



Would We Know ‘Integration’ If We Were to See It? Measurement and *The Imperative of Integration*

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These comments in response to Elizabeth Anderson’s *The Imperative of Integration* focus on the problems of measurement that arise from the next step of putting her theory of integration into practice. In fact, thinking about measurement helps us with the theory as well, since it highlights issues that may not have seemed as central or salient at first glance. Contemplating the units of analysis used in the measurement of segregation, how to measure integration, and what counts as diversity or integration in the minds of ordinary Americans forces us to think more concretely about what it means for a society to have integration, which is defined by Anderson as ‘the free interaction of citizens from all walks of life on terms of equality and mutual regard’. This article concludes with a couple of thoughts on political trade-offs that may be forced by integration.

Keywords: race; integration; segregation; measurement; attitudes

Elizabeth Anderson’s book, *The Imperative of Integration*, builds a compelling political theory about integration based on empirics spanning the humanities and social sciences. It convinces the reader of the importance of non-ideal theory, focusing on the principles needed for the world in which we live, rather than for a perfectly just society. Anderson’s synthesis of a wide range of political, sociological and psychological studies of segregation, prejudice and the effects of interracial contact is impressive. She discusses a range of policies that could be used to increase integration – even if that outcome was not the main reason for their implementation – and makes clear the dangers of certain arguments (besides integration) used as justification. Because I believe Anderson makes such a strong case for the ‘imperative of integration’, my comments are less in the nature of a critique and instead focus on the problems of measurement that arise from the next step of putting her theory of integration into practice. After all, one must be able to answer the questions ‘Does this plan produce enough integration?’ and ‘Has this integration plan succeeded?’ in order to implement good policy inspired by Anderson’s arguments. In fact, thinking about measurement helps us with the theory as well, since it highlights issues that may not have seemed as central or salient at first glance. Contemplating the units of analysis used in the measurement of segregation, how to measure integration, and what counts as diversity or integration in the minds of ordinary Americans forces us to think more concretely about what it means for a society to have ‘the free interaction of citizens from all walks of life on terms of equality and mutual regard’ (Anderson, 2010, p. 95). I conclude this article with a couple of thoughts on political trade-offs that may be forced by integration.



Units of Analysis and Segregation

When we think of segregation, we often think of schools or neighborhoods or cities, but the units chosen are crucially important for how we measure the problem.¹ Discussions of segregation that appear in the news focus on cities that are the most and least segregated; rarely do any stories focus on the quarter of Americans who live on 97 per cent of the country's land. In particular, we do not often think about how segregated the United States is as a country. Instead of worrying that red and blue America portends a fragmented country, political leaders should perhaps be more concerned about distinctions between more and less racially diverse states. If we think about the processes that assign groups to different social spaces, institutions and social roles, why should we be any less concerned that whites in the entire state of Vermont (as opposed to whites in a single city), for example, have very little chance of encountering many of the racial minorities that collectively will make up the national majority in the next century?

The household is also another unit of analysis that is rarely mentioned in discussions of racial segregation; it is instead treated as a measure of social distance or assimilation (but see Farley, 1999). While the numbers of multiracial Americans have increased over the last two censuses (Jones and Bullock, 2012), less than 7 per cent of Americans are married to someone of a different race (Lofquist, 2012). Why, roughly a half century after anti-miscegenation laws have been outlawed, is 'spouse' still a role predominantly assigned to an individual of one's own race? In the definition of integration I quoted above I left out the end of the sentence, which concludes that integration is 'the free interaction of citizens ... in all institutions of civil society, and on voluntary terms in the intimate associations of private life' (Anderson, 2010, p. 95). There may be a personal distinction between the intimacy of the household and that of the neighborhood, but what is the *normative* justification for the government pursuing integration in the latter but not the former (Arendt, 1959)?

Are the processes that lead to the problems in Detroit's public schools of the same type that lead to segregation at the national and household levels? If the answer is 'yes', isn't segregation at the largest and smallest units equally problematic? After all, integration at the national and household levels would also diminish material inequality and racial stigmas, and promote authentic democracy where whites and blacks treat each other as equal citizens. If, however, we think promoting racial diversity at the national or household level is impossible logistically, or that segregation is acceptable via whatever processes lead people to choose to live in Maine as opposed to California, for example, or choose 'happily ever after' with someone of their own race, why should we consider integration more feasible or desirable at the level of the school, neighborhood or city? I do not want to downplay the importance of segregation at the metropolitan level; however, thinking about units of analysis forces us to reconsider what the scope of the problem is and what policy solutions should be proposed as a result.

Another reason why reconsidering the units of analysis is important is that the definition and measures of segregation (like the commonly used dissimilarity index) require diversity at the larger level.² Can we only have integration where there is diversity? We would probably not be comfortable, for example, calling a city that is 100 per cent white 'integrated' because all the neighborhoods resemble the city as a whole.

However, measuring and worrying about segregation only in the areas where there is diversity is a bit like a drunkard's search. As of 2012, there are eleven states in the US that are at least 90 per cent white (and four that are over 90 per cent non-Hispanic white).³ How will citizens in these states learn about the straitened circumstances of out-groups and the burden of negative stereotyping from which out-groups suffer? There is little possibility of 'contact' except via media sources, and this type of learning about out-groups from news and entertainment is more than a little problematic (Gilens, 2000; Gilliam and Iyengar, 2000). If we think about political representation, for example, these states' representatives comprise more than one-fifth of the Senate; even if elites have more contact with out-group members, their actions are still constrained by the beliefs of their constituents who live in racially homogeneous environments. There may be more economic opportunities in metropolitan areas (which tend to be more racially diverse) and in states that are more diverse (and the causal arrow obviously runs in both directions, since more recent immigrants are moving to where there are jobs), but efforts to ensure integration in *only* those areas cannot help ameliorate racial stigmatization, social/cultural capital deficits and anti-democratic effects at the national level. Focusing on measurement reminds us that our choice of units determines whether segregation will be seen as a problem or not.⁴

Measurement of Integration

To an average American, integration may seem simply to be the opposite of segregation. However, if we think about the measurement of both, we are reminded that they are not simply flip sides of the same coin. Segregation between two groups – operationalized as isolation, interaction or dissimilarity – is measured generally with four numbers: the percentages of groups A and B at two different units of analysis. However, given Anderson's description of integration, its operationalization cannot simply be the proximity of groups since desegregation and diversity do not automatically lead to contact (Uslaner, 2012). Although she is careful to distinguish integration from assimilation, factors that affect the latter's achievement – focusing specifically on its measurement, and not its more normative conceptualization – coincide with what Anderson describes throughout the book as the goals of integration: socio-economic equality, spatial integration, language acquisition (English, 'standard' or otherwise), intermarriage, settlement in 'non-traditional' areas (where immigrants or non-whites have not tended to live in large numbers) and the ongoing replenishment of out-group members via public policies (like immigration or busing) (Waters and Jimenez, 2005). Of course, assimilation does not guarantee the end of nativism or xenophobia, so should we expect that racial integration will lead to the end of negative racial attitudes and stigmatization? Or, should integration be measured differently, such that the achievement of reciprocal regard is more likely to predict societal equality?

Perceptions of Diversity, Integration and the Nation

If average Americans are troubled by segregation – and this is a big 'if' – and are therefore amenable to policies that may require some sacrifices to achieve integration, it matters what unit of analysis they are envisioning, and also what they think counts as

'integration'. If they are thinking about their 'local community' and making judgments about its diversity or lack thereof, what is the size of their community? Or, if they are thinking of their city, for example, are they picturing the same city as the one described by the census and government bureaucracies? In our research, my colleagues and I have found that ordinary citizens have idiosyncratic definitions of their local community that do not coincide with the official boundaries of administrative units used to calculate segregation indices, and that vary a great deal in size and are often not contiguous (Wong *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, people may not be *seeing* the degree of segregation measured by demographers because the borders of their relevant contexts are different. Furthermore, we find that the 'pictures in their heads' of the diversity of their self-defined communities (and that of official administrative contexts in which they live, like their census bloc group, city and country) do not coincide with the numbers that the government and politicians use in their decision making (Wong, 2007; Wong *et al.*, 2012). In general, people tend to perceive the environments in which they live as more diverse than they are 'objectively' speaking.⁵ For example, it is likely that a large number of Americans already think they live in a majority-minority country (Alba *et al.*, 2005; Nadeau *et al.*, 1993).

In addition, over-estimation of minority groups at the local level has implications for the research on tipping points and white flight, which assumes residents are aware of (and accurate about) their surroundings (Bruch and Mare, 2006; Schelling, 2006; Xie and Zhou, 2012). Researchers may find that the tipping point is well below 50 per cent out-group, but residents may actually be willing to be a slight numerical minority in their neighborhoods. In other words, residents may perceive their neighborhoods – which the census describes as 45 per cent out-group – as 65 per cent out-group; if their 'real' tipping point were 60 per cent, they would move, and demographers would then interpret these actions as evidence that the tipping point is 45 per cent. We also find that misperceptions affect racial attitudes, above and beyond census numbers; for example, if two individuals live in almost identically diverse neighborhoods, the one who *thinks* he lives among more out-group members may be more prejudiced (Wong *et al.*, 2012).⁶ Public education may play as important a role in pursuing racial integration as institutional changes.

Perceptions and attitudes also matter because what 'integration' means may vary a great deal among the public. Reynolds Farley and his colleagues, for example, found that white survey respondents are comfortable living in integrated neighborhoods that are about 10–15 per cent black, whereas black respondents imagine living comfortably in integrated neighborhoods with about equal numbers of whites and blacks (Farley *et al.*, 1997; Krysan and Farley, 2002). If political leaders agree with Anderson and argue that we need to achieve integration in order to reach greater levels of equality and democracy, then we need to have a better understanding of what counts as 'integration' for different actors in the public sphere. People today are clearly opposed to laws that ensure segregation and therefore express support for what Anderson calls the 'first stage of integration' – formal desegregation (Schuman *et al.*, 1997). However, they differ a great deal in their support for policies promoting integration (including affirmative action, busing and fair housing laws), and one question that arises is whether this heterogeneity in preferences is a result

of imagining integration in equally heterogeneous ways. What counts as integration will not only shape policy proposals, it will also affect who mobilizes in support and opposition.

Another reason why perceptions matter in the discussion of integration arises from Anderson's discussion of the role of national identity in possibly mitigating the extent of segregation. She suggests a national identity as a preferable alternative to exclusive racial identities, but there is a caveat to this suggestion: Americans' attitudes about their national identity are not unproblematic, as different survey measures make clear (Citrin *et al.*, 1990; Schildkraut, 2011). Who makes up the members of our national community to whom we feel obligated? While social scientists have shown the advantages of emphasizing superordinate identities (Gaertner *et al.*, 1999; Transue, 2007), Americans who have a more exclusionary sense of who is a 'true American' not only have more restrictionist immigration attitudes (e.g. limiting birthright citizenship, diminishing the number of immigrants allowed, restricting social welfare benefits to immigrants), they also express less support for government programs to help blacks, more support for capital punishment and less support for the civil liberties of numerical minorities (defined by politics, religion or sexuality) (Wong, 2010). Analyzing people's perceptions makes clear that promoting an American identity (in exchange for racial identities) can have equally negative consequences for the integration of minorities.

At What Cost Integration?

I want to conclude with brief thoughts about two trade-offs that are posed by integration efforts: descriptive representation versus influence, and diminished ethnocentrism versus satisfaction. While the former is ostensibly the more political balancing act, the latter may, in fact, be weightier when deciding what is politically feasible. These trade-offs again make salient units of analysis and what counts as integration in the minds of ordinary Americans.

Imagine a country where every census unit and electoral district resembles the nation as a whole, such that all are about 15 per cent Hispanic, 13 per cent African American, 5 per cent Asian and so on. If one assumed all non-whites share political interests, values and preferences, then one could argue that all districts would be influence districts (Lublin, 1999). And, researchers have shown that contact can lessen ethnocentrism (Allport, 1979; Pettigrew, 1998). However, it also means that there would be no majority-minority districts, for the same reason that one cannot draw majority-women districts if one prioritizes geographical compactness or contiguity in any way. In this hypothetical (but not necessarily ideal) world would we be willing to give up descriptive representation – to the extent that it is a result of majority-minority districts – to eliminate segregation?⁷ Which would most materially improve the lives of the disadvantaged? In other words, in the hypothetically spatially integrated US, blacks' substantive representation could be maximized (at least as measured via floor votes on key civil rights bills) while Congress remained largely white. Would one still argue that roles have been assigned to different groups (in which case, it would be difficult to maximize both spatial integration and role integration), or is an all-white Congress representing perfectly integrated districts an acceptable (or ideal) scenario?⁸

If policy makers strive to achieve integration, they also need to consider the extent to which ordinary citizens will accept dissatisfaction resulting from institutional changes. Most people find homophily comfortable; they tend toward familiarity and similarity in their social networks, their communities, their spouses and even their doctors (McPherson *et al.*, 2001). Of course, many people also choose discomfort in order to live a better life; voluntary migrants, for example, often have to learn new languages and cultures, far away from family and friends, in order to maximize educational and employment opportunities or political and religious freedoms. And, as Anderson explains, studying participants in the Gautreaux and Moving to Opportunity programs helps us understand the potential effect of people's environments on life chances – at least for these impoverished individuals who self-selected to receive the treatment – but they had strong incentives driving their willingness to move away from their old neighborhoods. However, are ordinary Americans willing to sacrifice for what they perceive to be integration when the advantages are more diffuse or are public goods? In experiments where college students were assigned to dorm rooms, both white and black subjects who had a roommate of a different race were less satisfied, were less likely to be good friends with their roommates and were less likely to continue living with their roommate the following year; however, the white students also had better racial attitudes and black students' grades were improved (Shook and Fazio, 2008a; 2008b; Trail *et al.*, 2009). So, with integration, diminished ethnocentrism may be achieved with diminished comfort. Even when there is no direct discomfort from integration, there may still be other problems that arise – for example, researchers argue whether there are higher divorce rates for interracial couples (Bratter and King, 2008; Zhang and Van Hook, 2009).

Politicians are sensitive to the preferences and misperceptions of voters, which is one reason why metropolitan-wide mandatory busing had a relatively short lifespan (Pride, 2000). Mandated spatial integration in schools is commonly believed to come at the cost of spatial integration in neighborhoods, and, in that case, social integration would not occur. How likely are voluntary programs to be adopted and accepted, setting aside legal barriers (since even some voluntary education desegregation efforts have been struck down by the courts)? A university may be willing to allow a one-time social psychology experiment involving an incoming class of students, but would it be willing to require interracial rooming groups for all students' dorms in order to achieve what it sees as integration? These students are, after all, future alumni and donors, and satisfaction with one's college experience plays a significant role in whether one wants to contribute to one's *alma mater* in the future (Drew-Branch, 2011). Similarly, hospitals are businesses, and administrators may yield to patients' refusal of a doctor of a certain race rather than enforce egalitarian standards of treatment at all cost (Paul-Emile, 2012). Is a doctor-patient relationship an 'intimate association of private life' that should remain voluntary to enhance comfort?

Anderson makes a compelling argument in support of racial integration in the US. But, in the struggle for greater racial equality and democracy, would we know 'integration' if we were to see it? Thinking about its measurement helps us grapple with the theoretical case for integration more comprehensively and highlights issues that become salient only when one considers its implementation. What does integration look like in

our non-ideal world, and what is it worth to both political leaders and ordinary Americans?

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Notes

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- 1 From a statistical standpoint, due to the Modifiable Areal Unit Problem (MAUP), using different units leads to different segregation scores regardless of the measure used (Wong, 1997; 2009). The MAUP is a statistical problem whereby relationships between variables change – regardless of the individual-level relationship – depending on the level of aggregation, and there is no easy, agreed-upon solution.
- 2 Furthermore, researchers have shown that the size of a unit matters for segregation: the more individuals there are in a context, the less likely one will have interracial friendships (Cheng and Xie, 2013).
- 3 Idaho, Iowa, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Utah and Wyoming are at least 90 per cent white; Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and West Virginia are at least 93 per cent non-Hispanic white.
- 4 Alesina and Zhuravskaya (2011) find, for example, that segregation in the US is relatively mild in their data, where they use the nation and state as the units.
- 5 We consider ‘objective’ numbers to be those published by the Census Bureau, although we acknowledge that these numbers rely on subjective self-descriptions of a social construct.
- 6 Nevertheless, in our pilot study, more prejudiced people do not, on average, draw smaller communities in order to minimize heterogeneity.
- 7 While non-Hispanic whites do sometimes vote for minority candidates, the vast majority of African Americans in Congress, for example, still come from majority-minority districts.
- 8 Anderson (2010, p. 109) notes that descriptive representation is necessary ‘in conditions of group segregation’. What if there is no segregation? Is descriptive representation needed for influence? If so, we need to rethink the measurement of ‘influence districts’.

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