

Occupational Segregation Presentation: Slide Notes and References

Slide 1: Introduction

Hello, I'm Paulina and my presentation will be covering racial and ethnic segregation in the workplace.

Slide 2: What is Occupational Segregation?

Occupational segregation is the term used to describe when certain demographic groups are over- or under-represented in different jobs. I have always understood this term to refer to gender occupational differences (for example, the concept of "pink collar work," as well as terms like the "glass ceiling"), but I wanted to take a look at the phenomenon focusing on race and ethnicity in the United States.

Broadly, racial and ethnic occupational segregation describes how certain races and ethnicities - like white people and some Asians populations - are more likely to hold professional, high-paying jobs while others - primarily Black people and Latinos - are concentrated in lower-paying, lower-advancement jobs. This is referred to as having an "oversized proportion" within an employment sector.

This is not a rule set in stone; different ethnicities, different American cities, and different individuals mean that occupational segregation does not always occur, nor does always occur in the same way. At the same time, American history and factors seen today all add to the cumulative effect of this phenomenon.

Slide 3: Graph Displaying Underrepresentation of Professionals

I believe this graph does the best job of illustrating the occupational divide and segregation that we have currently. As you can see, this data from 2021 - from the Economic Policy Institute - shows that white people are the majority of all professionals, with them making up 70.5% of the professional work sector. In comparison, Black people and Latinos in particular have much smaller percentages of their employment in the professional sector. But what does this really mean?

Slide 4: A Snapshot of Racial Occupational Segregation

Disproportionately, the highest-paid jobs in the United States are held by white people, particularly white men. For instance, the 86% of white men who make up pilots and flight engineers make an average annual salary of \$161,888 per year.

In comparison, for their population sizes, Black people and Latinos are much more likely to hold an oversized proportion of the lowest paying jobs. For example, Black women only make up roughly 6% of the workforce in the United States, but they make up 32% of all home health aides. Home health aides make an average annual salary of \$23,803.

Just to be clear, I in no way want to come across as if I am disparaging certain jobs or types of work. There is a hard objective difference, however, in making more than \$100,000 a year or making less than \$30,000. This type of occupational division along racial lines has an enormous impact on the financial health of American racial and ethnic minorities, as I will discuss later.

As I will also further touch upon, in some ways this is a self-fulfilling problem. For instance, there is a lack of Black and Latino workers in many professional occupational categories that are projected to grow at faster rates than the overall workforce. For example, the workforce of computer and mathematical professionals is projected to grow at a rate of 6.4%, an above-average rate. Black and Latino people will overwhelmingly miss out on this growth, meaning that it is less likely that they will be able to break through to these sorts of professional jobs in the future.

Slide 5: Snapshot: Black Americans and Occupational Segregation

According to the Economic Policy Institute, “Black workers, on average, are not being hired, promoted or paid according to what would signal their level of productivity based on their experience or their education.” Based on the numbers, this is absolutely true. As you can see, Black Americans make up an oversized proportion of entry-level positions based on population size, but are incredibly underrepresented when it comes to managerial or more senior positions.

Partly as a result of this inequality, the wage gap of Black Americans is estimated to be around \$2.7 trillion dollars. If this trend continues, it has been estimated that it could take 95 years before Black employees reach parity with their white counterparts based on population size. Now, let’s look into why we are in this situation.

Slide 6: Historical Causes

Something that should surprise no one is the heavy impact that slavery had and continues to have in fostering occupational segregation. Not only did slavery set up a system in which certain work - usually hard labor and work considered “low skilled” - was most deemed appropriate for Black Americans, but it also kept Black Americans as a whole from achieving the generational wealth of their white counterparts, not to mention a lack of access to safety, security, and health.

Similarly, the Jim Crow era limited the educational and employment options of Black Americans. Segregation meant that services and facilities, including schools and libraries for Black people were either nonexistent or extremely under-resourced. Some states, like South Carolina, had additional “Black Codes,” which fined Black people if they worked as anything other than household help or farm laborers. These regulations made it impossible for Black people in these areas to join the professional class.

Compounding the effects of slavery that we still see today, Black Americans and other people of color including American Indians, were not included in aspects of the New Deal that helped so many white Americans. In fact, 65% of Black Americans were ultimately ineligible for these benefits, including exclusion from accessing the G.I. Bill, which allowed veterans who served in WWII to receive low-interest loans to buy a home, start a business, or attend school.

Likewise, Asians have historically been seen as too different and untrustworthy to fit into American society at large. They too were often forced into menial labor, such as with Chinese immigrants building the railroads across the country. Furthermore, thousands of Japanese Americans were put into concentration camps on the West Coast and were seen as direct threats to America during WWII.

Basically, every minority group in America has faced varying types of persecution and discrimination that have limited their opportunities historically. And problems in the present compound them.

Slide 7: Present Causes

People of color continue to face unequal challenges to accessing high-paying jobs for numerous reasons, including: the inability to move to an area with better jobs, a lack of educational opportunity, and health and safety disadvantages. In the workplace itself, people of color face discrimination and harassment on racial and ethnic grounds, including microaggressions, tokenism, and assertions that they are “affirmative action hires.” They are also more likely to be passed over for promotions, given less working hours, and denied other key employment opportunities.

Although there are certain laws and bureaucratic regulations to protect people on the basis of their skin color and ethnicity, they are not always readily enforced or widely known. And, depending on the government administration at the time, they might be considered guidelines rather than the law.

Slide 8: Intersection with Gender

Gender obviously intersects with race and ethnicity when it comes to employment, financial success, and other factors. According to the Center for American Progress, this slide shows a general breakdown of what women of different racial categories make compared to white men.

However, this is a bit of an overgeneralizing chart that does not get into details of ethnic subcategories. For example, while Asian American women overall make more than their Black and Latina counterparts, Hmong (muhng) and Burmese women make the lowest amount of money compared to white men than those in any other category.

Additionally, for some groups (for example, American Indian women), there is not enough data to come to any conclusion as to their particular wage gap.

Slide 9: Impact of Occupational Segregation

1) Work done by minorities, particularly women of color, may be viewed as “less than” or “less skilled” than other occupations. This devaluation can result in things like a wage penalty, where certain job types see a stagnation or decrease in salary as white people exit the occupation.

2) White workers with a college degree have median wages that are 23 percent higher than college-educated Black workers. White workers who have completed high school but do not have a college degree earn 22 percent more than similarly educated Black workers.

3) While the Civil Rights Movement succeeded in removing many formal barriers to employment, resulting in an increase in workplace integration and an increase in wages, millennials, Gen Xers, and Baby Boomers all face roughly the same level of occupational stratification based on race and ethnicity. As a result, it can't be said that this problem is “going away.”

4) Occupational segregation results in reducing the opportunities of people of color, maintaining wage inequality, further limiting economic security, and subsequently makes it harder to integrate workforces, continuing the cycle of segregation.

Slide 10: Case Study of Impact: COVID-19

For a recent example of the impact of occupational segregation, one needs to look no further than the COVID-19 pandemic. From the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, here is the data of unemployment that occurred at the beginning of the pandemic. As you can see, people of color, and particularly Latinos, disproportionately lost their jobs. This is due to the fact that Latinos make up an oversized population group in customer-facing services, especially in restaurants. This group was more likely than others to lose their jobs. In comparison, those who were able to work remotely or at least in a hybrid setting, did not face the same wave of unemployment at the pandemic start.

Occupational segregation meant in this case, Latino workers that had been segregated into work industries particularly vulnerable to the global health crisis we faced were not able to recover their employment numbers as well as other racial and ethnic groups.

Slide 11: Graph Illustrating COVID-19 Employment Loss

This is a graph from the same source illustrating what the gap in unemployment at the start of the pandemic really looked like when the data is focused on occupation type. Note that Latinos faced the largest dip in excess unemployment that took a long time to fully recover. Occupational segregation was the principal driver of this employment loss.

Slide 12: A New Problem: Facial Recognition in Hiring

Businesses have become increasingly more likely to use AI facial recognition software to use for hiring, both to speed up the screening process and to decrease costs. Some of these are large, influential companies like Unilever, Nestle, and Walmart. This software can sometimes analyze facial features, looking for certain attributes that supposedly measure an applicant's competency level, emotional intelligence, cognition, and other factors.

Proponents of this type of software argue that it removes human bias. It often, however, has bias baked into its mechanisms. This can result in certain races and ethnicities being more likely to be chosen for interviews, for having average facial features and behaviors deemed more friendly, intelligent, or otherwise more acceptable for employment. Ultimately, this might result in a homogeneous pool of those newly hired.

Slide 13: Possible Solutions

- 1) Where racial and ethnic minority workers are overrepresented, work tends to be undervalued. This can be partly rectified if people are paid and supported more for their labor, including increasing the minimum wage and offering better benefits, or any benefits at all, including medical and family leave.
- 2) Unions and collective bargaining, if strengthened in power, may help in achieving the goals outlined in the first point.
- 3) Provide increased educational and employment opportunities for people of color, ranging from better funding of public education to more inclusive job trainings and mentorships. There could also be incentives and regulations on diversifying hiring.

4) Strengthen and enforce legislation that already exists, such as the Equal Pay Act and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, including expanding their scope to other industries that have been excluded from this legislation. Additionally, it is imperative that regulatory bodies like the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission are well-funded and seen as valuable administratively, as these are where discrimination and harassment complaints are often heard.

Slide 14-15: References

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