

Inequality and Workplace Diversity

Race, Ethnic and Gender Differences in Decision-Making Authority at Work



PREPARED FOR
INEQUALITY BY THE NUMBERS
ANNUAL WORKSHOP
CUNY GRADUATE CENTER & STONE CENTER

2022

BY

DR. RYAN A. SMITH

PROFESSOR

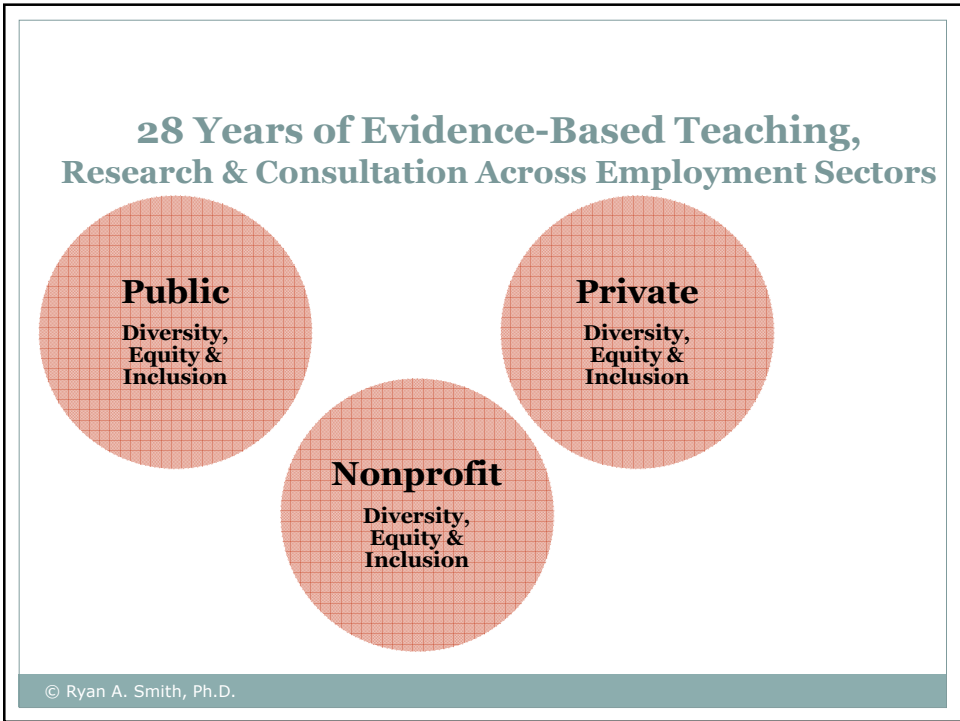
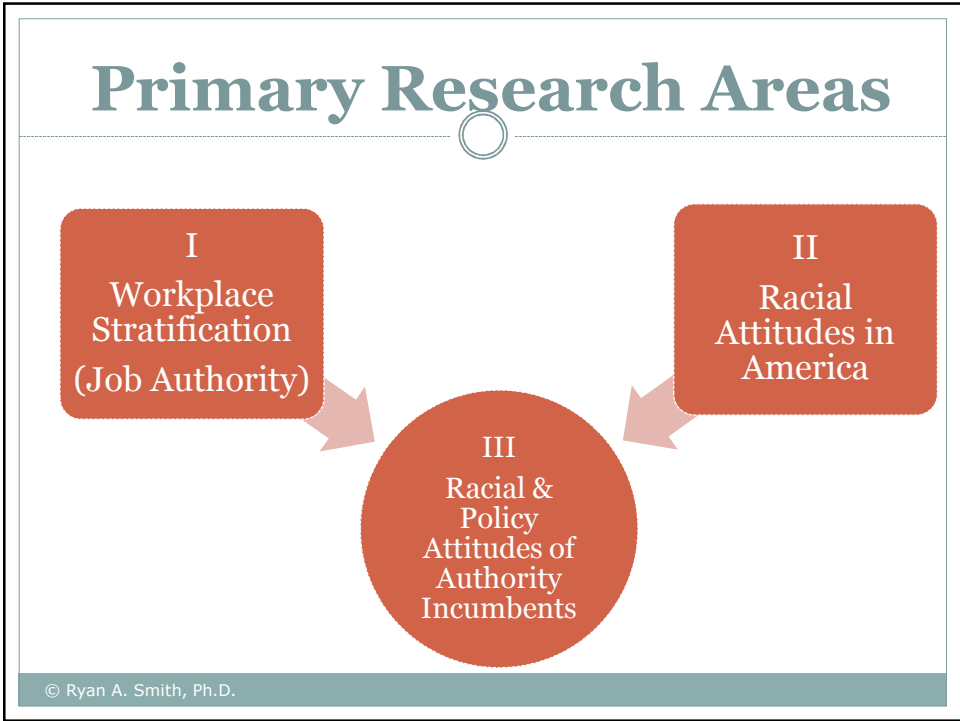
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OVERVIEW

- **Part I**
 - Primary research areas
 - Persistent Inequality in job authority
 - What is job authority?
 - Why is job authority important?
 - Operationalizing Authority for Quantitative Research
 - Major Research Findings
- **Part II**
 - New Directions
 - Racial & Policy Attitudes of Authority Incumbents

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I've come to agree with Barbara Reskin

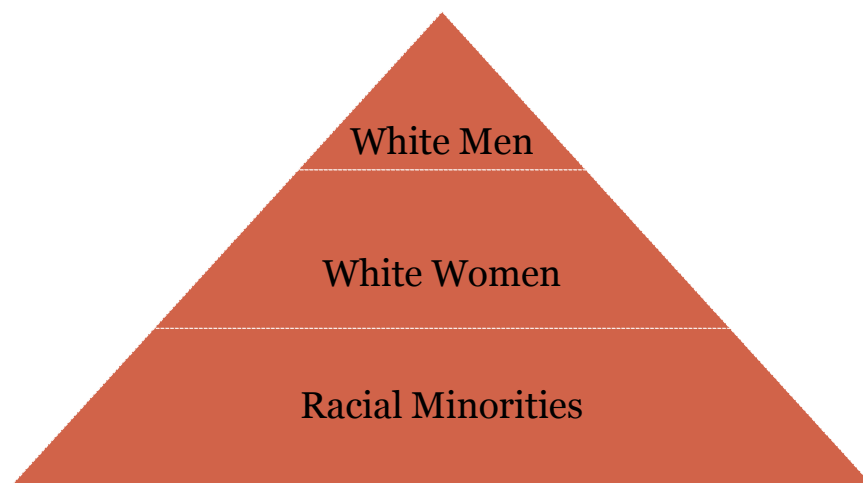
“Inequality at work does not just happen; it occurs through the acts and the failures to act by the people who run and work for organizations”

Barbara Reskin, 2000

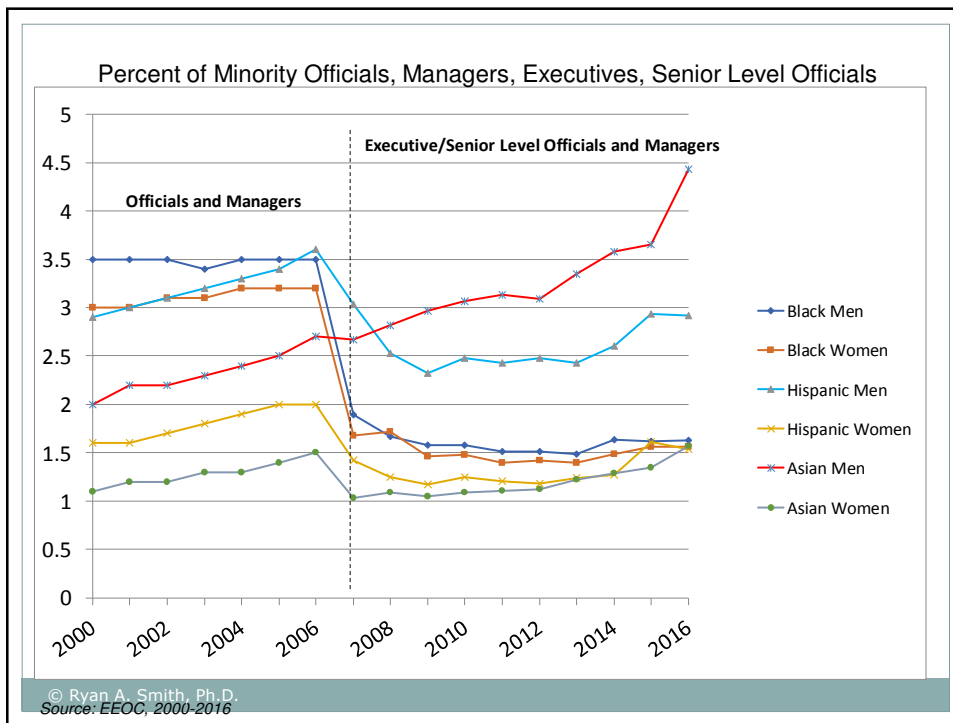
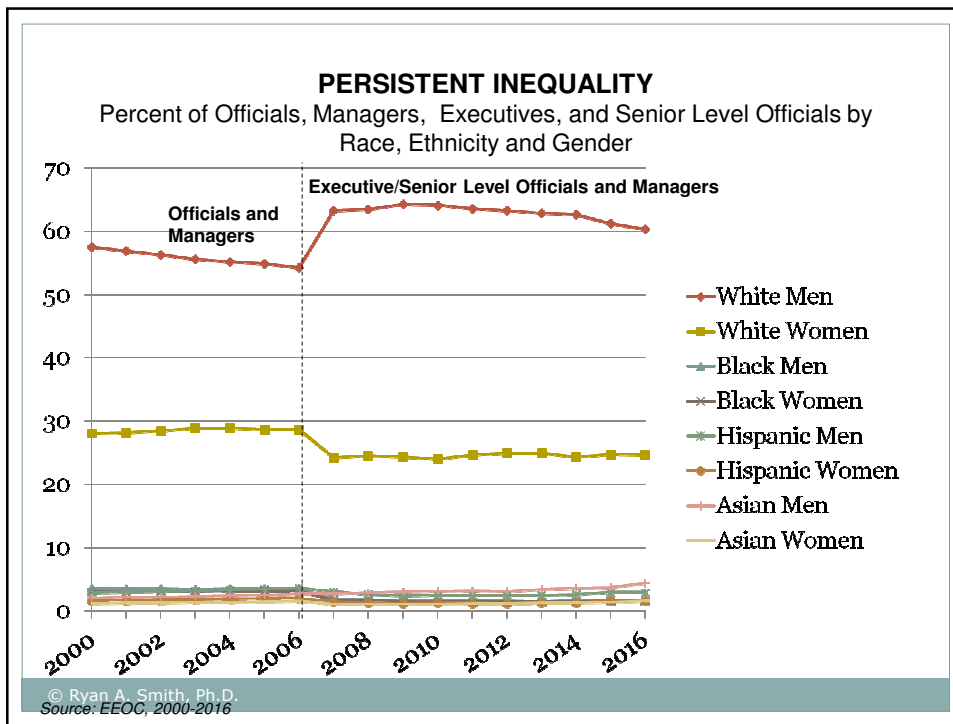


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Normative Context
Persistent Hierarchy of Decision-making Positions at Work



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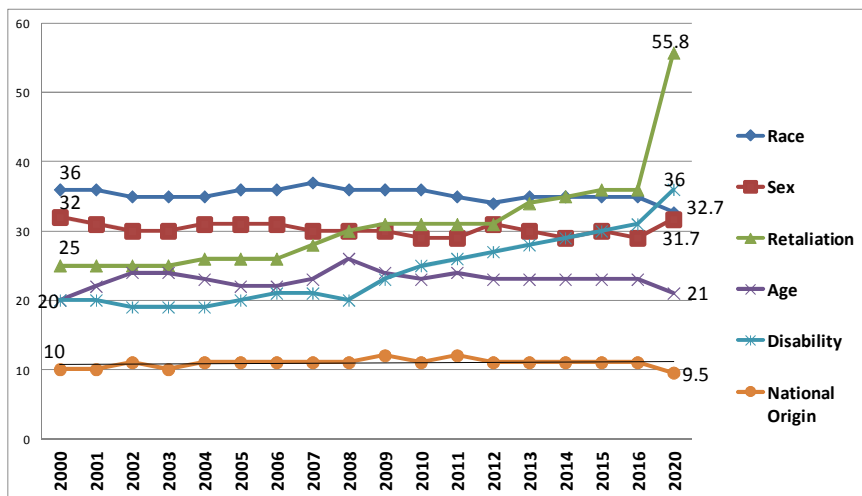


As result, companies are plagued by . . .

- Discrimination allegations
- Discrimination lawsuits

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Percentage of EEOC Discrimination Allegations (FY 2000 - 2020)



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Racial Discrimination Lawsuits (in millions)

Company	Year	# of Plaintiffs	Settlement
Coca-Cola	2000	2,200	\$192.5
Texaco	1996	1,400	\$176
Sodexo	2005	3,000	\$80
Abercrombie & Fitch	2003	17	\$40
Amtrak	2000	800	\$16
Ford Motor Co.	2005	3,400	\$11
Cracker Barrel	2004	42	\$8.8
Sunoco	2004	200	\$5.5

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Sex Discrimination Lawsuits (in millions)

Company	Year	# of Plaintiffs	Settlement
Home Depot	1997	25,000	\$104
Rent-A-Center	2002	5,000	\$47
Dial Corp.	2003	486	\$10
Boeing	2004	29,000	\$72.5
Morgan Stanley	2004	340	\$54

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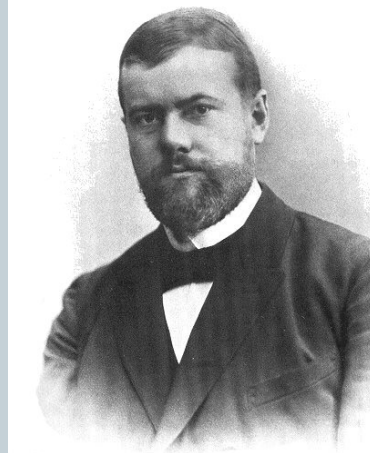
Common Denominator in Discrimination Cases

- Women and racial minorities lack decision-making authority, relative to white men.
 - Types of decision-making positions
 - ✦ Hiring Managers
 - ✦ Supervisors
 - ✦ Senior Leaders
 - ✦ Recruiters, etc.

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Theoretical Foundation

Max Weber— *“The important difference between power and authority consist in the fact that whereas power is essentially tied to the personality of individuals, authority is always associated with social positions and roles Authority is therefore a form of legitimate power.”*



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What is Job Authority? How is it operationalized for Quantitative Research?

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5 dimensions of authority

- **Ownership**
 - Control over the means of production
- **Span of Control**
 - Number of people under direct supervision
- **Sanctioning Authority**
 - Influence over pay, promotions, hiring, firing
- **Decision-Making Authority**
 - Control over products, services, budgets, and policies
- **Hierarchical Authority**
 - One's formal location w/in an organization

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Why is job authority Important?

- Job authority is a valued attribute of jobs that confers status on a person and it is intrinsically rewarding (Kluegel, 1978).
- The study of job authority has been declared sociology's chief contribution to the study of earnings inequality (Halaby & Weakliem, 1993).
- Job authority is one of the central ways in which the financial rewards of work are allocated (Wright et al. 1995).
- Job authority is related to job satisfaction, autonomy, class consciousness, class position, voting behavior, party identification, political views, and racial attitudes (Kluegel 1978; Smith & Hunt 2021).
- Those in authority dictate, direct, and inform D, E, I policies.

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Interested in Authority Research?



TWO PLACES TO START

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Annotated Bibliography & Annual Review

- **Smith, Ryan A. and Wilson, George. 2018.** “Authority and Work.” In *Oxford Bibliographies in Sociology*. Ed. Lynette Spillman. New York: *Oxford University Press*.
 - **Annotated Bibliography**
 - **USA & International Studies on Workplace Authority**
 - **Major Data sets**
- **Smith, Ryan A. 2002.** “Race, Gender and Authority in the Workplace: Theory and Research.” *The Annual Review of Sociology*. 28:509-542.

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Why does race, ethnic and gender inequality in authority persist?



**SELECT FINDINGS IN
SUPPORT OF MICRO,
MACRO, MESO
EXPLANATIONS**

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Micro Explanations

Human Capital & Family Status

- Women and racial minorities receive lower authority returns to their human capital investments (e.g., educ., Asian Men & Asian Women).
- The link between family structure and authority is much stronger for women than men.
 - Marriage hurts white women's authority chances; but black women experience a "marital bonus" in predominantly white work settings.
 - Latinas receive a "marital bonus" but only in predominantly Latino work-settings.

(source: Smith & Elliott 2005)

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Macro Explanations

Structural Accounts

- To the extent minorities and women have authority, it tends to be in economic sectors where they are disproportionately concentrated e.g.,
 - The south
 - Large urban areas
 - Public Sector (more on this later)
 - Co-ethnic work-settings
 - Industries & locales susceptible to economic down-turns

Sources: Mueller et al. (1989); McGuire & Reskin (1993); Smith & Elliott (2002); Wilson (1997).

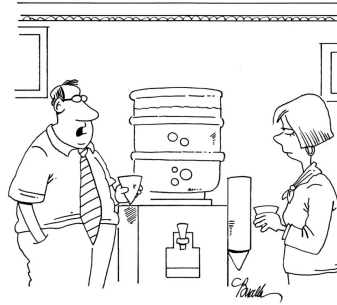
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Meso Explanations

Glass Escalators

- White male supervisors (in non-traditional settings) who report to women and minority supervisors receive more income and retirement benefits than white men (and other groups) who report to white men.

○ **Smith (2012)**



"I don't mind working for a woman. I do, however, hate being paid like one."

CartoonStock.com

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Meso Explanations

Glass Ceilings

- Relative to white men . . .
 - Blacks and Hispanics experience increasing inequality at higher levels of power (e.g., glass ceilings), but black women experience a particular virulent form of this inequality suggestive of direct discrimination.
- **Source: Elliott & Smith (2004)**

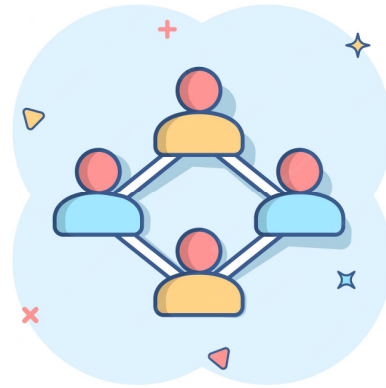


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Meso Explanations Networks

Black women are more likely than other groups to utilize network assistance (via black men) to access job authority in response to direct discrimination.

- Elliott & Smith (2004)



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Meso Explanations Homosocial Reproduction

- Predicts that authority elites will seek to keep management positions in the hands of their own kind by promoting individuals who share their group's characteristics (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, etc)
- Consequence: People who are different are closed out (AKA social closure)



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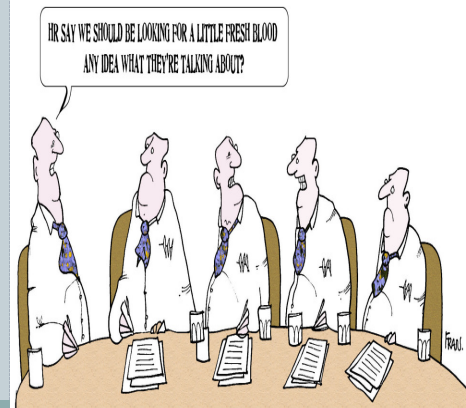
Meso Explanations

Homosocial Reproduction

The Ubiquity of HSR

- Most groups attain power via HSR, but because white men continue to dominate positions of authority, they are particularly well positioned to benefit from this form of social closure more so than other groups (i.e., “possession is 9/10th the law”) (Elliott & Smith, 2004)

“HR say we should be looking for a little fresh blood, any idea what they’re talking about?”



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Meso Explanation

Bottom-Up Ascription

- Racial minorities are more likely to have authority over other racial minorities.
- Subordinate racial minorities are more likely to have minority superiors.
- Minorities are more likely than majority group members to exercise authority at the bottom of organizational hierarchies.

○ Source: Elliott & Smith (2001)

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Part II New Directions



**CLOSING IN ON THE MECHANISMS
THAT GENERATE AND SUSTAIN
AUTHORITY INEQUALITY**

**EXPLORING THE RACIAL ATTITUDES
OF AUTHORITY INCUMBENTS**

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White Supervisor and Subordinate Beliefs about Black/White Inequality



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Study I Purpose

- To explore beliefs about the causes of black/white inequality (e.g., stratification beliefs) among whites who exercise authority at work, as well as whites who, lacking such authority, are likely to compete with racial minorities in the workplace.

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Why study the stratification beliefs of whites with and without authority?

1. Whites continue to dominate authority positions at work.
2. Most blacks in high-paying positions report to white supervisors and work mostly alongside and compete with white coworkers for scarce resources (e.g., promotions, pay raises, benefits, etc.) **(Smith 2012)**.
3. White Supervisors tend to evaluate the performance and citizenship traits of their own group much more favorably than members of minority groups **(Tsui & Egan 1994; Tsui & O'Reilly 1989)**.

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Why study the stratification beliefs of whites with and without authority?

4. White judgments of black employees are subject to “ultimate attribution error”
 - positive performance = luck or the exception to the rule;
 - negative performance = attributed to innate characteristics (Pettigrew 1979; Pettigrew & Martin 1987).

5. Attitudes regarding social inequality are shaped by an individual’s position w/in authority structures. (Robinson & Kelley 1979; Wilson & Maume 2016)

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Other Matters

- Organizational change efforts (e.g., diversity initiatives) are generally filtered through managers and supervisors (Kalev et al. 2006; Weber 1978).
 - Therefore, what white managers /supervisors think about the source of black/white inequality matters.
 - Also, what white managers/ supervisors think about workplace policies (e.g., affirmative action) designed to equalize opportunity matters.

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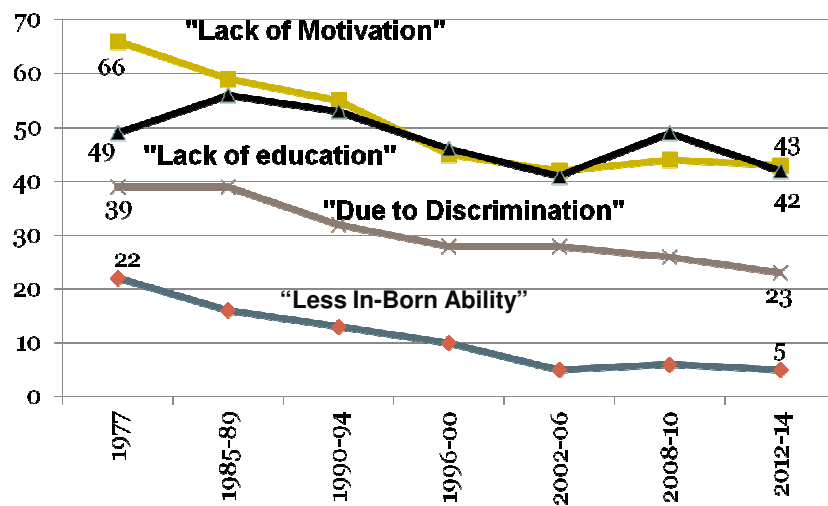
Data

- General Social Surveys (GSS)--national sample of the English-speaking, non-institutionalized population of the U.S. 18 years of age or older.
- Annual repeated, cross-sectional surveys 1972-2014 (study 1)
- Annual repeated, cross-sectional surveys 1996-2018 (study 2)
- GSS tracks supervisory status, racial attitudes, and antidiscrimination policy attitudes, etc.
- N = 11,262 total cases

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White Supervisor's Beliefs about Black/White Inequality

“On average, blacks have worse jobs, income, and housing than white people. Do you think these differences are due to . . .”



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Takeaway Questions

- When whites in authority believe that blacks simply lack the motivation to get ahead, how does that belief impact their ability to impartially consider blacks for employment or promotion opportunities?
- If those in authority increasingly believe that racial discrimination is not a factor limiting the life chances of blacks, how does that weigh against their charge to adhere to antidiscrimination policy, enforce affirmative action edicts, and/or endorse diversity policies aimed at supporting racial minorities?

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Study I: Bottom-line

These attitudinal patterns, along with the persistent authority inequality observed earlier, provide an attitudinal pretext and a social context for persistent bias against blacks—**bias that can influence how whites perceive policies that are designed to equalize opportunity in the workplace (e.g., Affirmative Action).**

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High Profile Faces of Affirmative Action



PRO & CON

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION—A COLLECTION OF POLICIES DESIGNED TO EQUALIZE OPPORTUNITY IN THE WORKPLACE

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High Profile beneficiary & opponent of Affirmative action

Clarence Thomas
Associate Justice
of the Supreme
Court of the United
States



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High Profile beneficiary & proponent of Affirmative action

Sonia Sotomayor
Supreme Court Justice



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High Profile beneficiary & proponent of Affirmative action

Henry Louis "Skip" Gates Jr. is an American literary critic, teacher, historian, filmmaker and public intellectual.

Alphonse Fletcher University Professor at Harvard University.



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**High Profile
beneficiary &
proponent of
Affirmative
action**

Cornel West

Former Professor
of the Practice of
Public Philosophy
at Harvard
University and
holds the title of
Professor
Emeritus at
Princeton
University.



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Study II: Key Questions

- What do white supervisors and subordinates believe about:
 - affirmative action?
 - preferences aimed at blacks versus women?

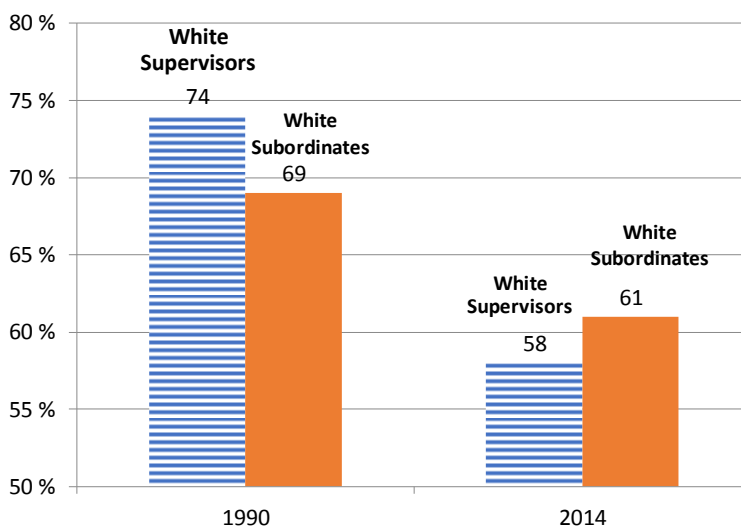
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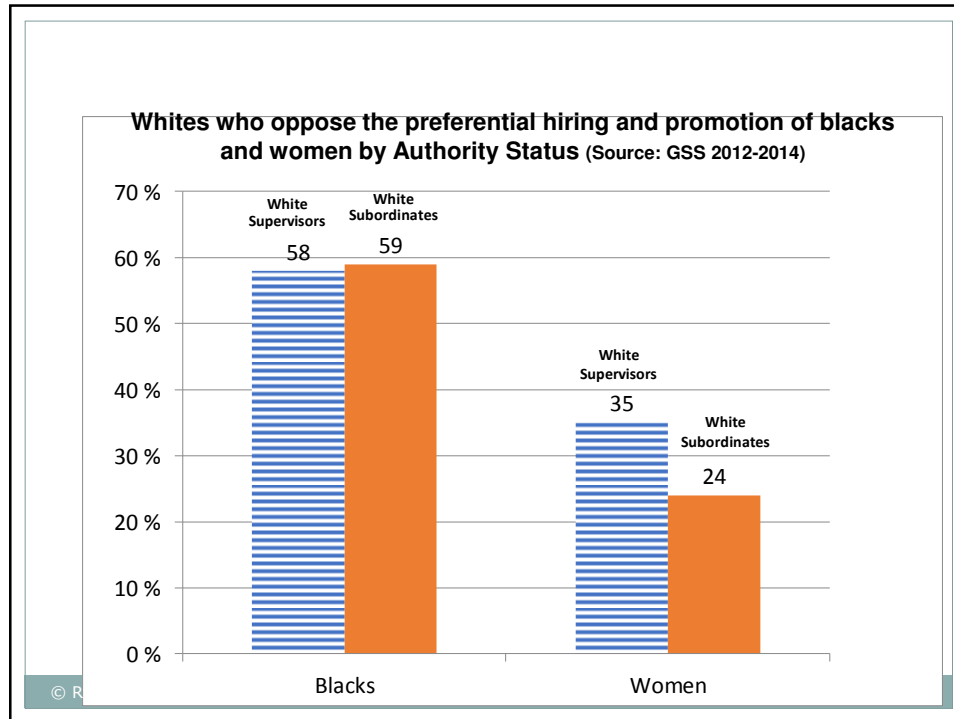
The Affirmative Action Attitudes of Whites (employment)

DESCRIPTIVE FINDINGS

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White Supervisors and White Subordinates who believe that whites are “very likely” or “some what likely” hurt by Affirmative Action





Select Multivariate Results Net of background factors*

- Who believes Whites are hurt by A.A.? (Reverse discrimination)
 - White women more so than White men
 - Whites in the public sector vs private sector counterparts to support this notion.
- Who opposes racial preferences at work?
 - Whites employed in “all or mostly all” workplaces relative to whites in more integrated work-settings.
 - Republicans more so than non-Republicans—especially among white supervisors compared with subordinates.

*Net of: mostly white workplace, gender, education, age, religiosity, region, urbanicity, political ID, political partisanship, year.

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Study II: Bottom-line

- So, whites who exercise decision-making authority at work, and white subordinates, largely oppose one the most effective governmental policies designed to equalize opportunity in the workplace.
- This opposition can take many forms including direct manipulation of the policy.
 - For example

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The New York Times

- In 2020, Wells Fargo Bank
- “Diverse Slate Policy”
 - Mandated at least 50% of candidates interviewed for positions earning \$100,000 or more per year be women or minorities
- Policy suspended due to fake interviews (NYT, 6-7-22, B4; 8-2-22, B3 Reporter Emily Flitter).
- **Point: Authority matters! Even the most well intentioned, and well conceived, policies are subject to the whims of authority elites!**

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Conclusion

- Thus, referring back to Barbara Reskin's quote:

“Inequality at work does not just happen; it occurs through the acts and the failures to act by the people who run and work for organizations.”

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Thanks for Listening!

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