neighborhood segregation and disadvantage have gone hand in hand. Ideas about diversity were thus wrapped up in parents' lived experiences of racial inequality.

When we questioned Suzy, a White Clevelander, about her "ideal community" in terms of "mix of folks," she responded, "It's funny because I was just talking to my husband about that too.... Because... where I grew up there wasn't a whole lot of diversity." Suzy depicted neighborhood diversity as a means to teach tolerance, to help her children see that, regardless of racial background, people "do the same things" and "everybody is equal." She told us that she wants to impart these lessons to her kids before they get to college. Her yearning to prepare her children for a multiracial real world was shared with parents of other races, yet residential segregation set up Suzy's reference point. Suzy framed the alternative to diversity as an all-White community, which she explained was "not reality....You're not seeing the whole picture."

Suzy lived in Lakewood, a Cleveland suburb that was 85 percent non-Hispanic White, 4 percent Hispanic, and 7 percent Black. Yet because her imagined alternative was all-White, like the area where she grew up, she portrayed her neighborhood as diverse, adding, "I think it's neat for the girls with all the diversity that they see." She repeated the same descriptor, "neat," as she described how her daughters have some friends with "different backgrounds." She elaborated, "I think that's what's neat, is that you're surrounded [by] around other people so it's not strange that, you know, they're Asians, or the Arabs are around." Suzy's vision of diversity, then, was not so much an integrated Black/White neighborhood reflective of the metropolitan area's demographics, but one with visible multiethnic difference—including "Asian, Arab, Black, Caucasian," as she put it—even if that space was almost entirely White.

Black parents expressed similar neighborhood diversity logics as White parents—voicing a desire for diversity as a means to augment their children's human capital, moral development, and enrichment. For example, Shantay and Vanessa, Black mothers in Cleveland and Dallas, respectively, viewed exposure to neighborhood diversity as valuable preparation for their children's future. Yet their reference points were homogenously Black areas. As Shantay stated, "I think diversity is good, period.... Because if you grow up only seeing Black and that's all you know, then you'll be shocked when you go someplace else." Likewise, Vanessa told us: "The truth is the world is not just Black people." She described her fiancé's upbringing in a low-income Black neighborhood, where "there were no White people at all," as a hindrance: "He didn't know how to interact, how to talk, nothing, because he never had to. Well, that's not the world." Having seen her fiancé's struggles to get along in a diverse environment as an adult, Vanessa hoped to give her daughter an alternative. For Black parents like Shantay and Vanessa, diverse neighborhoods promise child benefits, as imagined in contrast to racially isolated settings.

"Racial Mix" as a Marker of Relative Advantage

For some Black and Hispanic parents, unlike most White parents, their own negative experiences in segregated neighborhoods bolstered their preferences for neighborhood diversity.[6] For these parents, neighborhood diversity represented relative neighborhood advantage, echoing the racial proxy thesis (e.g., Harris 1999), as well as a resource for positive child development. For example, Gabrielle, a Black mother living in the Dallas suburbs, spoke about children's opportunities in predominantly White areas: "They have better schools; I'm just going to be honest. They're more focused. The neighborhoods are a lot better; not as much crime—there's crime everywhere, but it's a lot better."

Diversity conveyed safe and stable communities with high-quality institutions, as opposed to places like the predominantly Black East Side of Cleveland, which respondents told us had a reputation for poverty, crime, and social disorganization—or what Chuck, a Black father, described as "drama." Chuck described disliking behaviors—people not watching their children or not taking care of their houses—that he observed during his upbringing "down in the projects" on the East Side. This was his point of reference as he explained, "Not to be racist against my own race . . . I just like to live around a mixture of people." Chuck, and parents like him, seemed most concerned about what these spaces represented in a racially stratified reality. Chuck, for example, would welcome living in an area like Garfield Heights, a middle-income suburb with a substantial Black population, which he deemed more stable and "civilized."

Likewise, a few Hispanic respondents shared negative impressions of specific poor and predominantly Hispanic neighborhoods. Marina, a Dallas mother, described certain Hispanic neighborhoods as notorious for drunkenness or rowdy behavior and opined that Asians and Whites were probably "calmer." Jennifer, also from Dallas, wanted to avoid all-Hispanic areas, in part because she had lived in Hispanic neighborhoods with high crime. She also wanted a reprieve from nosy neighbors she attributed to "the Hispanic or Latino culture." She explained, "they're always checking, like, what time do you leave, what time do you come back, what are you doing?" With a self-conscious laugh, Jennifer told us about her ideal neighborhood: "I would have to go with White and Black, Asian, anything but [all] Latinos." In her current location, Jennifer enjoyed seeing her children playing with non-Hispanic children and speaking both English and Spanish: "I like that, that they interact with different cultures, different people." Thus, in addition to appreciating the opportunities for cross-race interaction that a diverse neighborhood afforded her children, Jennifer preferred a diverse neighborhood because she associated a preponderance of Hispanic neighbors with negative neighborhood characteristics.

In contrast to Black and Hispanic parents, White parents' aspirations for neighborhood diversity were not motivated by concerns about the quality of homogenously same-race (majority-White) neighborhoods. Given persistent place stratification by race (Logan and Molotch 1987; Sampson 2012; Sharkey 2013), most White parents did not expressly perceive predominantly White neighborhood destinations as low-quality—they did not, for example, note that such areas had poor-performing schools or reputations for violence. Rather, their only quibble with predominantly White areas was that these neighborhoods lacked the advantages of diversity, such as preparation for the "real world" and opportunities to teach tolerance and provide cultural enrichment to their children, as described above.

Diversity as a Strategy to Avoid Racism

If Black parents, and some Hispanic parents, conceptualized non-White neighborhoods as undesirable given their marginalization, neglect, and disinvestment by systems of power, why did they express preferences for diverse neighborhoods as opposed to highly resourced, predominantly White neighborhoods? For a few Black respondents, multiracial neighborhoods provided a favorable alternative to the racial isolation they might experience in all-White neighborhoods (Charles 2006, 2007; Krysan and Farley 2002).[7] Kenya, for example, a Black mother in Cleveland introduced above, recalled living in a place where "everywhere that me and my kids went we was the only African American family. It just got, people look at you different. It's just, it got tiresome." As such, she

wanted to live in a diverse neighborhood: "You can stick me in the melting pot. I'm good with that . . . "

Accordingly, for a few Black parents, diverse neighborhood contexts enabled them and their children to avoid predominantly Black neighborhoods and benefit from cross-race contact without feeling "singled out." Ella, a Black mother from Cleveland, described two neighborhoods where she aspired to live as "racially diverse," adding, "That's a big thing for me. I don't want to put my kids in a situation where they feel awkward or like they're not welcome or unrepresented." Similarly, Gabrielle, the Black mother in Dallas introduced above who felt that White neighborhoods were safer and had "better schools," was wary of homogenously White neighborhoods. She described her ideal neighborhood, "I want it to be mixed . . . a little bit of everybody in the neighborhood. I don't want my kids to walk outside and feel kind of awkward." In this sense, neighborhood diversity is understood by some Black families as a way to secure a relatively advantaged neighborhood environment while mitigating some of the risks of homogenously White neighborhoods, such as racial hostility and feeling "out of place" (Charles 2006; Krysan and Farley 2002).

FROM IDEAL TO REAL: BARRIERS TO PURSUING NEIGHBORHOOD DIVERSITY PREFERENCES

A substantial share of parents expressed hopeful ideals about neighborhood diversity, based in large part on their understandings of its benefits for their children. However, very few parents described ideals about residential diversity motivating their residential moves *in practice*. In a context of structural constraints on parents' housing searches, parents' other preferences and needs generally took precedence over their diversity aspirations.

White Parents Who Value Diversity: What Motivates Their Moves?

White respondents who expressed desires for neighborhood diversity rarely described prioritizing this preference in their housing searches. Reflecting broader patterns of racial wealth and income inequality, most White parents in our sample who valued diversity had relatively high incomes.[8] However, these higher-income White parents, who perhaps had the greatest ability to realize their neighborhood preferences, most commonly described prioritizing public school districts,[9] along with lower commute times to work, familiarity of area, and proximity to kin. These preferences often landed them in predominantly White neighborhoods. Mary's example is illustrative. Mary, a White mother, detailed her upbringing in a family committed to civil rights. Yet upon moving to Cleveland, she told us, she set her sights on living in Rocky River—a nearly all-White suburb—for the quality of its public schools, despite disliking the "wonder bread" character of the district.

As Mary's experience suggests, even for White parents who express a preference for neighborhood diversity, this diversity may be at most a bonus in the housing search, in contrast to other valued home or neighborhood traits. For example, Justin, a White father introduced above, also prioritized school and location when he and his wife first moved to Cleveland for work. They narrowed their housing search to Shaker Heights and Beachwood—suburbs within easy commuting distance that had been recommended by professional colleagues for their high-quality schools. Having happily settled in Shaker Heights, Justin described the city's racial and economic diversity as a "plus." He

appreciated that Shaker Heights was a "real diverse neighborhood," which he believed would provide "a good life skill" for his children "to learn how to get along with different types of people." However, he said, "I mean, if we had to live someplace where it was not as diverse, I don't think it would be a deal breaker but it's a nice—it's a nice thing to have."[10] In contrast, perceived school quality, followed by housing size and proximity to work, were nonnegotiables for Justin and his wife.

Likewise, Suzy, introduced previously, valued diversity, yet was emphatic about prioritizing neighborhood safety and school district quality—characteristics that are themselves highly racialized (Billingham and Hunt 2016; Quillian and Pager 2001). When she discussed specific places she would consider living, she told us, "First, safety is very important… and then yeah what you're looking for in a house is important. And schools of course." As we probed her perceptions about neighborhood options, Suzy also made it clear to us that she would not move "farther out" beyond Lakewood because of her commute and her desire to live near family. While Suzy thought it would be "good to be in a community where there is some diversity," the "diversity" she talked about was abstract. As she articulated it, if she could shape the world to meet her ideals, she "wouldn't build a community where it's just, like, all White people." Yet this ideal remained disconnected from her perceived real-life options.

Katherine and her husband were one of just two White families who described prioritizing racial diversity—in addition to other goals—when searching for housing. Katherine, a White mother, loved living in Shaker Heights in large part because of its diversity. However, when describing her housing search, Katherine made clear that school quality served as a first-order priority. She explained that she and her husband had narrowed their choice to two school districts they viewed favorably, Shaker Heights and Bay Village, a suburb that was approximately 96 percent non-Hispanic White. Ultimately, Shaker's relative economic and racial integration, along with its proximity to their family, swayed their decision. Katherine told us, "You know, that was one of the reasons that we wanted to live here.… I just wanted a more *real* environment." Speaking of the neighborhood they had lived in "pre-kids," which she described as "very homogenous," she told us, "I don't think we were taking that [homogeneity] into consideration as much as we would now. It's interesting that I think the decisions you make pre-kids and when you have kids." Katherine's desire for a more racially and economically diverse environment for her children influenced her housing choice, within limits.

Additionally, Arlene, a White mother living in East Dallas, had bought her house before she had children, but as her daughter approached school age, she worried about her local public school's low ratings. While Arlene was clear that school quality would be her "main" criterion in choosing a new place to live, she pivoted, spontaneously, to discuss the racial and ethnic "mix" in a Dallas suburb she was eyeing. "Richardson is the only suburb that we would consider.… It just sort of has a vibe and the community is just kind of a melting pot.… I wouldn't feel like it was like total White flight." Arlene appreciated her own upbringing in multiethnic contexts and wanted a similar environment for her young daughter.

As these examples show, even for the affluent White families who were most emphatic about the value of multiracial contexts, diversity was one sought-after neighborhood trait among others. Thus, while White parents with economic means had the resources to realize their aspirations for more racially integrated neighborhoods, their pursuit of other neighborhood goods—especially public school districts—impeded this goal. Perhaps the

exception in our sample of neighborhoods was Shaker Heights, a stably integrated suburb of Cleveland with schools well regarded by affluent respondents. Moreover, explicit acknowledgements of the structural inequalities shaping residential trade-offs, such as related to perceived school quality, were largely absent from parents' discussions.

Black and Hispanic Parents Who Value Diversity: What Motivates Their Moves?

Reflecting larger patterns of racial inequality, the Black and Hispanic parents in our sample tended to face more constraints on their moves in terms of resources like income, search time, transportation options, and wealth, which often limited their abilities to enact their housing and neighborhood ideals.[11] These parents were more likely to experience moves that were "reactive" or necessitated by factors outside of their control, such as eviction, pest problems, break-ups, or neighborhood shootings that left parents feeling unsafe.[12] Reactive moves oriented parents toward quickly finding an acceptable alternative to their current housing, leaving them little attention to dedicate to searching for housing aligned with their residential preferences (Harvey et al. 2019), such as for a diverse neighborhood.

Exemplifying some of these dynamics, Shantay, a Black mother in Cleveland introduced above, valued neighborhood diversity and described an interest in living in Shaker Heights, a suburb known for racial diversity and good schools. However, she told us, "I couldn't pay Shaker taxes." When we first met Shantay in 2013, she had just left her last rental, fed up with the bedbugs in her unit and desperate to avoid neighborhood crime: "I knew, since I had a kid, I wanted somewhere where I didn't look out the window and see drug dealers." She ended up in a place she could afford, but which did not reflect her ideals.

Similarly, Simone and Darnell, a mixed-race couple in Cleveland, described their ideal neighborhood composition as "a little bit of everything." However, their recent housing history consisted of a series of doubled-up households and reactive moves. When we met her in 2013, Simone told us she would never consider moving to Cleveland's East Side, saying it would be too far from her job and "like living in the hood. No White people live over there. There's nothing but Black people. And there is a lot of fights, a lot of guns, a lot of crack heads. . . . That's why I said nowhere on the East Side period." However, by 2014, with limited finances, Darnell's criminal record, and a short timeframe for their most recent move, they had landed in a unit on the East Side. Simone explained, "I wanted to stay on the West Side but that's not how it worked out . . . the rent's cheap and it's the first place [we] could find so we're here."

Rocío, a Hispanic mother in Dallas, spoke earnestly about wanting her children to live in a diverse neighborhood and learn from racial mixing, saying, "I think they would have more opportunity to grow as a person if they know different races and religions." Rocío has faced poverty and hardship—at times not having enough to eat. When we met her, she was grateful for the steady income from her new husband's job and was relatively satisfied with her home and neighborhood. They lived near kin and coworkers, so that her husband could get rides to work. So far, these demands, along with budget constraints, have determined Rocío's housing choices.

As these examples show, the Black and Hispanic parents in our sample often faced severe constraints to satisfying their preferences for diverse neighborhoods. Our sample did include some higher-income Black (8 of 41) and Hispanic (2 of 8) respondents who

expressed desires for diversity. These parents had more means to attain racially mixed neighborhoods, yet often described neighborhood choices oriented around relatively affordable homeownership in suburbs and proximity to family.

ALTERNATIVE PREFERENCES

Some parents expressed alternative views or were less explicitly positive about the benefits of ethnic or racial mixing. Several (10 of 41) Hispanic parents in our sample expressed positive sentiments about living near other Hispanic residents (in line with Charles 2000, 2007, and Zubrinsky and Bobo 1996), often for reasons of cultural affinity. These preferences were not consistently driven by children's needs. For example, Fernando, a Spanish-speaking Hispanic father from the Dallas area, responded to our questions about racial mix as follows: "People feel more comfortable living amongst their own race, right? . . . you might have more communication with them because you speak the same language." Additionally, several Hispanic immigrants raised fears of deportation or police stops leading to immigration-related entanglements as reasons to avoid certain neighborhoods (see also Asad and Rosen 2019).

Finally, in addition to clearly stated *preferences* for diversity, about one-quarter of all respondents (38 of 156) indicated that they had *no* preferences regarding neighborhood racial composition. These parents sometimes expressed pointed discourses of "colorblindness" (Bonilla-Silva 2003; Bonilla-Silva and Embrick 2001; Burke 2017), saying that race made no difference in their neighborhood preferences, or that they only cared about neighborhood quality and the individual character of residents. For example, Araceli, a Hispanic mother, said, "It doesn't matter to me if there's more Hispanics or more Black people; I just want somewhere peaceful and quiet." Hailey, a White mother, said, "It does not really matter your race—it matters how you live, the way you carry yourself." However, in contrast to these colorblind logics, the positive evaluations of neighborhood diversity described above show that many parents valued exposure to racial others, often for reasons related to their children.

CONCLUSION

Preferences about neighborhood racial composition have long been considered an important driver of residential segregation. Prior research on these preferences has mostly been animated by expectations about in-group attraction, out-group avoidance, the influence of stereotypes, and perceived associations between race and status (Bobo and Zubrinsky 1996; Krysan 2002b). Drawing on in-depth interview data from parents with young children in two metropolitan areas, we identify an important countercurrent to these themes: a substantial subset of parents pointedly expressing a desire to live in racially and ethnically mixed neighborhoods—a residential preference at odds with racial segregation.

Our findings extend the literature on colorblind racism in the context of residential decision-making. While parents in our sample tended to be silent on the connections between race, place, and inequality, as anticipated by scholarship on colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2003), they also went beyond colorblindness. Parents' positive evaluations of neighborhood diversity reflected a recognition of racial differences as valuable. Parents

often linked neighborhood diversity to benefits for child development. These parents believed neighborhood diversity would prepare children for the "real world," prevent them from developing racial stereotypes, and provide cultural enrichment. Importantly, Black, White, and some Hispanic respondents expressed parallel logics. While scholars have debated the consequences of multiracial exposure for stereotype development (Allport 1954; Pauker et al. 2018; Pettigrew 1998), what our data make clear is that *parents themselves* articulate multiracial contact for their children at the neighborhood level as a good worth pursuing.

These views of neighborhood diversity as beneficial for individual children's development resonate with diversity ideologies, which conceptualize racial and ethnic diversity as an asset while failing to recognize structural inequalities in power and resources (Burke 2012; Embrick 2011; Mayorga-Gallo 2014). While most research on these discourses in other contexts has focused on affluent White individuals, the present study shows the reach of such narratives across class and race in the realm of neighborhood assessment and choice. Diversity ideologies reject overt racial animus but may not affirmatively dismantle institutionalized racial inequality (Bell and Hartmann 2007; Berrey 2015; Burke 2012; Embrick 2011; Smith and Mayorga-Gallo 2017; Underhill 2018). In our sample, parents very rarely framed their stated desires for diverse neighborhoods explicitly in terms of the benefits of racial equity or even integration, instead highlighting the advantages they believed diverse residential contexts would have for their families (though their desire to prevent their children from internalizing racial stereotypes may, in part, reflect a desire to combat racial injustice). Additionally, when parents in our sample discussed the "mix" of their neighborhoods, they implied that racial or ethnic diversity reflected neighbors' traditions, foodways, languages, and communication styles. This is consistent with a cultural view of race, which often downplays race as linked to social stratification (Berrey 2015).

Given the absence of attention to the broader context of racial and residential inequality, parents lack a framework for conceptualizing and tackling residential conditions that are at odds with their ideals. Higher-income White parents who stated an abstract preference for ethnically diverse neighborhoods often described moving to homogenously White neighborhoods because they prioritized other concerns; chief among these were public school districts, often along with relative proximity to work and/or family and other housing qualities. Perceived differences in neighborhood institutions like schools are likely driven in part by real inequality in the level of historic investment in White and non-White communities (Massey and Denton 1993; Wilson 1987). However, scholarship also finds that White parents assess school quality based on racial composition, preferring schools with fewer Black students even accounting for test scores, school safety, and quality of school facilities (Billingham and Hunt 2016; Goyette, Farrie, and Freely 2012). Although advantaged parents are better equipped to achieve neighborhood diversity, perceptions of school and neighborhood quality—which may be driven by both racial stereotypes as well as systemic differences in school funding and community resources—stand in the way. We find little indication that parents, particularly White parents, consider how racial inequality structures these conditions.

Likewise, Black and Hispanic parents typically framed neighborhood diversity in contrast to predominantly non-White neighborhoods and often linked the conditions of these neighborhoods to the racial composition of the residents, largely without discussing systemic racial inequality. For Black and Hispanic parents, compared to White parents,

an additional meaning of diversity emerged, reflecting racial inequality and segregation: diversity as a marker of neighborhood advantage, as well as a potential buffer from all-White spaces (see also Farley and Frey 1994; Logan and Zhang 2010).

Our findings suggest that public policy has an important role to play in reducing the barriers parents face in pursuing more integrated neighborhoods. Currently, households with children have higher rates of segregation than households without children (Iceland et al. 2010). Our data show that many parents see benefits—often, specifically for their children—of living in integrated areas, but structural inequalities impede this goal. Policy interventions should target this gap between aspirations and neighborhood outcomes. For higher-income parents, few real neighborhood options offer the full bundle of valued qualities (Adelman 2005; Havekes et al. 2016): racial integration as well as amenities like high-quality school districts and desirable houses. This study underscores the importance of residential options such as Shaker Heights, a suburb in Cleveland known for stable racial integration and high-performing schools. Place-based investment might foster such real-world options, giving parents a better chance to realize their aspirations. Conversely, lower-income parents find themselves making the most of limited resources in metropolitan areas where neighborhood safety and school quality are segmented by race and class. For the most disadvantaged parents, their abilities to realize their preferences for neighborhood diversity are stymied by a strikingly *limited* amount of choice in where they end up, which often results in churning in high-poverty, racially segregated areas (DeLuca et al. 2019). Supporting these parents' abilities to find, secure, and remain in housing in more integrated neighborhoods that are safe and have high-quality institutions should be an important policy goal. In sum, the preferences for neighborhood racial and ethnic diversity that we found across race and social class could serve as an important countercurrent to persistent residential segregation. Public policy interventions should endeavor to unleash this potential.

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Notes

[1]Some recent studies have shifted away from purely hypothetical preferences, such as research in Detroit and Chicago that asks respondents where they would "seriously consider" and "never consider" looking for a home, using a list of specific metro-area communities (Bader and Krysan 2015; Krysan and Bader 2007).

[2]As of 2010, the Cleveland–Elyria–Mentor metropolitan area had the 8th highest Black–White dissimilarity among metros with large Black populations (Dissimilarity index [D] = 72; Black isolation index [i] = 64.7).

For the Dallas metropolitan area, Black–White segregation is lower ($D = 55.1$; Black isolation index [i] = 37.1). However, Hispanic–White segregation is relatively high in Dallas; it has the 12th highest dissimilarity of the 50 metros with the largest Hispanic populations ($D = 51.9$) and the 25th highest out of 50 metros in terms of Hispanic isolation ($i = 46.6$) (Logan and Stults 2011).

[3]Neighborhood preferences discussed in this article reflect respondents' own ideas about what constitutes a "neighborhood." This grounded approach is appropriate for uncovering parental ideas about the meaning and significance of racial composition in residential contexts. Parent responses make clear that neighborhood racial make-up is meaningful to them in terms of exposure to neighbors for children. However, parents may have different understandings about the geographic scale at which this might occur.

[4]Our interview team was racially mixed though majority White, and we did not design the study to match field researchers and respondents by race or ethnicity. Our approach was designed to address this potential limitation and to encourage respondents' candor, as described above.

[5]These themes or logics were not mutually exclusive; parents often expressed multiple themes within one interview.

[6]Of parents who described valuing diversity, about one-third of Black parents (14 of 41) and half of Hispanic parents (4 of 8) described neighborhood diversity as a marker of neighborhood advantage. Two White parents (of 13) spoke of experiences living in specific predominantly Black or Hispanic neighborhoods, which they associated with relative neighborhood disadvantages like crime and lower quality schools. For these two White parents, diversity was also a marker of neighborhood quality, in addition to being desirable for its other child benefits.

[7]Such concerns were explicitly described as a benefit of diverse neighborhoods by 12% (5 of 41) of Black respondents who described diversity as an ideal. This theme did not come up for the eight Hispanic parents who valued diversity. However, in the full sample, approximately one in five of all Black and Hispanic respondents voiced concerns about encountering racism in specific (generally predominantly White) neighborhoods, describing the prejudice and discriminatory treatment they or their social network ties had experienced from neighbors, classmates, and police officers.

[8]10 of the 13 White parents valuing diversity reported annual household incomes above the county median.

[9]Among parents who expressed a preference for diversity, 6 of the 10 higher-income White parents described public schools as one of their primary motivations for choosing their neighborhood. In addition, one prioritized being near a specific private school.

[10]As of 2010, the Shaker Heights' population was about 55 percent White, just under 40 percent Black, and 5 percent Hispanic.

[11]Approximately half (20 of 41) of Black parents who voiced a preference for diversity reported incomes of less than 50% of the county median. About one quarter (10 of 41) were living "doubled up" with friends or family, often due to financial constraints. In doubled-up cases, neighborhood options were limited by the residential locations of the family and friends with whom they lived.

[12]Of the Black parents who expressed a preference for diversity, a majority (60% or 25 of 41) had landed in their current residence through some form of reactive move.

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