

Other Protected Classes: Extending Estimates of Housing Discrimination

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Abstract

This article discusses the challenges involved in extending the paired-testing methodology from its original purpose of measuring discrimination based on race and ethnicity to rigorously measuring the incidence and forms of discrimination against other protected classes of homeseekers. It highlights three critical design challenges that any such study must resolve and draws on three recent pilot studies to illustrate these challenges and how they can be resolved. The power of paired testing is greatest when three key conditions are met: (1) the standard for comparison is unambiguous, (2) the relevant segments of the housing market can be identified and tested, and (3) testers' status is apparent to housing providers.

Introduction

During the past four decades, paired testing has proven to be an effective tool for measuring the incidence and forms of discrimination against minority homeseekers. The matched pairs directly control for other factors (like income, wealth, household composition, and housing preferences) that contribute to differences in housing outcomes to reveal differences in treatment based solely on race or ethnicity. Results that document unequal treatment of equally qualified homeseekers are easily understandable and offend most people's idea of basic fairness. As Oh and Yinger's (2015) article in this issue of *Cityscape* discusses, findings from paired-testing studies have influenced federal fair housing legislation, funding for fair housing enforcement, and public understanding of the persistence of discrimination in housing market.

Given the effectiveness of paired testing, the idea of extending the methodology to measure the incidence and forms of discrimination against other groups is appealing to policymakers and practitioners. In recent years, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has funded pilot or exploratory testing studies of discrimination against families with children; lesbian,

gay, and transgender homeseekers; and renters using housing vouchers.¹ For all these classes of homeseekers, other research provides evidence of poor housing outcomes, and it seems straightforward—at least at first blush—to use paired-testing to find out whether and how discriminatory treatment by housing providers may be contributing to those outcomes.

Extending the paired-testing methodology highlights three key conditions that undergird its power to compellingly document discriminatory treatment of minority homeseekers. First, ***the standard for comparison is unambiguous***. Ample evidence demonstrates that minority homeseekers experience inferior housing outcomes compared with White homeseekers, and it is straightforward to match minority and White testers so that their race or ethnicity is the only difference observed by a housing provider. Second, ***both minority and White households can reasonably be expected to occupy all sizes and types of housing available in the marketplace***. Testers can easily be assigned financial and other characteristics to correspond to the characteristics of any advertised house or apartment. Any available housing unit should, in principle, be offered to both on the same terms. Third, ***a person's race or ethnicity is (in most cases) immediately apparent to housing providers***, based on appearance, name, and possibly even speech patterns.

These three conditions do not necessarily apply for other classes of homeseekers. As a consequence, researchers seeking to extend the paired-testing methodology face thorny design and implementation challenges to produce credible and compelling estimates of differential treatment discrimination. To be specific, efforts to extend paired testing to new classes of homeseekers must effectively address one or more of the following three questions.

1. What is the appropriate comparison group?
2. Should some segments of the housing stock be either excluded or oversampled?
3. When and how should a tester's status be disclosed to housing providers?

This article focuses in turn on three pilot testing studies sponsored by HUD to assess the feasibility of effectively testing for discrimination against families with children; lesbian, gay, and transgender people; and housing voucher recipients.² As of this writing, results of these pilot studies have not been released, so this article focuses not on findings but on the key design challenges, discussing in depth how each study resolved the three questions in the preceding list. The article then concludes with implications for future paired-testing studies aimed at measuring the incidence of discrimination for other groups of homeseekers.

Families With Children

In 1988, the Federal Fair Housing Act of 1968 was amended to protect families with children and pregnant women from discrimination in the housing market. Before these protections were

¹ Note that the federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination based on the presence of children and on gender, but not based on sexual orientation or identity or on housing subsidy receipt. Some states and localities provide legal protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation and some prohibit housing discrimination based on source of income.

² Aranda's (2015) article in this issue of *Cityscape* addresses the challenges of effectively measuring discrimination against people with disabilities.

in place, it was not uncommon for rental properties to exclude children under 18 or restrict the number of children allowed (Colten and Marans, 1982). Today, families with children face significant challenges in the rental housing market compared with childless renters (Aratani et al., 2011; JCHS, 2013). Too little is known, however, about the extent and forms of discrimination against families with children. Analysis of fair housing complaints suggests that families with children experience discrimination from rental housing providers, but no recent research has investigated the problem systematically (NFHA, 2012, 2011).

Therefore, HUD commissioned the Urban Institute to adapt the paired-testing methodology to measure discrimination against families with children seeking rental housing and apply it in three metropolitan areas. The primary goals of this pilot study were to develop a preliminary estimate of the incidence of discrimination against families with children in the rental housing market and to assess the feasibility of conducting a larger national paired-testing study (Aron et al., forthcoming). All three challenges introduced previously had to be addressed in the design of this pilot effort.

What Is the Appropriate Comparison Group?

At first, the answer to this question may appear to be straightforward: the comparison should be a childless renter household with the same financial qualifications and housing preferences. But a childless household with three or four members is fundamentally different from a family with children with the same number of members. Consider, for example, an approach in which the two renter households of each matched pair are the same size but, in one case, some of the household members are children and, in the other, all are adults. Under this design, the control household paired to a married-couple family with two children would be a married couple living with two other adults. This would be problematic for several reasons. First, it represents a household structure that is rarely seen in the United States—only 2 percent of all rental households have four or more adults and no children (2010 American Community Survey). Second, to assign this four-adult household the same combined income as a married couple with two children would require that all four worked at lower paying jobs or that one or two are unemployed. Third, having four adults in a household resembles a group quarter's situation (for example, five college students sharing a house), an extended family situation, or a household of related adults sharing housing perhaps for reasons of economic hardship. In some jurisdictions, renting to a large group of unrelated adults violates local occupancy regulations.

Similar incongruences emerge with most other family sizes and scenarios. Even matching a single parent and one child to a childless couple raises comparability concerns, because housing providers might react more to the parent's nonmarried status than to the presence of a child. Thus, a paired-testing design for families with children that holds household size constant seems destined to yield inappropriate, apples-to-oranges comparisons.

Analysis of national data comparing renter households with and without children suggests that most childless renters are singles or couples as opposed to larger groups of childless adults. So for this pilot study, the counterfactuals for families with children were childless singles and childless couples. To be more specific, for single-parent female-headed households, the counterfactual was a childless single female, and for married couples with one or two children, the counterfactual was a childless couple. This design reflects the fact that renters with children compete in today's housing market with smaller, childless households.

However, the difference in household size between the two members of each tester pair raises concerns about how to interpret some differences in treatment that might be observed. The two testers in each matched pair of this pilot study inquired about the same size of housing unit, even though their assigned household sizes differed. In every test, the family with children was larger than the childless household. If housing providers recommend or show larger units—and possibly, higher cost units—to families with children than to their childless counterparts, should this difference in treatment be classified as discrimination? This issue was resolved in the pilot study by first ensuring that both testers in each pair asked about the same size unit and reported whether it was available to them. They also documented the size of other units they were recommended and shown and the asking rent for each of these units. Measures of differential treatment were then constructed for the following indicators.

- Was the tester told that any units were available?
- How many units of the requested size were available? How many units of any size?
- What was the average size of the available units?
- What was the average asking rent for available units, controlling for size?

If families with children were told about fewer available units than their childless counterparts, denied information about units of the requested size, or steered toward larger and more expensive units, this treatment could be considered discriminatory. If, on the other hand, families with children were told about the same units as their childless counterparts *plus* some larger units, this treatment probably could be considered nondiscriminatory, even though it might result in a higher average asking rent across all available units. In fact, some might view this outcome as favoring the family with children relative to the childless individual or couple, by offering more—or more desirable—housing options.

Should Some Segments of the Housing Stock Be Either Excluded or Oversampled?

Most renter families with children (79 percent) live in two- or three-bedroom units, with only 8 percent living in one-bedroom units. Even among families with one child, only 11 percent occupy one-bedroom units. This evidence suggests the possibility of excluding one-bedroom units from the sample of advertised housing selected for testing. However, one reason so few families occupy these units may be that they are in high demand (given their affordability relative to larger apartments) and landlords may know they can easily be rented to childless renters. In other words, data on where families currently live may reflect ongoing discriminatory practices rather than families' needs or preferences. Therefore, the pilot study included one-bedroom units in its testing sample.

The inclusion of one-bedroom units raises a concern, however, about whether occupancy standards might complicate the study findings, because some tests would involve inquiries about units that would involve more than two people per bedroom. Local occupancy laws vary widely, but no more than two people per bedroom is widely considered a standard rule of thumb. Some landlords may think that local laws limit occupancy to two people per bedroom even though this may not be the case, and others may use the two-people-per-bedroom limit as an excuse for excluding families with children. Actual occupancy standards are considerably more nuanced and typically consider both the number of bedrooms and the square footage of the unit as a whole.

Because the central purpose of the pilot study was to measure differential treatment of renter households based on the presence of children—not to assess landlords’ adherence to varying and potentially complex occupancy standards—all tests of one-bedroom units were assigned either single or married parents with only one child. Even so, a married couple with one child might stretch a landlord’s perception of occupancy limits for a one-bedroom unit. If large shares of landlords were using occupancy standards as an excuse to exclude families with children or believe such families violate the standards, this pattern would be reflected in the results of the one-bedroom tests.³

When and How Should a Tester’s Status Be Disclosed to Housing Providers?

In most paired-testing studies, one member of the fictional household calls or visits the sampled housing provider to inquire about the availability and terms of a house or an apartment. The presence or absence of children from the household is not discernable unless the tester discloses it. Therefore, all testers were directed to disclose their assigned household composition at the beginning of a telephone conversation or during a telephone message or e-mail. For example, if a tester was assigned a married profile, he told the housing provider that he and his wife were looking for housing. If a tester was assigned children for a given test, she indicated the age and sex of the children. Testers also disclosed their assigned household composition at the beginning of their in-person visits to housing providers. This disclosure protocol did not raise significant doubts or concerns, because it seems natural for a homeseeker to describe the composition of his or her household early in any inquiry about available housing.

Exhibit 1 sums up the pilot study’s response to the challenges of extending the paired-testing methodology to measure rental housing discrimination against families with children. This design differs from conventional paired testing in that the households in the protected group are larger than those in the comparison group, making it plausible for housing providers to offer them larger and more expensive housing units. To some modest degree, this undermines the power of the paired testing to measure differences in treatment all other things being equal.

Exhibit 1

Paired-Testing Methodology Extended to Families With Children

	Comparison Group	Housing Types Excluded or Oversampled	Disclosure of Status
Household composition	Childless singles and couples	Efficiencies excluded; one-bedroom units oversampled	Mention children early in both phone and in-person contact

³ This issue suggests the value of a rigorous study of local occupancy standards, how they are enforced, and how housing providers understand and apply them.

Lesbian, Gay, and Transgender People

Until very recently, much of what we knew about housing discrimination against lesbian, gay and transgender people came from surveys that asked respondents to report whether they have experienced discrimination while searching for housing (Colvin, 2004; Grant, Mottet, and Tanis, 2011; Kaiser Family Foundation, 2001). These surveys found that many lesbian women, gay men, and transgender people feel discriminated against, but the surveys do not provide rigorous estimates of the incidence or forms this discrimination can take. To the extent that self-reports of discrimination gathered by the surveys might capture only the most blatant forms of discrimination, the findings likely underestimate the actual occurrence of discrimination.

A handful of other studies have used e-mail contact to measure discrimination. The most comprehensive of these is HUD's recent study on housing discrimination against same-sex couples, which found that male same-sex couples were slightly less likely to receive e-mail responses from housing providers relative to comparable heterosexual couples. Other differences in treatment were not statistically significant (Friedman et al., 2013). In addition, a number of fair housing organizations in the United States have conducted in-person, paired tests of housing discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity for both research and enforcement purposes. For example, the Fair Housing Centers of Michigan studied housing discrimination based on sexual orientation with testers posing as same-sex couples matched with testers posing as heterosexual couples (Fair Housing Centers of Michigan, 2007). The tests, which targeted differences in treatment in rental housing, homes for sale, and home financing, found widespread discrimination against same-sex couples. In-person testing captured a much broader range of treatment than the very limited number of variables observed in e-mail-testing studies, reporting differential treatment related to the rent amount, the number of units discussed, offers of rental applications, and offers of move-in incentives. Testers also reported on subtler forms of treatment, such as whether an agent made any comments about gay people or homosexuality.

This experience led HUD to commission a pilot paired-testing study to measure the incidence and forms of discrimination against lesbian and gay renters and against transgender individuals seeking rental housing. This study will record and compare treatment both during telephone inquiries and during in-person visits with rental housing providers. The toughest design challenge for this pilot study revolves around how to disclose to housing providers the fact that a homeseeker is lesbian, gay, or transgender. In fact, the pilot study resolves this challenge differently for lesbian and gay people than for transgender people.

What Is the Appropriate Comparison Group?

For lesbian women and gay men, it seems quite clear that the appropriate comparison group consists of heterosexual women and men, respectively, with the same household composition. In other words, a single lesbian woman would be matched with a single heterosexual woman, and a gay man with a husband (or partner) and a child would be matched with a heterosexual man with a wife (or partner) and child. For purposes of the pilot study, all testers were assigned a partner; none posed as single renters, whether gay or straight, in part because of the challenge of

establishing a credible protocol for disclosing a single person's sexual orientation (discussed further below). Future studies might explore strategies for measuring discrimination against single lesbian women and gay men.

The pilot study matched transgender people with cisgender⁴ individuals whose gender matched the gender identity of the transgender person. Transgender people who did not identify as either female or male (who identified as gender queer) were randomly assigned a male or female cisgender match. In the pilot study, all transgender and cisgender testers posed as single individuals.

When and How Should a Tester's Status Be Disclosed to Housing Providers?

When searching for a house or an apartment to rent, lesbian women, gay men, and transgender people might choose to explicitly convey their sexual orientation or gender identity early in the interaction with housing providers in an effort to weed out disrespectful providers. On the other hand, they might choose *not* to convey identity, on the grounds that their sexual orientation or gender identity should not be a concern of the housing provider. Three options were considered for the pilot study, each offering different advantages and disadvantages.

1. Disclose sexual orientation or gender identity during the initial telephone inquiry and again at the start of the in-person visit. This option would ensure that housing providers are aware of each tester's status from the earliest point in the transaction and will presumably treat lesbian, gay, and transgender people unfavorably if they are so inclined. The disadvantage is that disclosure—especially during an initial telephone inquiry—may seem awkward and unnatural and may therefore lead to detection. Do most lesbian, gay, or transgender people actually make a point of disclosing their status when making an appointment to see a house or an apartment?
2. Wait until the in-person visit to disclose sexual orientation or gender identity. This option limits the analytic value of information gathered at the telephone inquiry stage, but it may reduce the risk of detection. In addition, it still raises the question of whether lesbian, gay, and transgender people proactively disclose their status to housing providers.
3. Do not explicitly disclose sexual orientation or gender identity at any stage, but rely instead on the housing provider's perceptions. This option minimizes the risk of detection but may also reduce the study's ability to observe differential treatment, especially if the identifiability of testers as lesbian, gay, or transgender varies or is unknown. In the most recent testing study of racial and ethnic discrimination, testers' identifiability was assessed by independent coders and used to analyze the extent to which testers who are more identifiably minority experienced more discrimination. A similar analysis of identifiability could potentially be conducted for lesbian, gay, and transgender testers.

Using feedback from expert advisors and from focus groups with transgender people, the pilot study implemented the first option for tests of discrimination against lesbian women and gay men and experimented with *both* the second and third options for tests of discrimination against transgender people. To be more specific, in the tests involving lesbian and gay couples, testers will refer to their partners or spouses by name during the initial telephone inquiry and again at the

⁴ A *cisgender* person is one whose gender identity corresponds with the biological sex assigned at birth.

start of the in-person visits with housing providers. In one-half of the tests involving transgender people, the transgender testers will refer to their identity as a transgender person early in the in-person visit. In the other one-half of the tests, they will not explicitly disclose their gender identity. Possible scripts for disclosure include explaining that the person's legal identification does not yet correspond to his or her identity and signing the guest register with both a chosen name and a legal name or referencing a different legal name on a credit report if the tester were to submit an application.

Exhibit 2 sums up the pilot study's response to the challenges of extending the paired-testing methodology to measure rental housing discrimination against lesbian and gay couples and against transgender individuals. The main issue here is when and how to disclose testers' status as members of the potentially disadvantaged class, and, for transgender homeseekers, the researchers have chosen to test the implications of two possible strategies. Future studies could potentially assess the incidence and forms of adverse treatment against lesbian and gay homeseekers who do not proactively disclose their identity.

Exhibit 2

Paired-Testing Methodology Extended to Lesbian and Gay Couples and Transgender Individuals

	Comparison Group	Housing Types Excluded or Oversampled	Disclosure of Status
Sexual preference	Heterosexual couples	None	Mention partner (by name) early in both phone and in-person contact
Gender identity	Cisgender individuals, matched to the transgender tester's gender identity	None	Two solutions: 1. Refer to transition in context of form of identification, legal name, or credit check 2. Do not explicitly disclose status

Housing Voucher Recipients

The federal Housing Choice Voucher program supplements the rent low-income households pay for homes and apartments in the private market, enabling them to obtain decent, affordable housing in neighborhoods of their choice. Three-and-a-half decades of experience have proven vouchers to be an extremely effective tool for addressing the housing needs of low-income families. Most households that get a voucher succeed in finding a house or an apartment where they can receive assistance, and recipients generally live in better quality housing and pay more affordable rents than similar unassisted households.

Despite its overall success, the voucher program falls short of its potential to provide access to rental housing in safe, opportunity-rich neighborhoods. Evidence suggests that housing providers in these neighborhoods may refuse to accept vouchers, leaving voucher recipients with limited options about where to live, but there is a dearth of knowledge about discrimination against voucher

holders in the private rental market. Fair housing groups have conducted local studies, mostly for enforcement purposes, to investigate landlord behavior. Methods for these studies vary widely and include some mix of passive screening of advertisements, screening landlords over the phone to see if they accept vouchers, and sending testers to screen landlords during on-site visits, sometimes with a matched pair. No matter the methodology, high rates of voucher refusal were common across all studies. These tests, however, were not designed for research purposes, and, thus, have significant limitations in terms of generalizability and replicability.⁵

Therefore, HUD commissioned a pilot study to explore the feasibility of using paired testing to more rigorously estimate the incidence and forms of discrimination against housing voucher recipients. This study has important implications for federal housing assistance policy and program implementation, but it poses daunting design challenges, involving the appropriate comparison group, when and how testers should disclose that they have housing vouchers, and how to sample available rental housing units.

What Is the Appropriate Comparison Group?

To capture adverse treatment based on voucher receipt, control testers should pose as comparably qualified renters without housing vouchers. What does it mean to be comparably qualified? A housing voucher effectively increases a household's available income for housing, so it would not be entirely satisfactory to match the incomes of the two testers at prevoucher levels, with one tester in possession of a voucher. The purpose of the voucher is to allow low-income households to obtain housing that would otherwise be unaffordable to them. Comparing the treatment of voucher holders with that of households with the same prevoucher income would mean that control testers were inquiring about housing units with unaffordably high rent levels, placing them at a clear disadvantage in the eyes of landlords.

Setting control testers' income too high, however, could potentially bias results in the opposite direction, creating a scenario in which landlords are presented with the choice between a low-income household with a voucher and a moderate- to middle-income household without one. Preferential treatment of the control tester could be attributed to its relative affluence (or perceived class) and not to the landlord's aversion to the voucher.

The pilot study addresses this quandary by assigning each control tester an income equal to the voucher holder's income plus the approximate value of the voucher itself. This gives the control tester sufficient income to rent the same unit for which the voucher household is qualified, but not so much income as to place the control household in a higher socioeconomic class. In effect, the two testers in each pair will have the same income, but from different sources.

It is still possible, however, that the extra income assigned to the control tester will—in the eyes of a housing provider—give her greater socioeconomic status (or perceived class status) than the voucher holder. If this perception is the case, differences in treatment could be interpreted as

⁵ On state and local levels, 12 states, the District of Columbia, and more than 30 cities and counties have enacted statutes that prohibit discrimination in the housing market based on source of income (PRRAC, 2014). Some evidence suggests that these protections have a positive effect on voucher lease rates and neighborhood choice, but no conclusive evidence supports this claim (Finkel and Buron, 2001; Galvez, 2011, 2010).

reflecting a preference for higher status tenants (possibly because of expectations about reliability, behavioral issues, or crime), rather than discrimination against voucher recipients per se. One potential strategy for exploring this issue further (after the testing is complete) would be to compare outcomes for tests in which the housing provider asked testers about their incomes with tests in which testers' assigned incomes were not disclosed to the housing provider.

Should Some Segments of the Housing Stock Be Either Excluded or Oversampled?

Existing evidence suggests that voucher recipients face higher rates of refusal or discrimination when they inquire about housing in high-quality, opportunity-rich neighborhoods than when they inquire about housing in distressed neighborhoods. To explore this issue fully, the sample of available rental homes and apartments for which tests are initiated must include units from these more opportunity-rich neighborhoods. In fact, depending on the geographic distribution of voucher-affordable rental housing in a given metropolitan area, it might make sense to oversample from these types of neighborhoods.

The pilot study will select a geographically representative sample of all voucher-affordable rental housing from a central city and a suburban jurisdiction in each of five metropolitan areas, without oversampling specific low-poverty areas or excluding areas with high concentrations of assisted residents. Analysis of the distribution of voucher-affordable housing in these target jurisdictions suggests that this approach is likely to yield a sufficient number of units for testing within low-poverty neighborhoods to generate reasonably precise estimates of discrimination—without the need for oversampling. It will not, however, yield metropolitanwide estimates of discrimination against voucher holders.

It is also possible that units in high-opportunity neighborhoods may be effectively eliminated from the in-person testing component of the study if landlords in these areas are more likely to (1) routinely refuse vouchers or (2) refuse voucher tenants during the phone tests. High rates of refusal at either of these steps would result in few in-person tests in these neighborhoods. If this proves to be the case, the pilot methodology would effectively capture the most important considerations about voucher access to high-opportunity neighborhoods: the overall rate of refusal of voucher holders as a matter of landlord policy and refusal to make appointments with voucher holders who inquire by telephone. It would not, however, be able to effectively capture any differences in treatment during in-person visits to housing in high-opportunity neighborhoods.

When and How Should a Tester's Status Be Disclosed to Housing Providers?

Housing agencies and advocates for housing voucher recipients express differing opinions about when households should disclose the fact that they have a voucher and about what most voucher recipients actually do. Some suggest that voucher holders should disclose their status in the first inquiry so they do not waste precious time visiting properties that do not accept vouchers. Others argue that voucher holders should wait until they have met a housing provider and established a positive relationship, in hopes that the provider will agree to accept the voucher because they feel comfortable with the potential tenant. Given the available evidence about the frequency with which housing providers refuse vouchers, the decision about when testers should disclose their status has important implications for the study's potential to capture specific forms of adverse treatment.

The pilot study arrived at a three-step testing process that is intended to capture both outright refusal to accept vouchers *and* any possible differential treatment of voucher holders by housing providers who accept (or at least say they accept) vouchers.

1. Advertised rental units that fall within voucher rent limits will receive a single screening call, asking if the provider accepts housing vouchers. This first step (which does not involve a matched pair) will yield an estimate of the incidence of outright refusal across the rental market.
2. For each unit that accepts vouchers, two testers will call to inquire about the unit's availability and terms and to make appointments for in-person visits. The tester who is assigned a voucher will disclose during the call that she is a voucher holder. This step should yield estimates of major differences in treatment between voucher recipients and nonvoucher households by housing providers who reportedly accept vouchers.
3. For each case in which both testers are able to obtain an appointment, they will make in-person visits, during which they again inquire about the advertised unit and try to inspect it and other available homes or apartments. The tester who is assigned a voucher discloses this fact at the start of the in-person visit. This step should yield estimates of any additional treatment differences by housing providers who agree to meet with voucher holders.

If the incidence of outright refusal (in step 1) is high, this approach requires that large numbers of advertised units are screened to produce sufficiently large samples at steps 2 and 3 to reliably capture any differences in treatment among housing providers that accept vouchers. It is possible that this three-step approach will yield minimal (or unmeasurable) differences in treatment between voucher and nonvoucher households, after providers who refuse to accept vouchers are screened out in the first step.

Exhibit 3 sums up the pilot study's response to the challenges of extending the paired-testing methodology to measure discrimination against households that receive vouchers. This study will yield estimates of the share of available housing units whose owners refuse outright to accept vouchers *and* the incidence of differential treatment voucher recipients experience when they inquire in person about available units where owners are willing to accept vouchers. The experience of voucher recipients will be compared with that of low-income households with the same effective purchasing power, so their incomes will be higher by the amount of the housing voucher subsidy amount. The sample of advertised rental housing for which tests are initiated will be limited to units with rents that fall within local payment standards so that they are indeed appropriate for voucher recipients. Units in low-poverty census tracts will be oversampled, if necessary, to ensure that the study can provide information about access to affordable rental housing outside poor neighborhoods.

Exhibit 3

Paired-Testing Methodology Extended to Housing Choice Voucher Holders

	Comparison Group	Housing Types Excluded or Oversampled	Disclosure of Status
Source of income (housing subsidy)	Unsubsidized households with the same income plus the value of the voucher subsidy	Units with rents more than payment standard excluded; units in low-poverty neighborhoods oversampled	Ask about voucher acceptance in advance phone contact and disclose early during in-person contact

Future Paired-Testing Research

Looking ahead, evidence about barriers to housing choice and unequal housing outcomes for other groups may lead to interest in further extensions of paired-testing research. In particular, given the effectiveness of paired-testing research to date, the methodology might be considered for measuring the incidence of housing discrimination on the basis of national origin, English fluency, other disabilities, or religious affiliation. Not every extension of paired testing will be straightforward and, in fact, some might prove infeasible. As policymakers and researchers consider these and other possible applications of paired-testing research, they should explicitly address each of the following three design questions.

1. What is the appropriate comparison group? Paired testing works as a methodology only when the treatment experienced by the group of interest should—in principle—be exactly the same as another, more privileged group.
2. Should some segments of the housing stock be either excluded or oversampled? Obtaining a meaningful understanding of a group's treatment may require a sampling design that screens for available housing units with characteristics that align with the group's needs or capacities, complicating the logistics of sampling and potentially undermining the generalizability of the results.
3. When and how should a tester's status be disclosed to housing providers? If housing providers cannot predictably discern the difference in status between two matched testers, the paired-testing methodology cannot reliably detect systematic differences in treatment.

For some classes of homeseekers, one or more of these questions may be easy to resolve, but others will be much more difficult—potentially so difficult that the power of the paired-testing methodology is undermined. For example, in a study designed to test for discrimination based on national origin, each tester should be matched to a native-born American of the same race or ethnicity. How would his or her national origin be disclosed during an initial telephone inquiry or in-person visit with a housing provider? In a study exploring potential housing discrimination against people of the Muslim faith, what religion should be assigned to the control testers and how would testers disclose their religious affiliation? Finally, in a study designed to test for discrimination against people whose English is not fluent, the testers' status will be disclosed as soon as they begin speaking to housing providers. If the housing provider has difficulty understanding or communicating with the tester, it might be implausible to interpret differences in treatment (such as information about fees or incentives, or even the number of units shown) to discrimination.

When the pilot studies discussed in this article are complete, we can assess how effectively each study tackled these design challenges and how useful paired testing proves to be for the populations on which they focus. These findings will also help inform future discussions about whether and how to extend paired-testing research. Paired testing may not prove to be the best tool for rigorously measuring the extent and forms of discrimination against all potentially vulnerable classes of homeseekers. In some circumstances, researchers may need to consider other methods—potentially including surveys of housing providers or households—either in combination with or as alternatives to paired testing.

It may not be possible to determine in advance whether and how the design challenges highlighted here can be effectively addressed for a new class of homeseekers. Recent experience with extensions of the methodology suggests that these challenges are fully appreciated—and resolved—only when they are addressed in practice. It is not always clear in theory whether adaptations of the method will work. Therefore, before launching a costly nationwide study, it is essential to invest in a smaller, pilot effort that provides the opportunity to fully explore options, assess the feasibility of modified testing protocols, and determine whether a full-scale, national study is likely to yield worthwhile information to guide policy and practice.

Acknowledgments

The author thanks Laudan Aron, Diane Levy, and Mary Cunningham of the Urban Institute, who are leading the three pilot studies discussed in this article, and the anonymous reviewers.

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Margery Austin Turner is Senior Vice President for Program Planning and Management at the Urban Institute.

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