

# Does Ethnic Concentration Influence Employees' Access to Authority? An Examination of Contemporary Urban Labor Markets\*

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## *Abstract*

*This article examines whether ethnic concentration in establishments, occupations, and industries influences the authority attainment of white, black, Hispanic, and Asian men and women. Data from the Multi-City Survey of Urban Inequality and the 1990 decennial census indicate that "horizontal" concentration among roughly equivalent coworkers and within local industrial and occupational sectors has little effect on minority chances of accessing positions of authority. However, "vertical" concentration in the form of racial/ethnic matching of supervisors to subordinate work groups exerts a strong and consistent effect among all groups, implying that authority attainment depends a great deal on the opportunity to supervise largely coethnic work groups. We conceptualize this "ethnic matching" of supervisors to subordinates as a kind of "sticky floor" that binds individual opportunity for workplace authority to the structural opportunity to exercise control over members of one's own race and ethnicity.*

A key question in ethnic stratification has long been whether employment in ethnically concentrated sectors of the economy helps, harms, or has no effect on individual achievement (Jensen & Portes 1992; Light & Gold 2000; Model 1993; Portes & Jensen 1989; Sanders & Nee 1987; Waldinger 1996). At stake is the issue of whether ethnic divisions of labor, evident in so many large American cities, provide a positive or negative alternative to assimilation for minorities. To date, researchers have operationalized this question largely in terms of a single workplace

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outcome, earnings, and have determined that ethnically concentrated industries tend to increase the wages of coethnic business owners and managers but decrease the wages of coethnic employees, particularly women (see Logan, Alba & McNulty 1994; Sanders & Nee 1987). In this study we advance this line of research by examining the extent to which ethnic concentration mediates the authority attainment of non-self-employed workers.

In contrast to recent research on ethnic entrepreneurship (e.g., Aldrich & Waldinger 1990; Green & Pryde 1997; Light & Bonacich 1988), we focus on non-self-employed workers because we wish to illuminate opportunities for authority attainment among paid laborers, rather than among individuals who have made a qualitative shift from one side of the labor market to the other (i.e., from employee to employer). We focus on workplace authority as our chief measure of socioeconomic achievement for two reasons. First, positions of authority both reflect and shape access to other types of material and social rewards allocated through the labor market, such as pay, occupational prestige, health care, and pensions (Halaby 1979; Kluegel 1978; Smith 1997, 1999; Spaeth 1985; Wright, Baxter & Birkelund 1995). Second, like other forms of socioeconomic rewards, workplace authority is known to be unequally distributed by race (Kluegel 1978; Mueller, Parcel & Tanaka 1989; Smith 1997, 1999; Wilson 1997), ethnicity (Elliott & Smith 2001; Smith 2001), and gender within American society (Halaby 1979; Hill 1980; McGuire & Reskin 1993) and cross-nationally (Wright, Baxter & Birkelund 1995) (for a review, see Smith 2002).

Our investigation of this topic is novel in several respects. First, we examine the link between ethnic concentration and authority attainment for Hispanics and Asians as well as for blacks and whites, thereby providing a more comprehensive assessment of racial and ethnic variation in the authority attainment process than prior research. Second, we examine this variation separately for men and women to determine the extent to which gender mediates hypothesized relationships between ethnic concentration and authority attainment. Third, we operationalize the concept of ethnic concentration “horizontally” among roughly equivalent coworkers and within local industrial and occupational sectors and “vertically” among immediate supervisors and subordinates, to determine which dimension, if any, is more salient for understanding the effects of ethnic concentration on authority opportunities available to minority employees. Our overarching objective in conducting this research is to explore the extent to which opportunities for upward mobility depend not just on individual characteristics but also on group membership and group composition at the level of industries, occupations, and work groups.

## Background

In this section we review individual and organizational determinants of authority attainment and present formal hypotheses for empirical investigation. We begin by addressing basic racial and gender differences in authority attainment to establish baseline expectations. We then focus on different conceptualizations of ethnic concentration in the labor market and specify their potential effects on authority attainment over and above relevant individual characteristics.

### RACE AND GENDER

Prior sociological research has established that net of personal and human capital characteristics, blacks are less likely than whites (Kluegel 1978; McGuire & Reskin 1993; Mueller, Parcel & Tanaka 1989; Smith 1999; Wilson 1997) and women are less likely than men (Halaby 1979; Hill 1980; Reskin & Ross 1992; Wolf & Fligstein 1979; Wright, Baxter & Birkelund 1995) to hold positions of authority. Conventional wisdom explains that these patterns arise because whites and men generally possess more social, economic, and political power than minorities and women, and this power allows them to continue to dominate positions of authority within the workplace. Thus, our baseline hypothesis runs as follows:

*Hypothesis 1:* Minorities will be less likely than whites to occupy positions of workplace authority, regardless of gender and net of other factors.

### ETHNIC CONCENTRATION

Because no single theory exists to explain the effect of ethnic concentration on authority attainment, we draw on several literatures to inform our hypotheses on the subject. These literatures include research on organizational demography, ethnic niching, and group position/threat, respectively. The first three hypotheses relate to what we call “horizontal” ethnic concentration — among coworkers on the job and within industrial and occupational sectors. The final two hypotheses relate to “vertical” concentration, or ethnic matching, of supervisors and subordinates.

#### *Organizational Demography*

Organizational demography, or “relational demography” as it has come to be known in the field of management, addresses how demographic composition influences organizational functioning. Launched by Pfeffer’s (1983) influential statement on the subject, the core idea is that demographic similarity among coworkers within an organization positively correlates with individual- and organizational-level well-being.<sup>1</sup> The underlying premise is that individuals tend to relate better to others

who are more similar to themselves along meaningful social dimensions, such as race and gender.

To date, empirical support for this “similarity-attraction” hypothesis has come largely at the level of roughly equivalent coworkers. This research generally shows that racial and gender homogeneity within work groups correlates positively with in-group members’ sense of self-identity, job satisfaction, and feelings of attachment to the employing organization (Jackson et al. 1991; Mueller et al. 1999; Pfeffer 1983; Tsui, Egan & O’Reilly 1992; Tsui & O’Reilly 1989; Tsui, Xin & Egan 1995). Homogeneous demographic concentration also appears to contribute to more stable work environments as regards reductions in employee turnover and absenteeism (Jackson et al. 1991; O’Reilly, Caldwell & Barnett 1989). By contrast, research also shows that being an out-group member — for example, one of a few blacks among mostly white coworkers — tends to foster negative workplace experiences (Mueller et al. 1999; Tsui, Egan & O’Reilly 1992; Tsui & O’Reilly 1989).

This body of research and its theoretical grounding in the “similarity-attraction” paradigm of social psychology provides the basis for our first contextual hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2:* Authority attainment will be higher in jobs in which most of one’s coworkers are of the same race/ethnicity.

#### *Ethnic Niching within Local Sectors*

Another literature that speaks about issues of ethnic concentration and employment outcomes is the ethnic economies, or niching, literature. In contrast to organizational demography, which emphasizes the impact of racial homogeneity/heterogeneity within organizations, research on ethnic niches illuminates the effects of racial and ethnic concentration at the level of local industrial and occupational sectors (Lieberson 1980; Model 1993, 1997; Waldinger 1996). Examples of ethnic niches include Korean domination of retail grocery and liquor stores in inner-city Los Angeles, Italian concentration in construction jobs in New York City, and black middle-class concentration in municipal government and health care industries in many northern cities.

Waldinger (1996) describes these ethnic concentrations, or niches, as “the principle mechanism by which ethnic groups move into and up the economy” (59). He goes on to explain that ethnic niches “provide a protected environment — not just an orbit of jobs in which ethnics of any group may have privileged access, but also an arena in which they are treated more favorably than in jobs of lower ethnic density” (95). In other words, within local ethnic niches, minority status can act as a prerequisite, rather than a barrier, to promotion and authority attainment.

In this sense, the ethnic niching literature parallels that of organizational demography in predicting positive consequences of ethnic concentration for minority workers. However, it makes this argument at a different level of analysis,

emphasizing supraorganizational arrangements at the level of local industrial sectors and occupational groupings. The justification for this supraorganizational emphasis is that industries and occupations offer career ladders and mobility opportunities that span specific organizations. So if opportunities for upward mobility are blocked in one establishment within an ethnic niche, in-group members can move to other establishments within the niche and still maintain the benefits of in-group privilege. This line of argument leads to our second contextual hypothesis, which highlights ethnic concentration at the level of industries and occupations, rather than within workplaces:

*Hypothesis 3:* Authority attainment will be higher in local industries and occupations in which group members are overrepresented relative to their share of the local labor force.

#### *Group Position/Threat and Social Closure*

A third line of research offers contrary predictions about the effects of minority concentration on authority attainment. Specifically, Blumer's (1958) "group position" and Blalock's (1957) "group threat" arguments suggest that ethnic concentration tends to block, rather than open, positions of authority for minority members. The logic behind this perspective is threefold: (1) job authority is a coveted social resource over which majority and minority groups compete; (2) the majority group (whites) have a vested interest in using their power to exclude, or at least severely limit, minority members from gaining access to this coveted social resource; and (3) this vested interest in excluding minorities from positions of authority increases with the presence of the minority group (see Blalock 1957; Blumer 1958; Dahrendorf 1957; Kluegel 1978; Mueller, Parcel & Tanaka 1989; Tomaskovic-Devey 1993; Wright, Baxter & Birkelund 1995).

This perspective rests heavily on Blumer's conceptualization of racial prejudice, which he views as serving at least four general functions in society: (1) it enhances feelings of superiority among the dominant group; (2) it increases perceptions that subordinate group members are "alien and different"; (3) it reinforces proprietary claim to certain areas of privilege and advantage; and (4) it relieves fear and suspicion that minority members harbor designs on dominant positions (Blumer 1958; Smith 1998).<sup>2</sup> These functions suggest that the exclusion of minorities from positions of authority derives to a great degree from social perceptions about where minorities *ought* to be in the authority structure relative to their white counterparts — a decidedly structural and social psychological phenomenon, wherein prejudice and its behavioral manifestation, discrimination, find root in a "felt challenge to the sense of group position" among whites (Blumer 1958:5).

According to this perspective, minority overrepresentation at any level — within work groups or local industrial and occupational sectors — poses a potential threat

to whites' sense of "group position," thus encouraging them to erect even greater barriers to minority advancement in the face of minority concentration. This line of thinking suggests the following counterhypothesis:

*Hypothesis 4:* Minority authority attainment will be lower in industries, occupations, and work groups in which group members concentrate.

The underlying point is that the link between ethnic concentration and authority attainment is conditional on group position — the dominant group may benefit from ethnic concentration, but subordinate groups will be harmed.

### *Coethnic Reproduction from Above and Below*

Underlying hypotheses 2 through 4 is the idea that ethnic concentration, in general, affects minority authority attainment. However, another possibility is that ethnic concentration is less important than the racial and ethnic "fit" of supervisors and the subordinate work groups they oversee. In other words, the key mechanism linking ethnic concentration with minority authority attainment might be more vertical than horizontal in nature.

One type of vertical concentration, or "ethnic matching," of supervisors and subordinates, parallels Kanter's (1977) well-known idea of "homosocial reproduction." Kanter argued that for reasons of familiarity, comfortableness, and trust — factors facilitated by ascriptive similarity — authority elites tend to advance subordinates who are like themselves. Building from Kanter's concept of homosocial reproduction, we introduce the idea of "coethnic reproduction." We define coethnic reproduction as the process by which key organizational decision makers, of any racial/ethnic group, seek to promote members of their own racial/ethnic group into supervisory positions below them. The implication is that all ethnic groups have the propensity to reproduce themselves in positions of power by promoting subordinates who share their own ethnic identity — a point that leads to our first vertically oriented hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 5:* Authority attainment will be higher in jobs in which one's immediate supervisor is of the same race/ethnicity.

Finally, we raise the possibility that such vertical concentration, or ethnic matching, of supervisors and subordinates operates from below as well as from above. That is, in addition to top-down ethnic reproduction, employers might engage in bottom-up ethnic matching, whereby they reproduce the race/ethnicity of subordinates in the race/ethnicity of the subordinate's immediate supervisors. As a result, blacks are more likely to gain authority over largely black work groups, Hispanics are more likely to gain authority over largely Hispanic work groups, and so forth. This type of ethnic matching "from below" can occur through the normal operation of internal labor markets or be deliberately imposed through specific external hires. Either way, the end result can be viewed as "rational" in the

sense that it helps employers maximize organizational harmony and minimize employee unrest by ensuring that latent managerial-subordinate tensions are not sparked or fueled by racial and ethnic antagonisms. This line of thinking is consistent with assumptions espoused by Fernandez (1975) and later Kluegel (1978) and Mueller, Parcel, and Tanaka (1989) and serves as the basis for our second, and final, vertically oriented hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 6:* Authority attainment will be higher over coethnic work groups than over noncoethnic work groups.

Next, we discuss the data and measures used to investigate our hypotheses.

## Data and Measures

Data for the present study come primarily from the Multi-City Survey of Urban Inequality (MCSUI). The sample is a multistage, stratified, area-probability design conducted within the metro areas of Atlanta, Boston, and Los Angeles during 1992–94. Face-to-face interviews lasted approximately two hours, and the race/ethnicity of respondents and interviewers were matched to minimize well-known race-of-interviewer effects (for more details of the survey, see Johnson, Oliver & Bobo 1994).

To sustain samples large enough for multivariate analysis, we pool data from all three metro areas. Included in the sample are white, black, Hispanic, and Asian men and women between the ages of 21 and 64 who were active labor force participants in the civilian economy but who were not self-employed. By excluding the self-employed, we lose 576 cases, or 11% of our original sample. As prior research would suggest, this exclusion is not randomly distributed across race and gender. Supplemental analyses show that Asians have particularly high rates of self-employment, while whites are more likely than other groups to gain authority through paid employment, rather than through self-employment.<sup>3</sup> One implication of our sampling restrictions is that our analysis will understate overall rates of authority attainment among Asians. The sample sizes for respective non-self-employed respondents appear in the final row of Table 1 and range from 266 Asian men to 965 black women. We discuss our operationalization of key variables below.

### DEPENDENT VARIABLES

#### *Workplace Authority*

We operationalize our dependent variable — workplace authority — two ways. The primary way is as a three-category measure corresponding to the respondent's self-reported level of authority: 0 = no supervisory authority; 1 = low authority *either* to hire and fire others *or* to influence their pay; 2 = high authority *both* to hire and fire others *and* to influence their pay. These categories derive from two related



questions regarding the respondent's last/current job: (1) "Do/did you have the authority to hire or fire others?" and (2) "Do/did you influence or set the rate of pay received by others?" This operationalization is preferable to occupation-based measures of authority for two reasons. First, it acknowledges that authority is gradational *and* categorical, and second, it acknowledges that authority extends outside officially recognized managerial occupations. The latter point is important because in our sample only 7% of respondents claiming some level of authority — low or high — are employed in an officially recognized managerial occupation (Census Occupation Codes 23–42).

### *Coethnic Supervisor*

In addition to asking about each respondent's level of workplace authority, the MCSUI asked, "What is/was the race and ethnicity of your immediate supervisor?" From this question, we construct a variable that is coded 1 if the immediate supervisor is coethnic and 0 if the immediate supervisor is noncoethnic. We use this variable in two ways. First, we use it as an independent variable to examine our hypothesis about coethnic reproduction "from above." Second, we use it as a second dependent variable to probe the extent of coethnic reproduction "from below." (No direct questions were asked about the race and ethnicity of subordinates, so we infer ethnic matching from below by combining respondents' answers about the race/ethnicity of their supervisor with answers about the race/ethnicity of coworkers, which we discuss below.) Respondents reporting no immediate supervisor are excluded from both analyses of this variable.

## INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

### *Ethnic Concentration*

We conceptualize (horizontal) ethnic concentration at three levels of analysis: workplaces, local industrial sectors, and local occupational groupings.

*Workplaces.* To measure the relative ethnicity of coworkers, we draw on the following question: "What is the race and ethnicity of most of the employees doing the kind of work you do at the place where you work?" If the respondent reports that most coworkers are of the same race and ethnicity, then we consider the individual to work among predominantly coethnic coworkers. If the respondent reports that no group comprises a majority or that most workers are of a different race or ethnicity, then coworkers are designated as noncoethnic. As with the race/ethnicity of respondents, the race/ethnicity of coworkers is defined in broad terms — white, black, Hispanic, Asian, and other — reflecting coding restrictions in the MCSUI data set.

This measure of ethnic concentration provides valuable insight into intraorganizational dynamics, but it is not entirely unproblematic. Of chief con-



cern is how broadly respondents interpret “doing the kind of work you do” and how many coworkers loom behind their answers. For example, if a respondent is the only person “doing the kind of work she does” at a particular establishment, she would technically constitute a majority, just as if 100 of 175 similar coworkers were coethnics. Because the MCSUI provides no qualifying information about the number of coworkers performing similar tasks, we must treat the two situations as qualitatively equivalent. To help control for this fact, we include the number of workers at the respondent’s employing establishment in our multivariate analyses (discussed below).

*Industrial Sectors.* Our second measure of (horizontal) ethnic concentration focuses on industrial sectors — that is, on what respective employers produce. Drawing on previous research by Logan, Alba, and McNulty (1994) and Model (1997), we use data from the 1990 5% Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS) to subdivide each metro economy — Atlanta, Boston, and Los Angeles — into 48 industrial sectors. If the odds that an ethnic group is represented in a given sector within the local metro economy are 1.5 times as great as the odds expected from the group’s share of the local labor force, then the local industrial sector is considered ethnically concentrated for that group. For example, if Hispanics constitute one-third of Los Angeles’s metro labor force, then an industrial sector is considered a Hispanic industrial niche if group members comprise 43% or more of the sector’s total employees:  $(.43/.57) / (.33/.67) = 1.53$ . We use an odds ratio to determine industrial niche employment because it helps control for the fact that smaller groups are more easily overrepresented. Using this odds ratio, we create a dummy variable for each respondent that indicates whether she or he works in a coethnically concentrated industry (0 = no; 1 = yes).

*Occupational Groupings.* Our third approach to operationalizing (horizontal) ethnic concentration focuses on local occupational groupings — that is, on what people do, rather than on what their employers produce. Using the same data and procedures above, we subdivide each metro economy into 43 occupational groupings.<sup>4</sup> If a racial/ethnic group is overrepresented in a particular occupational grouping, as indicated by an odds ratio of 1.5 times or greater, the occupational grouping is designated a coethnically concentrated occupation for that group.

It is important to note that unlike the establishment measure of coethnic coworkers, industrial and occupational niches can overlap — two groups might concentrate in the same industrial sector or occupational grouping. The corollary is that some industries and occupations may not be an ethnic niche for any group, reflecting relatively proportionate racial/ethnic representation. Additionally, occupational niches differ from industrial niches in that some occupational groupings (i.e., managerial jobs) have authority by definition. So if a group concentrates within these occupations, as whites do, it is difficult to determine how much of the observed effect derives from ethnic concentration and how much derives from simple occupational position. To distinguish between the two effects,

we include a dummy indicator for managerial occupation in our multivariate analyses (1 = employed in Census Occupation Codes 23–42; 0 = employed in other Census Occupation Codes).

#### CONTROL VARIABLES

To isolate the effects of ethnic concentration on authority attainment, we include a number of control variables in our multivariate analyses that previous research has identified to be empirically significant. These variables include personal and household attributes (age, marital status, presence of children in the household, city of residence), human capital characteristics (educational attainment, years of work experience, organizational tenure, whether one has been promoted with his or her current employer, hours worked per week), and workplace attributes (public/private sector, establishment size, union membership). The appendix provides a full list of these variables along with their group-specific means.<sup>5</sup>

## Results

Table 1 reports the distribution of workplace authority by race and gender. In general, results confirm the expected: whites are more likely to hold positions of authority than racial minorities, and men are more likely to hold positions of authority than women. Specifically, results show that 22% of white men in the sample report having at least some workplace authority (low or high), compared with only 11% of black and Hispanic men. Results for women show that whites are again on top at 14%, with black, Hispanic, and Asian women clustering around 5%. Chi-square tests indicate that these racial/ethnic differences within gender are statistically significant at the .001 level.

Comparisons across gender indicate that the major difference between men and women, besides the overall likelihood of authority, is that Asian men fair much better than Asian women relative to whites. In fact, Asian men are almost as likely as white men to hold positions of authority (20% compared with 22%), which is somewhat surprising given our exclusion of the self-employed. Results for women show that whites are again on top at 14% (low + high authority), with black, Hispanic, and Asian women clustering between 5% and 8%. One explanation for this finding is that Asian men have higher levels of educational attainment than other groups, helping offset their minority status (see Appendix). Another possibility is that Asian men are more likely than other groups to work in ethnically concentrated environments, which could generate favorable opportunities for employee advancement.

To begin assessing whether ethnic concentration influences authority attainment, we first computed chi-square tests for each level of authority (none, low, and high) and each type of (horizontal) ethnic concentration for each race-

TABLE 1: Measures of Authority and Ethnic Concentration, by Race/Ethnicity and Sex

	Whites		Blacks		Hispanics		Asians		Chi-Square Test of Racial Difference within Sexes	
	Men (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)	Men	Women
Level of authority										
None	77.8	<b>85.8</b>	89.1	<b>94.5</b>	88.9	<b>95.5</b>	80.5	<b>91.6</b>	48.7***	56.7***
Low	10.1	<b>8.8</b>	6.7	3.8	6.4	2.9	7.1	4.0	6.9	28.5***
High	12.1	<b>5.4</b>	4.2	<b>1.7</b>	4.7	<b>1.6</b>	12.4	<b>4.4</b>	39.3***	26.3***
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0		
Ethnic concentration										
Industrial niche	22.0	<b>16.4</b>	16.6	19.7	17.0	17.3	3.0	1.1	52.8***	61.4***
Occupational niche	42.3	<b>35.4</b>	16.2	15.8	47.3	<b>29.5</b>	22.6	19.8	161.4***	101.7***
Mostly coethnic coworkers	76.1	75.2	42.9	49.5	67.4	62.5	52.3	56.4	178.5***	150.8***
Coethnic supervisor	78.8	77.2	32.1	35.5	33.6	30.7	49.3	51.3	335.0***	375.5***
N	565	628	499	965	577	618	266	273	1,907	2,484

*Note:* Italicized values denote statistically significant differences (.05 level) between men and women within respective racial/ethnic groups. For example, the italicized value of 85.8 for white women indicates they are significantly more likely than white men (77.8) to occupy positions of no authority.

\* p < .05    \*\* p < .01    \*\*\* p < .001

gender group in the sample. Two general patterns emerged from this preliminary analysis (results not shown). First, simple bivariate correlations show no significant relationship between employment in coethnic work groups or local industrial niches and levels of authority. Second, the correlation between occupational concentration and authority attainment is generally positive for whites and negative for minority women. In other words, white men working in occupational niches are significantly more likely to hold positions of authority than white men working outside occupational niches. The opposite tends to be true for minority women, particularly black and Hispanic women. To determine if these preliminary patterns are statistically significant net of relevant background factors, we turn to our multivariate analysis.

#### MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS

We begin our multivariate analysis by estimating a series of logistic regression equations predicting respective levels of authority attainment (0 = none; 1 = low; 2 = high). Because this dependent variable has three categories, a methodological question is whether we should fit the model using multinomial techniques or ordered logit techniques. Because the ordered logit model is nested within the multinomial model, we performed a chi-square test on the null hypothesis that respective coefficients are the same for each level of authority. Rejecting this null hypothesis at the .05 level, we report the results of multinomial estimations in Table 2 for men and Table 3 for women.

In both tables we present models that exhaust all three contrasts of our dependent variable: column 1 = no versus low authority; column 2 = no versus high authority; and column 3 = low versus high authority. The latter contrast (low versus high) has been described in other authority studies as a partial measure of the glass ceiling effect because, relative to the first two contrasts, it addresses whether the racial/ethnic gap in authority is greater for preexisting incumbents of the authority hierarchy or for workers trying to gain access to either high or low authority without having authority in the first place (Wright, Baxter & Birkelund 1995). In all model estimations we include the full set of control variables listed in the Appendix. However, for purposes of space and clarity, we report information only for variables of interest. (Results for control variables are available upon request.) We begin our discussion with our baseline hypothesis regarding group differences in authority attainment.

#### *Are Minorities Disadvantaged in Authority Attainment Net of Background Factors?*

Results for men in Table 2 reveal two major findings regarding whether minorities are disadvantaged in authority attainment net of background factors. First, after accounting for respective interaction terms, results show that black men have uniquely limited access to positions of low authority. Specific calculations show

that black men's highest relative rate of low authority (versus no authority) occurs inside black industrial niches, but even this best-case scenario results in a black-white odds ratio of only  $\exp(-.556) = .57$ , net of other factors.<sup>6</sup> That is, even in the best of circumstances, black men's odds of obtaining low authority remain nearly half those of white men. This pattern is intriguing because it turns the logic of the glass ceiling metaphor on its head. It is not that black men become stuck in positions of low authority, but rather that they have relatively little access to such positions — authority appears to be all or nothing for black men. This finding lends partial, though weak, support to hypothesis 1, regarding minority disadvantage in the authority attainment process.

By contrast, the second major pattern in Table 2 runs directly counter to hypothesis 1. Specifically, results show that Asian men fare surprisingly well in their acquisition of high-authority positions, net of other factors. This "Asian advantage" is most apparent in comparisons of low- versus high-authority positions in column 3. Here, calculation of respective odds ratios reveal that Asian men fare best outside coethnic work environments. In fact, their odds of acquiring positions of high, as opposed to low, authority are  $\exp(2.333) = 10.3$  as great in noncoethnic settings as white men's odds in noncoethnic settings. Overall, then, Asian men appear to succeed in the authority attainment process as employees, as well as entrepreneurs, and this success appears fairly common in noncoethnic (presumably white) work settings.

Results for women, in Table 3, provide stronger support for hypothesis 1. Specifically, findings show that black women are significantly disadvantaged in their access to positions of high authority — a finding consistent with prior research (McGuire & Reskin 1993). Indeed, calculations show that, net of background factors and observed measures of racial concentration, the odds of black women holding positions of high authority (as opposed to no authority) are less than half those of white women. Pairwise comparisons of minority coefficients also show, for the first time, that authority chances among black women are substantially lower than those among their Hispanic and Asian counterparts.

Thus, our overarching conclusion is that blacks, not racial minorities in general, are disadvantaged relative to whites in the authority attainment process and that this disadvantage is much more acute among black women than among black men.

#### *Does Working with Mostly Coethnic Coworkers Improve Authority Attainment?*

We address whether authority attainment is higher for those working with mostly coethnic coworkers (hypothesis 2) by examining the main effects and interaction terms corresponding to coethnic coworkers in Tables 2 and 3. Results for men in Table 2 show no strong evidence of coworker concentration effects for any racial group. Ditto for women in Table 3, with one notable exception. Findings from the full model in column 3, model B, indicate that among black women, employment in coethnic work groups significantly improves their relative odds of attaining

TABLE 2: Abridged Multinomial Results Predicting Levels of Authority among Men

	(1) No versus Low Authority		(2) No versus High Authority		(3) Low versus High Authority	
	Model A	Model B	Model A	Model B	Model A	Model B
Race/ethnicity <sup>a</sup>						
Black	-.539*	-.901*	-.503	.470	.035	1.372*
Hispanic	-.134	.368	-.278	.263	-.144	.632
Asian	-.505	-.922	.200	1.411*	.705	2.333**
Ethnic concentration						
Industrial niche	.242	.071	-.112	-.416	-.354	-.487
Occupational niche	-.605**	-.665*	.498*	<b>1.476***</b>	1.103***	<b>2.140***</b>
Coethnic coworkers	-.043	-.272	.081	.249	.124	.521
Interaction terms						
Black × indust. niche	.274		-1.176		-1.450	
Hispanic × indust. niche	.253		.752		.500	
Asian × indust. niche		1.192		1.649		.457
Black × occup. niche		.463		<b>-1.884*</b>		<b>-2.347*</b>
Latino × occup. niche		.069		<b>-1.733**</b>		<b>-1.802*</b>
Asian × occup. niche		.168		<b>-2.167**</b>		<b>-2.335**</b>
Black × coworkers		.435		-.242		-.677
Hispanic × coworkers		.216		.374		.158
Asian × coworkers		.451		-.752		-1.203
χ <sup>2</sup>				335.2		365.1
Df						44
N						1,899

Note: The control variables listed in the appendix were included in each estimation but are not reported here. A global chi-square test shows that model B provides a statistically better fit than model A at the .01 level.

<sup>a</sup> White is the reference category.

\* p < .05    \*\* p < .01    \*\*\* p < .001

positions of high, as opposed to low, authority, net of other factors [ $\exp(-1.422 - .053 + 1.795) = 1.38$ ]. While this finding lends partial support to hypothesis 2, it also suggests that the chances of black women cracking the glass ceiling — that is, attaining positions of high as opposed to low authority — depend a great deal on entering positions of high authority already dominated by blacks.

TABLE 3: Abridged Multinomial Results Predicting Levels of Authority among Women

	(1)		(2)		(3)	
	No versus Low Authority		No versus High Authority		Low versus High Authority	
	Model A	Model B	Model A	Model B	Model A	Model B
Race/ethnicity <sup>a</sup>						
Black	-.808**	-.352	-.911*	-1.774**	-.103	-1.422*
Hispanic	-.756*	-.543	-.080	-.309	.676	.234
Asian	-1.188**	-.484	-.410	.033	.777	.518
Ethnic concentration						
Industrial niche	-.073	.067	.043	-.460	.116	-.527
Occupational niche	-.081	.121	-.117	.187	-.035	.065
Coethnic coworkers	-.466*	-.192	.081	-.245	.547	-.053
Interaction terms						
Black × indust. niche		-.559		1.170		1.729
Hispanic × indust. niche		.519		.375		-.144
Asian × indust. niche		NA		NA		NA
Black × occup. niche		NA		NA		NA
Hispanic × occup. niche		-2.108		.066		2.175
Asian × occup. niche		-.992		-2.264*		-1.272
Black × coworkers		-.647		1.148		1.795*
Hispanic × coworkers		.202		.361		.159
Asian × coworkers		-.840		-.159		.680
$\chi^2$			242.5	262.5		
Df					44	58
N					2,478	2,478

Note: The control variables listed in the appendix were included in each estimation but are not reported here. A global chi-square test shows that model B does not provide a statistically better fit than model A at the .05 level. NA = not available.

<sup>a</sup> White is the reference category.

\*  $p < .05$     \*\*  $p < .01$     \*\*\*  $p < .001$

The dearth of such positions in U.S. society suggests a particularly narrow and decidedly disadvantaged opportunity structure for black women.

Overall, then, we find limited support for hypothesis 2, and this support, as with hypothesis 1, derives almost entirely from the relative experiences of black women. This set of findings suggests that coworker concentration helps only the most disadvantaged workers in the authority attainment process.



*Does Working in a Coethnic Industrial or Occupational Niche Improve Authority Attainment?*

Starting with the main effects and interaction terms for men in Table 2, we find little support for the idea that local industrial niches significantly affect the authority chances of minority employees. Results for local occupational niches tell a similar story. The primary finding here is that occupational clustering exerts no significant effect on the authority attainment process among minorities, whereas it exerts a strong, positive effect among white men. Specifically, results in column 2, model B, and column 3, model B, of Table 2 (see italicized coefficients) show that white men working in white occupational niches are significantly more likely than all other men, including white men working outside occupational niches, to hold positions of high authority — a pattern that holds even after controlling for employment in officially recognized managerial occupations.

Results for women in Table 3 again offer little support for the idea that industrial niching improves authority chances among minorities. Results for occupational niching, on the other hand, offer two additional insights into the authority attainment process. First, white women do not benefit from occupational concentration the way white men do — gender mediates the effects of occupational concentration within the dominant racial group. Second, results for the full model in column 2, model B, show that Asian women are significantly disadvantaged by occupational concentration when it comes to positions of high authority (as opposed to no authority) — a pattern consistent with but stronger than that for Asian men.

Overall, these findings suggest that industrial niching exerts little direct effect on the authority attainment of paid employees and that occupational niching, if anything, benefits white men but tends to hurt Asians, particularly Asian women. These findings lend partial support to hypothesis 4 and detract from hypothesis 3.<sup>7</sup>

*Does Working under a Coethnic Supervisor Improve Authority Attainment?*

To address whether authority attainment is higher for those working under a coethnic supervisor (hypothesis 5), we estimated a separate set of multinomial equations, the results of which appear in Table 4. This set of equations is equivalent to those reported in Tables 2 and 3, with two key exceptions. First, the models now include main effects and interaction terms for having a coethnic supervisor (1 = yes; 0 = no). Second, because having a coethnic supervisor assumes that one is under supervision in the first place, we restrict the sample in Table 4 to respondents reporting an immediate supervisor. We report results only for the full model — the one that corresponds to model B in Tables 2 and 3 — and, again, report only those variables of interest for purposes of space and clarity.

Overall, results in Table 4 provide little evidence that having a coethnic supervisor improves authority attainment among racial groups, regardless of gender.

TABLE 4: Abridged Multinomial Results Predicting the Effects of a Coethnic Supervisor on Levels of Authority, by Sex

	Men			Women		
	No vs. Low Authority	No vs. High Authority	Low vs. High Authority	No vs. Low Authority	No vs. High Authority	Low vs. High Authority
	Race/ethnicity <sup>a</sup>					
Black	.325	1.129	.803	-.204	-1.037	-.833
Hispanic	.912	.943	.030	-.581	.037	.618
Asian	.293	2.318**	2.025	-.348	.691	1.039
Ethnic representation						
Coethnic supervisor	1.168	.515	-.653	.017	-.026	-.043
Interaction terms						
Black × coethnic supervisor	-.793	-.175	.618	-.118	.490	.607
Hispanic × coethnic supervisor	-1.823*	-1.553*	.272	-.927	.063	.990
Asian × coethnic supervisor	-.759	-.437	.322	-.042	-.451	-.409
$\chi^2$			342.0			222.7
Df			70			66
N			1,713			2,219

Note: Only respondents reporting an immediate supervisor are included in this table. All variables from Tables 3 and 4, including the unreported control variables listed in the appendix, were included in each estimation but are not reported here.

<sup>a</sup> White is the reference category.

\*  $p < .05$     \*\*  $p < .01$     \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Indeed, the lone significant effect for Hispanic men indicates the opposite scenario — Hispanics working under Hispanic supervisors are *less* likely to be in positions of authority than Hispanics working under non-Hispanic supervisors. Thus, we reject hypothesis 5 regarding coethnic reproduction “from above.”

#### *Does Working over Coethnic Subordinates Improve Authority Attainment?*

As the final step in our analysis we examine whether workers in mostly coethnic work groups are more likely to have coethnic supervisors, indicating a form of bottom-up ethnic matching that employers might use to enhance organizational harmony (hypothesis 6). To conduct this analysis, we again, as in Table 4, exclude respondents who report no immediate supervisor. The dependent variable is a

simple dummy indicator (1 = coethnic supervisor; 0 = noncoethnic supervisor), which we predict separately for each race-gender group using a simple logit model. As in all our multivariate analyses, we include the full array of control variables listed in the appendix but report estimated coefficients only for those variables of theoretical interest, with employment among mostly coethnic (subordinate) coworkers being of primary concern.

Results appear in Table 5 and lend strong support to hypothesis 6, showing that the race/ethnicity of supervisors and subordinate work groups is highly correlated. This relationship is statistically significant for all groups at the .001 level and quite substantial in its net effect, especially among minorities. Specifically, results indicate that, net of other factors, black work groups are roughly six times as likely to have black supervisors as are other racial/ethnic work groups [ $\exp(1.795) = 6.02$  among men;  $\exp(1.812) = 6.12$  among women]. For Hispanics the corresponding ratio is between 10.6 (for women) and 13.9 (for men); and for Asians it is between 14.6 (for women) and 37.3 (for men). The especially high ratio among Asian men suggests that at least one explanation for their relative success in the authority attainment process derives from a virtual lock on positions of authority over largely Asian work groups, inside and outside industrial and occupational niches.

These findings differ from those reported in Table 4 (hypothesis 5) because they relate to the “bottom-up” ethnic matching of supervisors to subordinate work groups, rather than to “top-down” ethnic reproduction. One way to understand these two sets of findings is to think of nested layers of ethnic concentration within workplaces — the opportunity to supervise coethnic subordinates greatly increases one’s odds of gaining supervisory authority, but once this authority is obtained, it may be alongside mostly noncoethnic coworkers, which would diminish the odds of coethnic supervision.

## Summary and Conclusion

Examining specific types of ethnic concentration, we find little evidence that concentration within work groups and within local industrial and occupational sectors influences minority access to supervisory authority. One explanation for this nonfinding is that our broad racial and ethnic categories failed to capture the “true” effects of ethnic concentration — results would have been different if we had examined, say, Chinese as opposed to Asians, Mexicans as opposed to Hispanics, and so forth. While this possibility cannot be dismissed, we believe that greater ethnic specificity would not dramatically change our findings — the real action appears to occur in the vertical organization of establishments, not in the ethnic concentration of work groups, industries, and occupations.

Specifically, our results indicate that the key mechanism linking ethnic concentration with enhanced minority authority opportunity is ethnic matching “from below,” whereby the race and ethnicity of subordinate work groups strongly influ-

TABLE 5: Abridged Logit Results Predicting a Coethnic Supervisor, by Sex

	Dependent Variable (Coethnic Supervisor = 1; Noncoethnic Supervisor = 0)			
	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian
<b>Men</b>				
Industrial niche (0:1)	-.162	.571	-.055	2.345
Occupational niche (0:1)	.374	.190	.167	-1.196
Mostly white coworkers (0:1)	1.256***	NA	NA	NA
Mostly black coworkers (0:1)	NA	1.795***	NA	NA
Mostly Hispanic coworkers (0:1)	NA	NA	2.637***	NA
Mostly Asian coworkers (0:1)	NA	NA	NA	3.619***
$\chi^2$	55.3	109.2	143.4	181.1
Df	18	18	18	18
N	510	452	527	228
<b>Women</b>				
Industrial niche	.137	.085	.153	NA
Occupational niche	.548	.489	.305	.327
Mostly white coworkers (0:1)	.921***	NA	NA	NA
Mostly black coworkers (0:1)	NA	1.812***	NA	NA
Mostly Hispanic coworkers (0:1)	NA	NA	2.363***	NA
Mostly Asian coworkers (0:1)	NA	NA	NA	2.680***
$\chi^2$	37.6	213.1	159.5	151.7
Df	18	18	18	18
N	562	879	535	242

*Note:* These models were fit separately for each racial/ethnic-gender group and include only respondents reporting an immediate supervisor. The control variables listed in the appendix were included in each estimation but are not reported here. The coworker variables refer to the race/ethnicity of subordinate work groups, since the dependent variable refers to immediate supervisors. NA = not available.

\*  $p < .05$     \*\*  $p < .01$     \*\*\*  $p < .001$

ences the race and ethnicity of appointed supervisors — a finding consistent with assumptions found in prior research but never systematically tested across a wide array of groups and workplaces (see Mueller, Parcel & Tanaka 1989; Tomaskovic-Devey 1993; Wilson, Sakura-Lemessy & West 1999). We suspect that at least three factors contribute to this pattern of “bottom-up” ethnic matching of supervisors to subordinate work groups. First, employers are likely to match the race and ethnicity of supervisors to those of subordinate work groups in order to minimize racial tension and to maximize organizational harmony and commitment among nonsupervisory workers. Second and relatedly, operation of internal labor mar-

kets within organizations would mean that employers often draw supervisors from subordinate workers they will oversee. Thus, if an ethnic group dominates a particular work group, the odds of someone from that ethnic group being selected to supervise the work group necessarily increase. Third and finally, subordinate workers might contribute to patterns of “bottom-up” ethnic matching post hoc by selecting themselves into jobs with coethnic supervisors and by pushing for coethnic supervisors once employed.

Ultimately, we suspect that all three processes interact. Thus, a challenge for future research is to determine how and under what circumstances this interaction occurs. In the meantime, and in more metaphorical terms, we interpret our findings as supporting more of a “sticky floor” imagery of minority authority attainment than a “glass ceiling” imagery (see Berheide 1992). From this perspective, the relative position of one’s ethnic group within an organization constitutes the “sticky floor” — one to which individual opportunity for authority “adheres.” If one’s ethnic group dominates only entry-level jobs within an organization, then one’s authority chances will be restricted largely to supervising entry-level workers. If one’s ethnic group dominates higher-level positions, then one’s authority chances will increase accordingly. The principal point is that intraorganizational dynamics involving group composition are important and that these dynamics make it difficult for individuals to advance more than one level above positions that their ethnic group dominate.

In advancing this interpretation we do not wish to imply that organizations or groups conspire to limit the life chances of others, although some might. Instead, we believe that something more subtle and profound occurs in the process of doing “business as usual” — mere maintenance of the status quo is more than enough to perpetuate racial stratification.

In closing, we draw attention to limitations of the present study to help guide and improve future research in this area. The first and most obvious limitation is that we examined cross-sectional data from only three metro labor markets. These data allowed us to probe, for the first time, the effects of various types of ethnic concentration on the authority attainment process across a large number of workplaces. Future research will benefit from data collection that extends beyond these three metro economies and permits longitudinal assessment of individual career trajectories and their intersection with intraorganizational dynamics.

The second limitation involves our analysis of “bottom-up” ethnic matching. Because respondents in our study were asked about the race and ethnicity only of their immediate supervisors, and not of their subordinates, we had to invert the logic of our multivariate analysis to investigate this issue. The results of our strategy, while indirect, proved robust and lend powerful support to the idea of ethnic matching “from below.” However, more direct information on subordinates and their position within the organizational structure would help confirm these results and provide additional insight into how high up the organizational chain of command such “bottom-up” ethnic matching prevails, and how low down the

organizational hierarchy minorities tend to adhere to a “sticky floor.” We have begun to examine these issues ourselves (Elliott & Smith 2001) and invite others to help scrutinize and advance this line of research with us.

## Notes

1. The terms *organizational demography* and *relational demography* are often used interchangeably. Both differ from *social demography* in terms of their focal level of analysis. Instead of focusing on the intersection of social structure and social processes with demographic (i.e., race, gender, etc.) processes, relational/organizational demography focuses on the intersection of organizational structure and organizational processes with demographic processes (Pfeffer 1983). Race and gender are the most commonly used indicators of organizational/relational demography, but age and job tenure are also important indicators (Tsui & Farh 1997).

2. See Bobo (1999) for a detailed discussion of the core assumptions underlying Blumer’s model, and see Bobo and Smith (1998) and Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith (1997) for a recent delineation of Blumer’s group position theory of prejudice for understanding the modern transition in racial attitudes in American society from Jim Crow racism to laissez-faire racism.

3. As a point of comparison, the following table shows the distribution of employed authority positions and self-employment within respective race/ethnic-sex groups.

	Men			Women		
	Percent Employed in Position of Authority	Percent Self-Employed	Percent Employed in Position of Authority or Self-Employed	Percent Employed in Position of Authority	Percent Self-Employed	Percent Employed in Position of Authority or Self-Employed
White	18.5	17.4	35.9	12.6	10.7	23.3
Black	9.8	9.3	19.1	5.3	4.9	10.2
Hispanic	10.1	8.7	18.8	4.2	6.8	11.0
Asian	13.8	29.3	43.1	6.8	19.9	26.7

4. Occupational groupings and corresponding 1990 Census Occupation Codes are available from the authors upon request.

5. Because they are not the focus of our analysis, we do not report the motivation or the results for our control variables. However, we are glad to provide both upon request.

6. This and subsequent odds ratios are calculated by summing relevant coefficients and taking the inverse log. For example, calculations show that within respective industrial niches, black men’s odds of holding positions of low authority (as opposed to no authority) are .57 times those of whites, all else being equal. This number comes from the summation of coefficients in column 1, model B, of Table 2:

$(-.901) + (.071) + (.274) = -.556$ . We then take the inverse log of  $-.556$  to get the black-white odds ratio of .57.

7. We reestimated the models reported in Tables 2 and 3 with continuous measures of ethnic industrial and occupational concentration (i.e., percent coethnic) instead of our reported dummy indicators of ethnic industrial and occupational niches. Results of these supplemental analyses do not differ noticeably from those reported in the text, lending further support to our conclusion that minority concentration within local industries and occupations exerts no net effect on the authority chances of minority employees.

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## APPENDIX: Control Variables with Group Means by Sex and Race/Ethnicity

	Men			
	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian
Managerial occupation (0:1)	.06	.02	.01	.04
Age (years)	38.1	37.6	34.1	38.2
Married and living with partner (0:1)	.25	.33	.54	.63
Kids in household (0:1)	.45	.28	.47	.41
Atlanta (0:1)	.28	.35	.02	.04
Boston (0:1)	.28	.21	.27	.05
Los Angeles (0:1)	.44	.44	.71	.91
High school dropout (0:1)	.05	.12	.50	.10
High school degree (0:1)	.36	.53	.36	.23
Community college or associate degree (0:1)	.16	.17	.06	.20
Bachelor's degree (0:1)	.28	.13	.06	.29
Master's, Ph.D., or professional degree (0:1)	.14	.04	.01	.19
Work experience (years)	17.1	17.0	15.7	15.2
Organizational tenure (years)	6.7	6.0	4.3	4.7
Hours worked per week	43.8	40.9	40.4	41.4
Promoted with current employer (0:1)	.33	.30	.26	.26
Public sector (0:1)	.16	.22	.07	.11
Ln (establishment size)	4.19	4.35	3.62	3.82
Union member (0:1)	.19	.28	.23	.13
N	565	499	577	266

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APPENDIX: Control Variables with Group Means by Sex and Race/Ethnicity  
(Continued)

	Women			
	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian
Managerial occupation (0:1)	.05	.04	.01	.07
Age (years)	38.6	37.7	34.9	37.8
Married and living with partner (0:1)	.48	.21	.34	.63
Kids in household (0:1)	.40	.49	.69	.47
Atlanta (0:1)	.32	.35	.02	.04
Boston (0:1)	.29	.21	.44	.04
Los Angeles (0:1)	.39	.44	.54	.92
High school dropout (0:1)	.07	.11	.46	.12
High school degree (0:1)	.40	.54	.36	.29
Community college or associate degree (0:1)	.18	.19	.12	.20
Bachelor's degree (0:1)	.25	.12	.04	.33
Master's, Ph.D., or professional degree (0:1)	.10	.04	.02	.06
Work experience (years)	15.4	15.8	13.2	13.4
Organizational tenure (years)	5.9	6.2	5.3	4.4
Hours worked per week	37.2	37.9	38.2	38.2
Promoted with current employer (0:1)	.28	.26	.16	.24
Public sector (0:1)	.17	.26	.13	.11
Ln (establishment size)	4.23	4.57	3.82	3.62
Union member (0:1)	.14	.23	.18	.11
N	628	965	618	273

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