

RACE, SEGREGATION AND DIVERSITY IN COLLEGE:
HOW PRECOLLEGE DIVERSITY EXPERIENCES INFLUENCE
STUDENTS' COLLEGE PREFERENCES, BEHAVIORS, AND PERCEPTIONS

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Abstract

Existing research suggests that racial segregation in neighborhoods and schools might lead students to develop negative predispositions regarding multiethnic settings and situations. However, very little research exists regarding how the presence or absence of precollege diversity experiences shapes students' future multiethnic college experiences. This dissertation consists of three related empirical analyses based on conceptual frameworks that I develop from research evidence and theories from the fields of sociology, psychology, and education. Using two recent multi-institution student surveys, I evaluate how students' ethnoracial origin and precollege experiences with racial and ethnic diversity influence their college preferences as well as their interracial interactions and perceptions of comfort in college. This dissertation contributes to a growing literature on the enduring consequences of racial and ethnic segregation, particularly how experiences of segregation influence individual attitudes and behavior. I find that both opportunities for and direct experiences with diversity prior to college influence students' future engagement with and interpretation of racial and ethnic experiences. In the concluding chapter, I discuss important areas for research and action related to minimizing the reproduction of social stratification and maximizing the preparation of students for a global community where experience with diversity is becoming a form of capital.