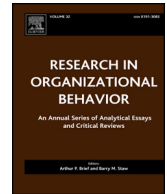


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Racism and discrimination versus advantage and favoritism: Bias for versus bias against



Nancy DiTomaso

Rutgers Business School—Newark and New Brunswick, Department of Management and, Global Business, Newark, NJ, United States

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ABSTRACT

Almost all academic literature across disciplines and most of the news media explain racial inequality as the result of the discrimination and racism of whites toward nonwhites. In contrast, I argue that it is the favoritism or advantages that whites provide to other whites that is the primary mechanism by which racial inequality is reproduced in the post-civil rights period in the U.S. I provide evidence for my argument with data at the individual, organizational, and societal levels. I also discuss how my argument accords with management theory about diversity and inequality, considering the literature on anti-racism, implicit or unconscious bias, micro-inequities (or micro-aggressions), the need for mentors, and white privilege. I end with a discussion of objections that might be raised with regard to my framing of racial inequality as the result of whites providing advantages to other whites, including concerns about egregious negative acts toward nonwhites. Overall, I argue that my argument that favoritism takes precedence over racism and discrimination is consistent with the research evidence in the field.

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After five decades since the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963 and the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, it is an opportune time for management scholars to assess our current understanding of trends in the diversity of the labor force and the outcomes from the Civil Rights Movement. While there have been many such assessments of the half century anniversary of the Civil Rights Act, especially with recent noteworthy events that have highlighted the continued challenges of racial inequality, organization scholars have not given enough consideration to how our theories of diversity and the labor force explain the patterns that have emerged since the passage of the Civil Rights Act. In this paper, I review evidence at the individual, organizational, and societal levels to argue that in the post-civil rights period racial inequality is reproduced primarily by the advantage or favoritism whites provide to other whites more so than from the discrimination and racism of whites toward nonwhites. I then discuss how my argument compares to alternative

theories about diversity and racial inequality. I conclude the paper with a review of some of the potential objections that my argument might invoke, including concerns about egregious negative acts toward nonwhites, and a brief discussion of methodological issues.

Despite the changes over the past fifty years, recent research suggests that far less has changed with regard to access to the best jobs than many would have expected or believed to be the case in the years since the Civil Rights Act was passed. Management research has not explained how larger patterns in the labor force have emerged over the past several decades, especially, how white men continue to dominate the best jobs (Stainback & Tomas-kovic-Devey, 2012). Thus, there is a gap in our knowledge of how the labor market works, and especially in how the labor market meets organizational policy and contributes to the outcomes of who gains access to which jobs, with what kinds of job rewards and prospects for future career benefits (Elliott & Smith, 2004; Smith, 2002).

Most academic literature assumes that racial inequality is reproduced primarily through processes of discrimination,

E-mail address: ditomaso@business.rutgers.edu.

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social closure, or active exclusion of those who are not part of one's social group (Elliott & Smith, 2001; Manza, 1992; Murphy, 1988; Waldinger, 1997; Weber, 1968). Such processes are then attributed to racism on the part of whites (Bobo, Kluegel, & Smith, 1997; Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Essed, 1991; Feagin & Vera, 1995; Krieger, 1995; McConahay, 1986; Sears, Sidanius, & Bobo, 2000; Sears, Van Laar, Carrillo, & Kosterman, 1997; Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996a). The news media follows the same narrative by attributing evidence of racial inequality to racism and discrimination. In this paper, I provide an alternative framing to these explanations for racial inequality in the workplace, one which is well supported by the research literature (Brewer, 1999; Dixon, Levine, Reicher, & Durrheim, 2012; Greenwald & Pettigrew, 2014). I argue that in the post-civil rights period, racial inequality is reproduced by whites helping other whites more so than through the discrimination or racism of whites toward non-whites. In this regard, I examine specifically how whites hoard jobs, which they often treat as personal resources when they pass along information, influence, or opportunity to members of their social groups (Adler & Kwon, 2002).

Tilly (1998) calls this opportunity hoarding, which he defines as the effort by a group of people to reserve a valuable resource for members of their own social group. As explanation, he described an example of chain migration among Italian immigrants from a small town in Italy to an area in Westchester, New York. These immigrants created an economic niche that came to be identified with Italians. As Tilly (1998: 151–52) describes it:

... members of a categorically bounded network retain access to a resource – in this case, a set of employers, clients, and jobs – that is valuable, renewable, subject to monopoly, supportive of network activities, and enhanced by the network's modus operandi. Matching the category Italian-Americans to the business of landscape gardening sequestered opportunities for poor Italian peasants and their descendants, but it also fenced off those opportunities from other people, including the growing number of black residents. . . It reinforced Italian identity as a basis of everyday social relations.

Note that although Tilly acknowledges the consequences of opportunity hoarding as keeping blacks out of these jobs, the mechanism for doing so was through Italians helping each other, not through Italians actively excluding blacks, even though they may have fought to preserve their privileges if their access to these jobs was threatened.

The concept of opportunity hoarding has often been associated with ethnic enclaves and niches (Portes, 1995, 2000; Waldinger, 1996, 1997), but in the post-civil rights period, it is just as likely to be based on social networks that are more general. Across many different contexts, help is primarily given to others within the same social groups through the connections of where people live, go to school, attend church, and interact in social and professional settings (Crosby, Bromley, & Saxe, 1980; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1981; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1977, 1986; Saucier,

Miller, & Doucet, 2005)¹. Because on all these dimensions, we still live largely segregated lives, passing along opportunity is still mostly done within racial groups (Massey, 2007; Massey & Denton, 1993; Orfield & Lee, 2006). Further, whites are disproportionately represented in the best jobs, the jobs with the highest incomes, and the jobs with the most training and authority (Keister & Moller, 2000; McCall, 2001; Oliver & Shapiro, 1995; Smith, 2002; Stainback & Tomaskovic-Devey, 2012), so when whites help other whites, it reproduces existing racial inequality. Thus, despite policies that promise equal opportunity, there are many ways that people in organizations intervene in the processes by which jobs are allocated in order to gain an inside edge – unequal opportunity – for themselves or for friends, family members, and others identified as “like me.” Often employers are complicit in these processes for their own purposes, such as ensuring greater loyalty to the firm and meeting labor supply needs at low cost (Moss & Tilly, 2001; Waldinger, 1997).

Access to jobs is required for a decent life in the U.S., especially to jobs that pay a living wage and are protected from market competition. Connections are used in the search for such jobs during periods of both high and low unemployment. It is how most people get jobs most of the time (DiTomaso, 2013; Granovetter, 1995; Royster, 2003). Especially during periods of sustained unemployment, there is keen competition for jobs and an even greater likelihood that people will seek to use networks and connections to family members, friends or acquaintances in order to gain advantage in the access to jobs.

Importantly, I argue that the use of favoritism or advantage by whites toward other whites is not just another form of discrimination or the other side of the same coin. Indeed, favoritism and discrimination differ in fundamental ways: cognitively, socially, legally, and politically. People helping others creates a positive sense of self. It makes people feel good about themselves. Not only is it not illegal, it is something that is applauded in most social groups. People who help others in their social networks in this way gain social standing and good will. Given the positive cognitive and social rewards for helping one's family, friends, and acquaintances, helping others like oneself creates no political motivation for change. Indeed, it creates a sense that things are as they should be and that one is contributing to positive outcomes, not negative ones. And because it is not illegal, there is no sense of wrong-doing associated with helping family members and friends. In contrast, those who engage in discrimination (defined as explicit exclusion of blacks or other nonwhites) rarely feel good about themselves in the post-civil rights context. Discrimination is illegal. It is widely condemned, and those who engage in actions that

¹ These articles on helping behavior find that when there are non-racist reasons that can explain the behavior that whites are helped more often than blacks. The findings, however, are interpreted as indicating discrimination against blacks, rather than as favoritism toward whites. Thus, the empirical findings in one of the key literatures demonstrating that whites receive favor, nevertheless, are interpreted through a frame of discrimination and racism rather than of favoritism or advantage for whites.

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