Race and Inequality at Work: An Occupational Perspective

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Abstract. Recent research on racial inequality at work offers fruitful new insights on the organizational conditions that foster racial segregation, racial disparities in wages, and racial hierarchies in the labor market and the workplace. Much less is known, however, about the specifically occupational influences that impinge on equitable work outcomes by race. In this paper, we explore three processes at the occupational level that relate to racial segregation, racialized access to resources, and status standing in one's line of work. We review research on racial inequality at work over the last twenty years to elucidate what is known, and remains to be seen, about these occupational processes. First, we review how occupational members get selected, and attempt to self-select, into occupations via recruitment, licensing, credentialing, or certifications. Second, we consider how occupational incumbents teach, govern and evaluate new entrants, and with what consequences for racial inclusion/exclusion and retention in careers. Third, we examine research on client- or service-based work, and highlight how workers navigate not only their roles, but also racial dynamics, vis-a-vis clients. We conclude with suggestions for how future research can harness occupational analysis to advance understanding of racial inequality at work.

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INTRODUCTION

In her 2003 American Sociological Association Presidential address, Barbara Reskin issued a call for more theoretically informed efforts to identify the mechanisms that underlie racial inequalities at work. Her call urged scholars to uncover mechanisms that connect groups' ascribed characteristics to inequalities in the distribution of job rewards. Over the past twenty years, sociologists have made significant advances in organizational research towards meeting this call, focusing on mechanisms rooted in organizational characteristics and practices (e.g., DiTomaso 2013; Wilson and Roscigno 2016; Wingfield 2020; see also Amis, Mair, and Munir 2020; Bapuji, Ertug, and Shaw 2020; Ray 2019; Stainback and Tomaskovic-Devey 2012; Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt 2019). However, fewer gains have been made with respect to the specifically *occupational* influences that are likely to influence the distribution of job rewards, social relations, and the structure of workers' careers within and across occupations. Stratification scholars have previously noted that mechanisms generating inequality "operate with special force at the occupation level" (Weeden and Grusky 2005: 149). And, as Vallas' (2003) review of research on the color line within work organizations pointed out, barriers to minority group attainment take many forms beyond specifically organizational ones, including relational dynamics that affect recruitment and persistence within occupations, access to technical expertise needed to succeed in a given job, and informal processes bearing on recruitment.

In this paper, we ask: What does existing research tell us about how occupations operate relative to, in combination with, or perhaps in opposition to the focus on racialized organizations? To answer this question, we first briefly survey classic sociological research on

occupations, finding that (with important exceptions), few early scholars explored the sources of racial inequalities at work in any sustained way. We follow with an overview of the current patterns of racial and ethnic inequality affecting the contemporary U.S. labor force. Heeding Reskin's call, we turn to research in the last twenty years on the mechanisms that underlie racial inequalities at work that focuses on particular occupations and includes a focus on race. We close with suggested themes and directions for future research on race and occupations, focusing on occupational structures that function outside the bounds of organizations; the "racing" of occupations; and racial groups that have been overlooked in existing research.

BACKGROUND

Knowledge about occupational structure on the one hand, and racial dynamics within occupations on the other, has developed in a markedly uneven way. In the study of occupations, seminal studies such as Becker et al.'s (1961) *Boys in White*, Blau and Duncan's (1967) *The American Occupational Structure,* Abbott's (1988) *the System of Professions*, and Wenger's (1998) *Communities of Practice* each stimulated a steady stream of research on occupational socialization; the link between parents' occupation and the child's own economic outcomes; the systems of abstraction that occupations use to protect their jurisdictions; and learning and identity within occupational groups, respectively. Foundational works in industrial sociology did not identify racial and ethnic dynamics as a compelling issue for analysis (see Walker and Guest 1952; Roethlisberger and Dickson 2003[1939]; Gouldner 1954). Thus we gain rich descriptions of manual labor performed mostly by white workers in factory settings, while other types of employment were underexplored, including rural or agricultural labor and service occupations that were (and remain) race-typed. This left a gap in the literature on occupations as it generally did not problematize the role of racial and ethnic exclusion at work – with some exceptions (e.g.,

Hughes 1946) – and tended to overlook the labor of Black workers, the role of race in establishing occupational prestige, and the historical ties between slavery and the social organization of factory work (Desmond 2019; Ruef and Harness 2009).

Theories of "split" or segmented labor markets (Bonacich 1972; Reich, Gordon and Edwards 1973), in contrast, focused squarely on race. Prominent in sociology in the 1970s and somewhat less so by the start of restructuring and globalization in the 1980s, these theories provide explicit explanations of how racial and ethnic minorities are "crowded" into the low skill and low wage segments of the economy, with less job stability and pensions, while white workers (especially men) are more likely to be found in large firms with greater job security and benefits. More recent stratification scholarship shows how occupations come to be meaningful sites of class location and individual life outcomes (e.g., Weeden and Grusky 2005 on microclasses) and how occupational mobility is becoming increasingly constrained over time (e.g., Cheng and Park 2020 on mobility boundaries). This research focuses on socioeconomic inequality, even though these authors do acknowledge that race needs to be considered. Weeden and Grusky incorporate demographic composition (e.g., by race and ethnicity) in mapping social classes, and Cheng and Park recognize a need for future research to investigate patterns in mobility boundaries by race. Following suit, in this paper, we consider how race plays a primary role in processes of employee selection, self-governance, or interactions with clients.

Grappling with the connection between race and these occupational processes is worthwhile and timely for three reasons. First, job-typing based on race is relevant across a wide range of occupations. On one hand, studies of elite professional services (Rivera 2016; Turco 2010) show that closed networks operate to exclude competitors on the basis of externally identifiable characteristics, such as race (Weber 1968). On the other, low-status job categories

have a longstanding tendency of becoming racially typified (Neckerman and Kirschenman 1991). Indeed, "occupational effects emerge not only in the professions, but also within the managerial, clerical, craft, operative, and service classes" (Weeden and Grusky 2005: 182; see also Bechky 2011).

Second, the erosion of the employment relationship over the past 45 years makes occupational analysis in studies of racial inequality at work more pressing. The post-Fordist era, which has weakened organizational attachments generally (Crowley et al. 2010), implicitly elevates the importance of occupations and the social networks and communities they establish. This development only enhances the traditional view that occupational communities and their associated tasks, established methods, and values transcend particular organizational boundaries (Lave and Wenger 1991; Van Maanen and Barley 1984).

Third, a body of empirical research strongly suggests that occupational dynamics play a significant and enduring role in the persistence and expansion of income inequality over time (Kaufman 1983; Grodsky and Pager 2001). Seeking to explain why racial disparities in earnings grow in direct proportion to occupational prestige, for example, Grodsky and Pager (2001) note that business service occupations often exhibit the largest racial gap in wages. The point here is that differences between occupations complicate the pursuit of equal opportunity at work in ways that warrant closer analysis than they have received.

Accounting for Trends in Race, Work, and Social Inequality

Any discussion of racial disparities in the U.S. workforce must begin by reviewing the socio-demographic composition of the workforce, and comparing this to patterns in racial disparities in wages and racial segregation across occupational categories. During the last two

decades, Latinx representation in the labor force has increased by about six percent among and by two percent among Asians. At the same time, the white composition of the workforce has decreased about 5 percent (BLS 2019a). The increasing representation of Latinx and Asians in the labor force, however, has not been evenly distributed across occupational categories, nor has occupational segregation among Black workers changed over this time.

Racial disparities in wages across groups are striking. Median weekly earnings of white full-time workers is $1,006; Black, $799; Asian, $1,286; and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, $750 (BLS 2021). Calculations grouping occupations by racial/ethnic representation reveal greater disparities: Fox (2017) estimates that for occupations in which white people are highly represented, weighted annual income averages about $120,000 (more than double the national average); compared to $31,000, $104,000, and $32,000 among occupations in which Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics are highly represented, respectively. The allocation of groups across occupational categories partly explains these racial wage disparities (Bahn and Cumming 2020; Grodsky and Pager 2001). Some occupations are more segregated by race than others. For example, though their focus is on organizational and not occupational variation in levels of segregation, Stainback and Tomaskovic-Devey (2012: 247-48) report two broad types of jobs in which racial segregation has been most pronounced: business services and craft occupations (such as construction, printing and publishing, and furniture manufacturing).

The state of racial disparities in wages and the ongoing trend of occupational segregation provides prima facie evidence of the value of an occupational perspective. Some studies argue that the "old reliable occupational perspective" – which holds that occupations are key sites of stratification including wages – should be traded in for a focus on firms and jobs (see Leicht 2020:1 for a review; see also Kmec 2003). The research of Tomaskovic-Devey and his

colleagues on the organizational front has proceeded along these lines, but also has underscored areas for empirical and theoretical elaboration vis-a-vis occupations. For example, beyond linking changes in racial and gender segregation to the ebb and flow of wider social movements and the legal gains they secured, Stainback and Tomaskovic-Devey (2012) also find that the post-Civil Rights period has given rise to increasing heterogeneity with respect to racial inequality, requiring nuanced analysis. Their data and others' show that segregation has grown more highly pronounced in industries that offer higher levels of pay (suggestive of a social closure effect); in local labor markets whose minority composition is greater (Huffman and Cohen 2004, suggestive of higher levels of racial discrimination in these areas); and among employers that fail to screen on the basis of educational credentials, opting instead for "soft skills"criteria (Mong and Roscigno 2010).

Extending this analysis, Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt (2019) have sought to construct a holistic perspective that might account for these variations. The result is what they call relational inequality theory (RIT), which draws freely on the work of Tilly (1998) in particular. Concretely, RIT predicts that where actors wielding organizational power and authority are categorically distinct from their subordinates, inequalities in wages and mobility will grow especially pronounced. Drawing on a range of quantitative and qualitative studies, the authors identify three social mechanisms – social closure, claims-making, and exploitation – that account for the racial inequalities that persist. For instance, closure processes often impinge on intra-firm processes that affect "access to authority, training, and promotion," resulting in downward occupational mobility for Black white-collar workers (McBrier and Wilson 2004) and employment exit for young, Black women workers (Reid and Padavic 2005: 1244).

Racial segregation, racial disparities in wages, and racialized patterns of promotion are work outcomes that can be better understood with more analytical focus on occupational dynamics. After all, seminal research on occupations made clear long ago how homogeneity and exclusion arise in occupational membership: through the informal guarding and institutionalized protection of occupational groups' prestige and resources. We proffer that each of the mechanisms of social closure, claims-making, and exploitation can be especially observed in, and understood through, the informal relations that shape entry into and retention within occupations. Fully understanding how racial inequalities arise at work requires that we take occupational dynamics more seriously than recent studies have done.

We now turn to a review of recent research in the past twenty years that offers insight into the race-occupation nexus.

BRINGING OCCUPATIONS BACK IN

Racial exclusion and disparities in the distribution of job rewards often flow from occupationally-rooted barriers to entry, symbolic boundaries that arise as members interact, and how occupations define proper worker-client relations. In what follows, we develop three facets of this occupational perspective, each in turn: how occupational groups understand and enforce occupational membership through selecting new members; how they teach, govern and evaluate their members; and how they navigate their roles vis-a-vis clients. Recent studies in each area show the potential of this perspective to advance sociologists' understandings of mechanisms producing racial inequality at work.

How occupational incumbents select new members, and how individuals pursue membership

The formal requirements for occupational membership are often enacted at the macro-level, through accreditation and legislation; they are also enacted at the micro-level through how individuals pursue licensure requirements (Bechky 2011), acquire skill, and evaluate their co-workers' abilities (Vallas 2003). We know that Civil Rights social movements and legal gains at macro-level led to some decreases in occupational segregation by race and gender. However currently, arrangements of power within workplace organizations now have more influence over these outcomes (Stainback and Tomaskovic-Devey 2012). How organizational arrangements translate into or compare with dynamics within specific occupations is less well understood.

Selection of new occupational members through recruitment mechanisms. How industries recruit new occupational members is partly a function of homophily among either managers or workers themselves. There is a vast literature in sociology and economics on homophily within referral relationships, but many of these studies are couched at the level of the firm or organization (e.g., Brown, Setren, and Giorgio 2016; Fernandez and Fernandez-Mateo 2006; Kmec 2007; Petersen, Saporta, and Seidel 2000). Our review of these studies is focused on findings specific to occupations. Some recent advances in network theory have articulated how racial segregation in personal networks perpetuates racial inequalities within occupational fields, including issues of selection into occupations via job referrals, but also issues of trust from lacking prior intergroup contact (Cho 2008; see Hirschman and Garbes 2019 for a review).

However, some occupational fields rely on incumbent referrals, which means lack of diversity within those fields may actually reflect their deeper beliefs about ideal workers for particular jobs, beyond convenience or similarity-attraction. For example, occupational studies

ranging from teaching (Nelson 2019) to restaurant work (Wilson 2021) find that managers rely on informal recommendations from the personal networks of their employees to fill vacancies with new employees of the same race. In industries such as finance and insurance, employers instead use formal bonus programs to reward incumbents who make successful referrals, more than is seen in industries such as manufacturing or professional services, and more for jobs such as technical, sales, professional, or supervisor positions, than for upper-level management positions (WorldatWork Report 2016). Such formal policies likely perpetuate racial disparities in access to middle class jobs, chiefly by encouraging homophily via formal authority and monetary inducements bestowed by the firm. In both informal referrals and formal policies encouraging referrals, the study of selection into occupations is a clear juncture where racism, defined as structured social practices that naturalize race as a category of difference, is visible (Hirschman and Garbes 2019).

Three studies suggest the value in investigating occupational particularities in recruitment. Petersen, Saporta, and Siegel's (2000) study of hiring at a high-tech firm showed that racial disparities in hiring and pay were almost entirely a function of access to referral networks. But this study was unable to explore any differences across occupation or job title. The authors declare that occupational differences "are not important in the organization" (2000: 774-75) – an assertion that may not fit for all occupations, especially in a high-tech organization that is likely to exhibit sharp differences in pay, power and other job rewards across occupational lines (e.g., see Alegria 2019). Rubineau and Fernandez (2010) rethink the question of how referrals contribute to job segregation by analyzing existing datasets from the referrer's perspective, rather than the one referred. In their focus on jobs such as janitor, machine operator, sales worker, cashier, and secretary, the authors conclude that reliance on referrals need not

generate homophily and continued segregation, so long as conscious efforts are made to increase the volume of referrals by under-represented groups. Finally, a recent study on recruitment through digital hiring platforms finds that employers in technology companies are reluctant to hire racial minorities into technical roles due to market concerns – stalling racial desegregation even when employers are making what appear to be explicit efforts to increase racial diversity (Jackson 2020).

In sum, gains in knowledge in the area of job referrals and race could reveal particular patterns by job and/or occupational category. Such investigations would help demonstrate how, contrary to human capital theory, "tastes" for white workers over workers of color often acquire an institutionalized state, transcending particular interfirm dynamics (Tilly, 1998; Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt 2019: 33).

Individuals pursuing licensing and occupational membership. How individuals are awarded or denied licensure in a particular occupation is another research area that could clarify abstract concepts in organizational research that incorporate topics of race and work. Occupations that involve continual testing for advancement, such as architecture and accounting, illustrate one such informative case of seeking occupational membership. The protection of the value of white-dominated occupations through large-scale processes of exclusion and social closure can be likened to how the greater value of white neighborhoods is protected by zoning, steering by realtors, and red-lining practices. Extending Small and Pager's (2020) notion that historic discrimination has contemporary consequences via organizations, we propose that the same process may occur via occupations.

In occupations that are becoming more ethnically and racially diverse, vestiges of institutionalized preference and discrimination may affect the response of incumbent workers.

These workers may seek to invoke social closure mechanisms to protect existing patterns of prestige and privilege or if that fails, exit into other occupational niches – a kind of occupational "white flight." First, in terms of social closure, credentialism, licensure, and certifications are now widespread among professional (Collins 2019[1979]) and non-professional occupations (e.g., Alkhateeb et al. 2011). Though occupational licenses (issued by governmental bodies) or certifications (issued by non-governmental bodies) can function in place of educational attainment (Cunningham 2019), educational attainment is often a requirement to obtain certification/licensure. Consequently, people with advanced degrees are still most likely to hold a certificate or license (Cunningham 2019). And, despite the high incidence of credentials among Black workers, these credentials appear to benefit them in the selection process less than for their Asian, white, and Latinx counterparts (King et al. 2006). These patterns suggest that credentialism in its various forms functions as an additional level of gatekeeping by allowing occupational groups to assert clear boundaries of qualification.

Second, exclusion via credentialing could also occur through occupational groups' own creation of new sub-categories or licensing requirements within their occupation. New studies in this area have the potential to show how incumbent workers enable a cascading process of categorical manipulation (Saatcioglu and Skrtic 2019; Stainback and Tomaskovic-Devey 2012) – i.e., a form of exit of high-status incumbents into new or reconstituted occupational categories that provide status protection and more resources. For example, following research on feminization of particular occupations (e.g., England 2017; Reskin and Roos 1990), the same notion could be amplified in a renewed stream of research that looks explicitly at the racialization of an occupation over time. Although Catanzarite (2002) began in this direction in her study of "brown-collar jobs," studies on how minority composition of occupational

categories affect wages and historical incumbents' behavior should still be expanded and updated. Relatedly, historical analyses of occupations should contrast instances of claims-making made by white people and people of color (e.g., through categorical manipulation versus through litigation, respectively), in which the latter were initially or still written off as cases of "special pleading," a term coined by critical race theorist Derrick Bell (1992).

How occupational members teach, govern and evaluate their members

Beyond mechanisms of "getting in," there are important mechanisms post-hire within occupations that generate racial inequality. Occupations govern inclusion and access to resources for their members through occupational communities (Van Maanen and Barley 1984; Orr 1996). These include invitations to adopt distinctive meaning systems – seen in cultures, discourses, and identities – all of which can require patterns of conformity that are highly selective in their effects (Wenger 1998). Deepening research into informal occupational communities may be especially important in the contemporary deformalized arrangement of occupations, which has affected access to professional work among people of color (Gorman and Kay 2020).

Some understandings of occupational membership derive from cognitive distinctions that actors use to categorize one another. Invoking such distinctions reflects a theoretical mechanism of symbolic boundaries (Lamont and Molnar 2002). While symbolic boundaries operate in macro-level processes such as the occupational gatekeeping functions previously described, they also operate when individuals differentiate themselves from others using cultural and status distinctions. This approach has generated a rich vocabulary with which to understand racial and ethnic inequality, as evident in Lamont's (2002) comparative study of ethno-racial boundaries in France and the United States; Kefalas's (2003) study of boundary work among white working-class populations; and Wimmer's (2008) theory of ethnic boundaries at the macro-social level.

Boundary theory has also been used to capture the link between cultural orientations and class inequality (Lamont and Fournier 1992; Jarness and Friedman 2017) but applications of it to workers' understandings and interpersonal negotiations of occupational membership as linked to race are just emerging (Franklin 2021).

A clear example of informal occupational membership involving symbolic boundaries can be found in the fashion industry, where cultural conventions and mimetic tendencies of the industry foster racial exclusion among its most prestigious sectors (Mears 2010). And, while not framed in terms of occupational culture, findings of racial harassment in the form of routine acts of racial bias, hostility, and mistreatment in Wingfield's (2019) study of Black health care workers and Joyce Bell's (2014) study of Black social workers reflect how white-dominated occupations may create conditions where discriminatory behavior is normalized. Boundaries of inclusion that rely on racial stereotypes can have not only psycho-social consequences, enhancing racial visibility in occupations (Glenn 2015), but material consequences as well. In a production occupations context, Embrick and Henricks (2012) argue that racial epithets help maintain workplace resource allocations towards white employees by maintaining a white supremacist workplace culture. More empirical work is needed to show how the seemingly race-neutral characteristics of epistemic and occupational communities can perpetuate racial inequality – as well as how occupational communities may be inflected with implicitly racialized themes.

The teaching of skills and dispositions between occupation members – classically, between veteran incumbents and newcomers – is a hallmark of occupational communities and communities of practice research (Lave and Wenger 1991; Van Maanen and Barley 1984). Among more skilled occupations, acquiring skills from interaction with coworkers and having

one's abilities evaluated positively by coworkers are often shaped by the preferences of incumbent racial groups (Vallas 2003). Occupational members also teach and evaluate the acceptable dispositions occupational members should exhibit (see Augustine 2021 for a review, emphasizing its origins in Abbott's and Hughes' theorizing). Everything from people's tastes, dispositions, work values, and work practices may be derived at the occupational group level (Weeden and Grusky 2005), creating strong potential for faultlines by both race and occupational category. Because such dispositions are often invoked in how occupational members define their group, future research on jurisdiction protection in occupational fields – likely germane to the study of occupational racial segregation – could explore how racial patterns or dynamics are present therein. For example, research on elements of racialized self-presentation in the workplace, such as hair styles of minority women (Rosette and Dumas 2007) or the choice of many Black middle-class workers to wear extremely professional clothing to avoid negative stereotypes (Cose 2009), could be brought together with research on how occupational communities draw boundaries around self-presentation (e.g., Nelsen and Barley 1997) to enhance understanding of racial inclusion within occupations. One example of combining research on racial attitudes and occupational values is Preito Hodge's (forthcoming) study of police officers. In addition, symbolic boundaries within occupational communities may provide better explanations of worker fit than theories of the "ideal worker" (Acker 1990), as they provide greater occupational specificity, while ideal worker theories rely on generalized stereotypes applying across a large range of work scenarios.

How individuals in an occupation, as opposed to hiring managers, themselves invoke racial categories in their assessment of their colleagues, clients, and managers and their own work practices is a nascent field of research. In one pathbreaking study, Franklin (2021)

documents how Black tech workers use strategies to establish micro boundaries that support cross-racial collegial ties and their workplace reputation. Another pioneering study, Lan's (2006) study of international domestic workers, shows how boundary theory can be used to explain an occupational group's strategies for self-protection from managers. Maids learn these strategies through their informal networks outside of formal work organizations. Other research shows how racial boundaries operate *across* occupational categories as well. Ribas' (2016) study of a meat processing plant documents complex intergroup relations between Latino and Black plant workers, whereby Latino workers perceive themselves as more subordinated than their Black colleagues, as they each hold different jobs with different working conditions within the plant.

Recent research documents that, when facing barriers to inclusion based on perceived discrimination at work, racial minority workers use coping strategies to advocate for their improved stature among and assessment by occupational group members. These strategies range from litigation, to subverting negative stereotypes into markers of positive performance, to circumvention via career decisions. Litigation challenging organizational practices has sometimes resulted in gains for minority groups within specific industries and occupations, such as Black supermarket workers who gained increased access to management positions in the years following a lawsuit (Skaggs 2009). Hirsh and Kornrich (2008) document that verification of charges by Equal Employment Opportunity Commission regulators is significantly more likely in lines of work involving manual labor and high levels of interaction with clients. However, Vallas (2003) found that minority groups who benefited from judicial rulings often had to pay a price for such victories, chiefly in the form of elevated levels of hostility, resentment, and abuse.

Studies of occupational identities among racial minorities suggest that occupation-specific values and practices may shape available coping strategies in particular lines of work.

For example, Black and Asian-American journalists leverage advantages associated with their minority identities at work using four identity mobilization tactics (crafting, challenging, confirming, or bridging) while also navigating interracial tension and racial discrimination at work (Cha and Roberts 2019). This contrasts with occupations in law and tech, where coping strategies have more to do with minority members' career decisions such as leaving for workplaces with more minority representation or minority-led workplaces (Garcia-Lopez 2008; Shih 2006). More research on how racial minority members of occupational groups experience and respond to the various forms of workplace discrimination would clarify whether racial identity be leveraged for protection of one's occupational membership in some occupations and not others.

How occupational members navigate their roles vis-a-vis clients

A final dimension of how occupational members come to understand their roles and proper ways of acting pertains to how professionals or occupation members relate to their clients. In these jobs, workers routinely engage customers, patients, students, or clients, in addition to their coworkers and managers, forming what Leidner (1993) terms the "service triangle." Viewing the unique and complex interracial dynamics implied in the service triangle provides an opportunity to understand how race shapes an important and growing sector of the occupational structure (Lopez 2010). Service or client-based jobs represent about half of the Bureau of Labor Statistic's list of fastest-growing occupations in the next eight years (BLS 2019b). While worker-client status asymmetries often exist for service workers across racial categories, research shows that workers of color in service jobs endure unique forms of interpersonal discrimination and power dynamics. Since the service labor process in the U.S. requires informal interaction with a predominantly white population whose inclinations may well harbor racial biases and

preferences, the inclusion of workers of color often becomes highly problematic. Powerful white clients or customers are widely perceived as likely to resist being assigned professionals of color, since they will not conform to the expected prestige hierarchies at work. This is evident in elite professional services (Grodsky and Pager 2001; Rivera 2016) and upscale restaurants (Wilson 2021). While front-of-house restaurant workers – mostly white – are encouraged by their managers to "interact loosely with guests," back-of-house workers in "brown-collar" jobs such as bussers and cooks are managed in "highly structured environments" without customers (Wilson 2021: 162). In service jobs where workers of color interface with the public, white customers often mistreat workers of color, as shown in Williams' (2006) study of toy store workers. Conversely, in service scenarios between white providers and racial minority service recipients, as in the case of white teachers and Black students, mistreatment of students may result as white workers attempt to cope with their own negative emotional reactions to feeling they lack a sense of belonging and control and desire to shut down conversations about race at work (Nelson and Johnson unpublished manuscript).

Managers are often actively involved in producing racialized worker-client relations, further demonstrating the utility of the service triangle concept. For instance, Walter's (2018) study of retail workers in a clothing store shows that managers strategically hired white or light-skinned workers to visibly promote the store and employed further labor control mechanisms around how they were presented to customers (i.e., what clothes, cosmetics, nail and hairstyles they were asked to wear). Relatedly, Hill (2018) shows how restaurant managers separated employees of color into locations where customers did not interact with them, such as cooks. In hidden spaces, workers were subjected to greater surveillance and hazardous conditions, such as Latino men being locked into the kitchen during their shift. Thomas' (2015) study of work in

comedy clubs likewise shows how managers' hiring and service discrimination were intertwined to cultivate a white clientele. And, some studies highlight how employers who do not like to think of themselves as managers, such as white women in the U.S. who employ immigrant women from Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean as domestic workers in their homes, nevertheless maintain manager-worker relations that are palpably raced and classed, with each constituent wanting different things from the relationship (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007).

Another line of research on client-service occupations focuses on the theme of racial matching in worker-client relationships. Research shows some benefits for clients' and/or racial minority workers' own outcomes under certain conditions. For example, in the context of healthcare, Wingfield (2019) documents how some nurses of color advocate for the quality of care received by their patients of color. In the context of welfare casework, Black and Latino bureaucrats leverage ethnic commonality with their clients and their occupational authority to inform how they do their jobs and provide unique forms of support to clients (Watkins-Hayes 2009). However, matching also has its drawbacks for racial minorities' careers and often seems to impose ceilings on minority opportunity. For example, Abad (2019) finds that Latinx immigration service providers matched to immigrant clientele remained on the front line and did not advance to management as their white coworkers did. Moreover, worker-manager racial matching is not necessarily protective, as in the case of Black casino workers whose Black managers declined to intervene when they encountered racist white clients (Sallaz 2009).

CONCLUSION

Since Reskin (2003) issued her call for scholars to identify the mechanisms that produce and reproduce racially stratified workplace outcomes, scholars have made important advances along

the lines she suggested. Theoretical frameworks addressing the intersection of organizational theory and the sociology of race have shown increasing sophistication (Ray 2019; Reyes 2017; Wooten and Couloute 2017). However, the emphasis on organizational patterns of racial inequality has come at the expense of occupational analysis. Seeking to rectify this imbalance, this review calls for theoretical and empirical development on an occupational perspective on racial inequality at work. It identifies three mechanisms at the occupational level warranting further study: how occupational members select new members, and how individuals pursue membership; how occupational members teach, govern and evaluate their members; and how occupational members navigate their roles vis-a-vis clients. Throughout, we tie these developing lines of research to promising empirical examples: some already occupying the race and occupations intersection, others coming from the occupations literature that need to be elaborated to account for race relations and racial dynamics.

As scholars who identify as white, we are aware of of the sensitivity of addressing race, racism and work from a position of privilege. We acknowledge that our racial identity has shaped our own subjective experiences with race in our places of employment over the course of our lives, our freedom from discrimination on the basis of our race, as well as everything from the journals and articles we read and our own academic networks. We have attempted to exercise reflexivity in our selection of literature and have audited the citation list herein to ensure sociologists and theorists are represented who may bring the perspectives we, on account of our race, lack or are prone to miss. Being reflexive about the discipline of sociology itself is also in order. Overall, there is more diverse representation in the field of sociology by race, as reflected in doctoral degrees awarded and professional association memberships, than there was in the past (National Science Foundation Survey of Earned Doctorates 2013). However, representation in

faculty ranks is less diverse. Li and Koedel (2017) use a cross-section of data in 2015-2016 to show that 76.6% of Sociology faculty in selective public universities are white, followed by 8.9% Black, 8.4% Asian, and 5.9% Hispanic. Compared to completed doctorates in Sociology for that year, this is an overrepresentation of whites and underrepresentation of Asians and Hispanics. In sum, academic sociology is still a professional field experiencing issues of racial sorting and inequality, likely produced by similar mechanisms of selection and inclusion in occupational membership discussed here.

We end by summarizing areas for future research. Studies on the inner workings of referral recruitment systems unique to occupational fields should pay attention to technical innovations and systems external to organizations, including digital hiring platforms. Though studies of platform work have surged, racial disparities and the role of biased rankings in this field need more attention. Future research should also tend to gatekeeping mechanisms outside of workplace organizations for selection into – and potential racial exclusion from – occupational membership, such as licensure and credentials. Finally, picking up the tradition of early scholars of occupations, future studies should consider how workers, even when unbounded from a particular workplace organization, form occupational communities (Orr 1996). In this vein, Trotter's (2021) historical analysis of professionalization projects in medical professions as "racial projects" is illuminating.

Another specific area for future research on racial representation and race relations within occupations is greater focus on Asian workers in non-elite and non-managerial jobs. Most existing research focuses on Asians' experiences in high-status occupations (e.g., Chin 2020; Gee and Peck 2017; Shih 2006), yet service occupations – including personal appearance workers – are also occupations in which Asian American workers are highly represented at

15.8%, though they are 6.5% of the U.S. workforce overall (BLS 2019c). One study stands out as a pioneer in this future direction for research (Kang 2010). Further, the occupational profile of Asian Americans differs by ethnic group, but existing academic literature on race and occupations does not make this readily apparent. For instance, Vietnamese Americans hold 20% of labor, maintenance and transportation occupations, compared to 15% among all Americans and 11% among all Asian Americans (Pew Research Center 2013). Meanwhile, recent studies on labor, maintenance and transportation occupations focus on other racial groups and/or do not make ethnic distinctions among Asians (e.g., Davis 2016; Dutton, Debebe, and Wrzesniewski 2016; Kelly et al. 2015; Royster 2003; Viscelli 2016).

The timeliness of an occupational perspective is evident in the growing number of workers in the post-Fordist era that are increasingly expected to fend for themselves, whether by freelancing or performing gig or consulting work on their own account. Coupled with the "responsibilization" trend in which workers are expected to provide their strategies for survival, without organizational support, studies are especially needed that can link the dynamics of occupational apparatuses (e.g., social networks, licensing requirements, occupational communities, etc.) to the exclusion of racial minority workers. Building on what we have learned from organizational research about important intra-organizational processes that generate racial inequalities at work, an accompanying occupational perspective would emphasize processes that mediate the individual's relationship to the organization, namely through their occupational membership. Such a perspective has much to offer, as it underscores how the selection of occupational members, their self-governance, and worker-client relations bear on racial inequality in work opportunities and outcomes.

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