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Complaints not really about our methodology

By LOIS QUINN and JOHN PAWASARAT

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This disagreement is not about methodology. Everyone who read the first Milwaukee Journal Sentinel article on our report and examined the map of Milwaukee last Sunday can see how simple the math is.

Let's take a look at what we did.

One, we defined integration. Two, we mapped it by block. Three, we added up the number of residents living on integrated blocks and calculated the percentage of residents in the city and metro area living on such blocks. We used residential blocks because that is where people are likely to have social contract: going to and from work, mowing the yard, shoveling snow and having their children play together.

Defining integration to be at least 20% white and at least 20% black, we found that one of five city of Milwaukee residents (21.7% of the population) lived on black-white integrated blocks in 2000. In all, 20% of the white population and 28% of the city's African-American population lived on integrated blocks.

Some of these blocks were majority white, some were majority black. Except in Brown Deer and a small number of other scattered blocks, almost no black-white integrated

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Segregation in Milwaukee



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blocks were located in the suburbs or rural communities of the Milwaukee area.

We compared Milwaukee to the 50 largest cities and the 100 largest metropolitan areas in the United States. Most communities showed high levels of segregation.

In the Milwaukee metropolitan area, only 9% of the population lives on black-white integrated blocks (5% of the total white population and 27% of the total African- American population).

This is very low. It is also very typical of U.S. urban areas, putting us 43rd among the 100 largest areas.

We suspect that the real issue for our academic critics is not with our "methodology," but that we have attacked a sacred cow of a small group of social scientists.

Ours is one of the first studies measuring integration in urban America. Most academics have focused exclusively on segregation, using an obscure statistical tool developed in the 1950s and 1960s to assess residential housing patterns.

The academic studies that receive the most media attention are those ranking cities and metro areas from worst to best, particularly when accompanied by emotional terms like "hypersegregation."

After the 2000 decennial census, there was a race to see who could be the first to get out their index and capture the headlines.

First, let's be clear about the serious deficiencies of the segregation index.

The index ranks the Milwaukee area suburbs (with only a 1.7% black population) as far less segregated than the city of Milwaukee. (The Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research calls our suburbs "moderately segregated.")

The suburbs also score well on their lack of "hypersegregation," as defined by Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton. Our critics want to ignore these index shortcomings as well as others (e.g., metro areas like Salt Lake City with very few African-Americans score as least segregated).

Indeed, some researchers using the segregation index have begun to drop western and southwestern cities from their studies, even though the index was specifically developed to be used for cities of any size and with any population mix. Both the Mumford Center and a recent U.S. Census Bureau excluded metro areas with fewer African-

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Americans from their rankings, which suggests their growing embarrassment with rankings showing metro areas with tiny black populations as the most integrated in America.

In rankings for Latino-white segregation, metro areas with small Latino populations (St. Louis, Pittsburgh and Cincinnati) were dropped from the index for the same reason. Our critics have ignored this problem, even though it calls into question the methodological consistency of the rankings.

We find the segregation index approach to be obsolete because it studies only two races at a time. The black-white index promoted in the newspapers completely ignores Latinos, Asians and Native Americans and focuses instead only on interactions between African-Americans and whites, using a measure which whites concerned about "white flight" were comfortable with in the 1960s.

The definitions are outmoded. Lacking a definition and measurement for diversity, the index uses even dispersal of each racial group as its only goal for measuring segregation (or by implication, integration). This academic approach hasn't evolved since the 1960s, while the cities and community attitudes have changed dramatically.

We further reject the notion that any simple black-white definitions can be used to rank the incredible diversity of cities. We have argued against using the rankings. We developed one of our own (using the racial definitions of the segregation studies), *only* to show the flaws of the rankings. We advise people not to use ours, but of course they do.

The notion that any research on this topic is the sole purview of "peer-reviewed" sociological journals and "audiences of academic experts" is ludicrous. From the response of our critics, that appears to be the place where open discussion may be least likely to occur when an academic sacred cow is the topic.

Problems of segregation are persistent and a critical part of our analysis. Anyone looking at the maps and data tables can see this.

Another question is, are the segregation indexes racially biased? Does the dissimilarity index measure metro areas against a goal of "mass dispersal of the African-American race?"

Actually, it does. Karl and Alma Taeuber, the index's most influential users, explained that 92.8% of the black population in Birmingham would need to move "if some governing council had the power and the inclination to redistribute the population of Birmingham so as to obtain an unsegregated distribution of white and non-white residences."

What does it mean today? Milwaukee's ranking on the dissimilarity

index is 82.16%, meaning that 197,890 of the area's 240,859 African Americans would be expected to move from their "too black" census tracts and into the remaining "whiter" tracts of the entire four-county area.

(When the dissimilarity index is applied to Latinos in metro Milwaukee, it expects 59.5% of the Latino population, or 56,200 residents, to move for "evenness.")

In fact, the goal of the black-white index is that every census tract in the 100 largest metro areas should be majority white. Is this racially biased? We think so.

Other segregation indexes are even worse. Massey and Denton, the sociologists who built their reputations on the "hypersegregation" label, use an "isolation" index that ranks metro areas where blacks live by the average percentage of other blacks in the tract. Communities where blacks typically live in overwhelmingly white neighborhoods are considered best, areas where blacks live in predominantly black neighborhoods are considered worst.

Is this racially biased? Yes. It maintains that African-Americans are "isolated" when they live with other African-Americans, but not when they live in nearly all-white census tracts.

Here's another example. A new census bureau report ranking metro areas on segregation uses a "delta index." This index expects African-Americans to be evenly distributed on every square mile of the metro area (and limited to 165 blacks per square mile in Milwaukee).

Under this standard, the city of Milwaukee population would be limited to 15,920 African-American residents; all others would be expected to relocate outside the city, including onto the many acres of farmland in Ozaukee, Washington and Waukesha counties.

Finally, the critics, while not explicitly opposing our integration measure, offer a series of "yes, but" exceptions to our democratic proposition that majority black neighborhoods can be considered integrated.

- Yes, but you can't include majority black neighborhoods that might be predominantly black ten years from now.
- Yes, but you can't include neighborhoods where some social scientists claim the people didn't really want to be there (i.e., that are not "middle and upper-class black communities").
- Yes, but you can't include areas that some sociologists have decided were "created because of discrimination and social inequality."

The critics take the perspective that African-American residential

patterns must necessarily and always be associated with unemployment, poverty and crime.

The historic segregation index addresses only the issue of race; why should our report be any different?

We examined the distribution of the African-American and white populations in metro Milwaukee, presenting a variety of statistics (rather than simply one statistic, which is what the segregation index provides). This allows readers to assess levels of integration and segregation in Milwaukee and other large metro areas.

The academic criticism appears to be not really about our count of integrated neighborhoods. It appears to be about preserving the social scientists' sole right to define segregation for urban American.

The real question is, what do we do next?

If we acknowledge that the black-white dissimilarity index is racially biased or just plain foolish (Salt Lake City comes to mind), if we say that majority black neighborhoods are not all segregated or that diverse neighborhoods can be defined in a variety of ways, then we will have to give up these statistical ranking systems along with the claim that Milwaukee is America's most segregated city.

How do we address the persistent and deep problems of racial segregation in Milwaukee and, particularly, in the suburbs? How do we support neighborhoods with integration, not just of whites and African-Americans, but also with Latinos, Hmong, Native Americans and others who make up the fabric of metro Milwaukee?

We believe that loss of the "most segregated" mantle will not hurt integration efforts but may instead increase the likelihood that the young minority professionals and others will be attracted to Milwaukee.

Our research is the first step toward describing housing integration in a new way.

U.S. census data are easily available off the web. We encourage others to carry the work forward by studying the racial mix, integration and segregation taking place in neighborhoods of our metro area and to contribute to the discussion.

Lois Quinn is senior research scientist for the Employment and Training Institute at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. John Pawasarat is the institute's director.

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