

*This study uses data from the 1988 to 1992 waves of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) to assess predictions from the particularistic mobility thesis concerning how African American and White males reach the Managers-Administrators and Professional-Technical census-based occupational categories. The findings provide support for the particularistic mobility thesis. In particular, African Americans, relative to Whites, attain both occupational categories on the basis of a narrow and circumscribed route: for African Americans, the acquisition of significant human capital credentials and experience at a similar level in the occupational structure in next-to-last job with the same employer are important prerequisites for moving into privileged occupations. Furthermore, analyses indicate that particularistic employment practices are more pronounced in the private than the public sector. The implications of the findings for explaining racial differences in representation in the two occupational categories are discussed.*

## Reaching the Top

### Racial Differences in Mobility Paths to Upper-Tier Occupations

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In the last decade and a half, sociological analyses of racial stratification in the workplace have broadened in scope to include comparisons of African Americans and Whites who occupy relatively privileged positions within the American occupational structure (for a review, see Collins, 1997). These studies have been timely and have extended our understanding of racial inequality to a growing segment of the increasingly differentiated African American population. In fact, accounts indicate that in the post-1980 period, the number of African Americans employed in the most prestigious census-based occupational categories—namely, those that include managers, executives, and professionals—has increased at a more rapid rate than the number of Whites (Farley, 1996; Farley & Allen, 1987; Jaynes & Williams, 1989).



Overall, existing research on racial stratification in upper-tier occupations has focused on a range of critical issues. Specifically, one line of studies has documented the discriminatory placement of African American managers and supervisors in politically induced, “racialized” job functions that offer racially delineated and marginalized mobility tracks within White management hierarchies (Brown & Erie, 1981; Collins, 1983, 1989, 1993; Durr & Logan, 1997; Moore, 1981). A second line of research has established that African American managers and executives tend to have relatively few opportunities to exercise higher-order and reward-relevant job functions such as job authority, job autonomy, and substantive complexity of work (Hyllegard, 1996; Hyllegard & Lavin, 1992; Kluegel, 1978; Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993a, 1993b; Wilson, 1997). Finally, studies of racial differences in socioeconomic rewards in upper-tier occupations have found that compared to Whites, African Americans receive inferior returns in the form of income and socioeconomic status for their personal investments, such as education and work-related experience (Farley & Allen, 1987; Landry, 1987; Son, Model, & Fisher, 1989; Thomas, 1993, 1995; Thomas, Herring, & Horton, 1994).

However, despite these contributions, basic gaps remain in our understanding of racial stratification in upper-tier occupations. Specifically, absent have been examinations of how African Americans and Whites reach them. Significantly, the process of attaining the most privileged positions may constitute a crucial aspect of racial inequality. For example, recent anecdotal evidence appearing in both academic treatises and media accounts suggests that African Americans have to be “more qualified and work twice as hard to get ahead” (Benjamin, 1991; MacLachlan, 1996) and are hampered by lack of access to social networks in a promotion system predicated on the notion, “it’s not what you know but who you know” (Fletcher, 1998; Landry, 1987). This seems to signal that their movement into desirable occupations is based on overcoming unique and relatively burdensome obstacles.

This study is concerned with how African Americans and Whites attain privileged places in the American occupational structure. In particular, it uses nationally representative data to assess predictions about the determinants of entry of African Americans and Whites into two different upper-tier occupational categories that derive from a theoretical perspective concerning how these two groups attain occupational mobility into privileged occupations.

### THE PARTICULARISTIC MOBILITY THESIS

Sociologists have typically explained the attainment process of workplace-based rewards for African Americans and Whites in terms of

human capital endowments, background socioeconomic status, and placement in economic niches of a differentiated labor market. In fact, prominent theories of social stratification maintain that these factors operate uniformly across racial groups, resulting in a single system of workplace attainment for African Americans and Whites (see Baldi & McBrier, 1997). In this vein, “supply side” theories maintain that the attainment process for both African Americans and Whites is structured by their respective funds of individual characteristics brought to the workplace. In particular, human capital theory (Arrow, 1972; Becker, 1957) posits that the accumulation of individual credentials such as education and labor force experience is viewed as an indicator of productivity and “opens doors” to economic opportunity in a similar fashion for African Americans and Whites. In addition, the status attainment perspective (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Featherman & Hauser, 1978) maintains that background socioeconomic status acts similarly across racial groups to structure levels of peer- and parent-driven aspirations for success and the subsequent attainment of workplace-based rewards.<sup>1</sup>

A second set of stratification theories has a “demand side” orientation and posits that the location of African Americans and Whites across labor markets determines how they attain workplace-based rewards. In this regard, several dynamics stand out: First, the government’s relative commitment to enforcing civil rights in the public sector puts a premium on formalized procedures to ensure equity in employment-based outcomes and reduces the element of subjectivity in the attainment process for African Americans and Whites (Collins, 1983, 1993, 1997; Landry, 1987). Second, dual labor market theory (Beck & Horan, 1978; Bridges & Villemez, 1994; Hodson & Kaufman, 1982) assumes that within discrete segments of the private labor market, attainment processes are similar across racial groups. Specifically, while African Americans are concentrated in the peripheral sector (Hodson & Kaufman, 1982; Kaufman, 1983), the disproportionate number of entry-level and nonunionized positions do not afford favorable economic returns to human capital investments and opportunities to reach upper-tier occupations for all groups. Conversely, the resource-rich core sector offers relative access to internal labor markets and unionized jobs that are associated with opportunities for career status and social mobility for both African Americans and Whites.

The particularistic mobility thesis challenges the notion that traditional stratification-relevant factors operate uniformly across racial groups to structure the attainment of upper-tier occupations. This perspective distills recent case studies and survey-based analyses of recruitment and promotion practices primarily among White managers and executives to elucidate race-specific determinants of occupational mobility (Baldi & McBrier, 1997;

Braddock, Crain, McPartland, & Dawkins, 1986; Braddock & McPartland, 1987; Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995; Fernandez, 1975, 1981; Kluegel, 1978; Nkomo & Cox, 1990; Parcel, Mueller, & Tanaka, 1989; Pettigrew & Martin, 1987; Wilson, 1997). Rooted in the work of sociologists such as Blumer (1965), Allport (1954), and Pettigrew (1964, 1971) the particularistic mobility thesis identifies how employers in work settings characterized by meritocratic ideologies make hiring and promotion decisions that reinforce existing patterns of racial exclusion. According to these authors, modern racial prejudice in the workplace can best be characterized as situational, ostensibly nonracial, and institutional in nature. Accordingly, dynamics as diverse as the perceived need to conform to existing norms of racial exclusion to maintain a stable workplace, cognitive distortions inherent in self-serving attribution bias, and statistical discrimination emanating from stereotypes about the work ethic and fitness of minority group workers, result in employment-related decisions that tend not to be discriminatory in intent but serve to disproportionately exclude racial minorities from top-level positions.

Studies using the particularistic mobility thesis have examined patterns of institutional discrimination in predominantly White workplaces with avowed policies of racial neutrality. In particular, these studies have identified an institutionally based practice that constitutes a crucial source of minority exclusion from prestigious positions: Employment decisions of managers and executives regarding recruitment and promotion are susceptible to "particularistic manipulation" (Kluegel, 1978), that is, they tend to be based on a range of personal characteristics that are vaguely defined and difficult to directly measure, such as perceived loyalty, good character, sound judgment, and leadership potential (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995; Kluegel, 1978; Parcel & Mueller, 1983; Wilson, 1997).

Significantly, these studies catalog how opportunities to demonstrate the vaguely defined criteria differ by race and put African Americans at a relative disadvantage compared to their White counterparts in attaining mobility into upper-tier occupations. In this regard, race emerges as a basis for access to predominantly White institutions and actors, which facilitates opportunities to demonstrate job-relevant criteria. For example, both Braddock and McPartland (1987) and Fernandez (1975, 1981) argue that African Americans, unlike Whites, disproportionately rely on racially segregated job networks, which precludes them from engaging in the informal interactions with Whites that serve as a means of demonstrating the crucial personal qualities necessary for promotion into top positions. In fact, these authors maintain that even when African Americans are attached to internal labor markets,

segregated networks limit opportunities to demonstrate job-relevant personal qualities to prospective employers. In addition, Fernandez (1975, 1981) identifies both minority underrepresentation in, and the segregated operation of, management-executive and professional traineeship and internship programs as additional dynamics that impede mobility into upper-tier occupations. Moreover, Braddock and McPartland assert that African Americans' lack of access to employers results in information bias, a form of statistical discrimination in which employers view the indirectly observable credentials of minorities, such as school performance and character evaluations, as less credible than similar credentials for Whites.

Finally, the particularistic mobility thesis maintains that the determinants of mobility into upper-tier occupations for African Americans and Whites are a product of their respective opportunities to demonstrate the relevant informal characteristics. Specifically, Whites have more opportunities to demonstrate the requisite informal characteristics that become an important basis for their selection. Conversely, African Americans have fewer opportunities to demonstrate them and are restricted to attaining mobility through a relatively "formal and deterministic route" (Wilson, 1997). In this regard, two recent studies, Baldi and McBrier (1997) and Wilson (1997), help to identify the relatively formal route taken by African Americans. Baldi and McBrier use matched samples from the General Social Survey and National Organization Study to assess racial differences in the determinants of an item that measures occupational mobility, "Have you received promotions while working for your present employer?" However, promotion is not synonymous with destination in an upper-tier occupation, and their focus on intrafirm mobility excludes from consideration interfirm job change, a critical source of movement into upper-tier occupations (see DiPrete, 1989). In addition, Baldi and McBrier examine racial differences along a restrictive range of determinants. For example, they assess the effects of one measure of human capital accumulation, educational attainment. Nevertheless, their study is instructive: Largely on the basis of findings that educational attainment is a more important determinant of promotion for African Americans than for Whites, the authors speculate that African Americans advance through "contest" mobility in which selection rests on the accumulation of human capital credentials and adherence to bureaucratized procedures whereas Whites are promoted pursuant to a system of "sponsorship" from employers that is based on personalistic considerations (Turner, 1974).<sup>2</sup>

Wilson (1997) identifies additional manifestations of formality: In a study with data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, he found that both the acquisition of a broad range of human capital credentials and relevant

experience in previous jobs are more important determinants of movement into positions that entail significant supervisory responsibility for African Americans than Whites. The author states,

Lacking opportunities to demonstrate personal characteristics, African Americans can be judged only on the basis of formal and deterministic criteria. In this regard two findings should emerge: first, African Americans relative to whites, should be evaluated for promotion into positions of job authority on the basis of more traditional, individualistic characteristics including educational attainment, labor force experience and tenure with employer. Second, African Americans' movement through the occupational structure into authority positions should be more ordered than for whites. Specifically, successful African American candidates are more likely than whites to have had to demonstrate competence at a similar occupational level with the employer who has promoted them. (p. 40)

Consistent with this line of reasoning, the particularistic mobility thesis predicts that the determinants of mobility into upper-tier occupations should be fundamentally different for African Americans and Whites. In particular, promotion into upper-tier occupations for African Americans compared to Whites is dependent on:

- Hypothesis 1:* a wider range of traditional individual characteristics such as educational attainment, labor force experience, and tenure with employer
- Hypothesis 2:* having previously worked for their present employer
- Hypothesis 3:* having work experience at a similar hierarchical level in the occupational structure

In addition, Wilson's (1997) findings introduce a qualification to the scope of particularistic employment practices. Specifically, he found that racial differences in the effects of variables that measure both human capital credentials and movement through the occupational structure were substantially greater in the private than the public sector. In fact, this finding is in accord with numerous studies that have documented that the private sector, relative to the public sector, is an inhospitable niche for African Americans because of the narrower reach and less stringent enforcement of legislatively mandated guidelines enacted to ensure economic opportunities for minority groups (Collins, 1993, 1997; Landry, 1987; Moore, 1981). Accordingly, a second set of predictions derives from this finding. Specifically, in the private sector, there are pronounced racial differences in the extent to which mobility into upper-tier occupations is dependent on:

- Hypothesis 4:* traditional individualistic characteristics such as education, labor force experience, and tenure with current employer

*Hypothesis 5:* prior work experience with current employer

*Hypothesis 6:* work experience at a similar hierarchical level in the occupational structure

## DATA AND METHODS

Data were combined from 5 years—1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, and 1992—of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) to assess racial differences in the determinants of attaining census-based upper-tier occupational categories (see Hill, 1992, for a description of the PSID data set).<sup>3</sup> Combining the data over a 5-year period was necessary to ensure adequate sample sizes for all analyses performed. The sample population consists of all non-self-employed White and African American male heads of household between the ages of 18 and 70 who worked either part- or full-time at the time of their interview.<sup>4</sup> The application of this criterion resulted in a sample of 2,905 males, of which 804 are African American and 2,101 are White (see appendix for the means and standard deviations for all variables in the analyses). The model used in the analyses is operationalized as follows.

### DEPENDENT VARIABLE

*Occupational categories.* The determinants of 2 of the 11 broad-based 1970 census-based occupational categories—Managers-Administrators and Professional-Technical—are assessed. Every PSID respondent's current "main job" was coded into 1 of the 11 categories.

### INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

We assess the influence of five categories of factors on the process of attaining upper-tier occupational categories among African American and White males.

*Sociodemographic characteristics.* Race is measured by a variable coded 1 for African American and 0 for White.

*Background socioeconomic status.* Background socioeconomic status is measured by two variables: The first is mother's education, which refers to years of schooling completed by respondent's mother. The second variable is family structure when respondent was growing up. The measure for this variable is whether respondent had both parents in the household until the age of 16 (1 = yes; 0 = no).

*Human capital characteristics.* The influence of several human capital characteristics is included in the model. The first is level of educational attainment, which is represented by three dummy variables, “high school,” “some college,” and “college BA.” Respondents with less than a high school education serve as the reference category. The rationale for coding education as a series of dummy variables is to allow for the possibility of nonlinear relationships with the dependent variable. The second human capital characteristic included is time spent with present employer, which is measured by the number of months respondent has worked for his present employer. The third human capital characteristic included is prior work experience, which is measured by the number of years respondent has worked full-time in the labor force since age 18. Finally, the number of hours worked per week is included as a control variable.

*Workplace and labor market characteristics.* The influence of employment in the public sector, as well as placement in the dual labor market, is assessed. First, a dummy variable was created, with the private sector serving as the reference category. Second, respondent’s union status is measured by whether his job is unionized (1 = yes; 0 = no). Third, the level of occupational segregation is measured by the proportion of African Americans (in decimal form) employed in respondent’s three-digit detailed occupation, according to the 1970 Census.<sup>5</sup>

*Promotion path.* Several variables were constructed to assess the trajectory African Americans and Whites have taken through the occupational structure to attain their present occupations. First, respondents whose next-to-last job was with the same employer as their present job were promoted internally. A dummy variable was constructed to represent internal promotion; those who were not promoted internally were used as the reference category. Second, several dummy variables were constructed to assess respondents’ range of movement across the occupational structure to their present positions. Specifically, all respondents’ next-to-last job was coded as 1 of the 11 three-digit 1970 census occupational categories. In this study, the two listed at the top of the 1970 Census Occupational Classification scheme—Managers-Administrators and Professional-Technical—were treated as equivalent.

Immediately below the Managers-Administrators and Professional-Technical categories were the Craftsmen and Operatives categories, which were also treated as equivalent. Significantly, a relatively large number of the detailed occupations within the Craftsmen and Operatives categories represent natural routes to attaining positions in the Managers-Administrators and



Professional-Technical categories. In this regard, 12 detailed occupations encompass foreman and first-line supervisory positions that entail the exercise of supervisory authority, an important job task for managers and administrators. Furthermore, detailed occupations within the Operatives category include lower- and mid-level positions in industries such as telecommunications, computers, health care, and the law; higher-level workers in these industries are represented in detailed occupations in the Professional-Technical category. The remaining three-digit 1970 occupational categories—Sales Workers, Clerical Workers, Transport Equipment Operatives, Laborers, Farmers and Farm Managers, and Service Workers—were ranked one category below the Craftsmen and Operative category. Overall, dummy variables were constructed that represent no change between occupational categories for the present and next-to-last job, a one-category rise between present and next-to-last job, and a greater than one-category rise between present and the next-to-last job; downward movement across occupational categories between present and next-to-last job serves as the reference category.<sup>6</sup>

#### DATA ANALYTIC STRATEGY

This study uses an interaction-based strategy to assess the determinants of mobility into upper-tier occupations for African Americans and Whites. Accordingly, interaction terms are created for race and all independent variables in the model. This strategy is appropriate for our purposes: It controls on all independent variables, thereby assessing whether the process of attaining upper-tier occupations is the same for African Americans and Whites when they have similar values along traditional stratification-relevant factors such as human capital credentials, background socioeconomic status, and work in similar sectors of the labor market.

In addition, multinomial logistic regression is used to assess the determinants of the two occupational categories. Multinomial logistic regression is used for evaluating categorical dependent variables that are treated as distinct and unordered, and the issue of interest is to identify the factors that contribute to being in a particular upper-tier occupational category rather than not being employed in either of them.

The multinomial logit model assesses the probability of being in a particular category relative to a base category for an individual with characteristics of  $x_i$ . The probabilities associated with each category are defined as:

$$Prob(Y = j) = \frac{e^{\beta_{jxi}}}{1 + \sum e^{\beta_{jxi}}},$$

where  $j = 1, 2, \dots, J$ .

$$Prob(Y = 0) = \frac{1}{1 + \sum e^{\beta_j x_j}}$$

Multinomial logit models are estimated by maximum likelihood techniques. The output from the multinomial logit analysis includes one less vector of coefficients than there are choices in the model. The  $\beta$  estimates represent the log odds of being in a particular category relative to a base category resulting from a one-unit change in the  $x$  variable of interest. Thus, for the analysis of the three-category dependent variable, occupational categories, two vectors of coefficients are produced. Because the base category for these analyses is occupational categories other than the Managers-Administrators or Professional-Technical ones, the coefficients represent the effect of the independent variables on the probability of being employed in the two upper-tier categories rather than being employed in neither of them. Finally, for multinomial logistic analyses, odds ratios associated with each coefficient are constructed by computing the antilog of each beta parameter.

## RESULTS

The distribution of African Americans and Whites across the Managers-Administrators and Professional-Technical occupational categories, as well as the distribution of those who are employed outside of the two upper-tier occupational categories, is displayed in Table 1 (appendix presents the means and standard deviations for all variables in the analyses). To aid in the interpretation of the descriptive statistics, one summary measure was constructed: The index of dissimilarity ( $\Delta$ ) identifies the proportion of people who would have to move to other levels in the table to achieve equality in the distribution across the three occupational categories.

The descriptive statistics indicate that African Americans are underrepresented in both census-based upper-tier occupational categories. Overall, the index of dissimilarity indicates that about 18% of the PSID respondents would have to change occupational categories to attain racial equality.

Findings from the multinomial logistic regression analyses concerning the determinants of entry into the Managers-Administrators and Professional-Technical occupational categories for African Americans and Whites are presented in Table 2.

The interpretation of the table focuses on the race-based interaction terms. The significant interactions indicate that relative to Whites, the route to both the Managers-Administrators and Professional-Technical occupational

**TABLE 1: Distribution of Occupations for Panel Study of Income Dynamics Sample**

<i>Occupational Level</i>	<i>African American (n = 804)</i>	<i>White (n = 2,101)</i>	<i>Difference</i>
(A) Managers-Administrators	16.4	25.7	9.3
(B) Professional-Technical	15.0	23.8	8.8
(C) Neither A nor B	68.6	50.5	-18.1
	100	100	$\Delta = 18.1$

categories for African Americans is narrow and circumscribed along lines predicted by the particularistic mobility thesis. This interpretation is based on two findings. First, African Americans and Whites have taken divergent routes to reach the two upper-tier occupational categories. Specifically, more than one half of the interaction terms for each of the two upper-tier occupational categories affect African Americans and Whites in significantly different ways. In addition, the majority of the coefficients are moderately to highly significant, indicating that the effects of the variables are pronounced on a race-specific basis.

Second, the findings concerning the interaction terms for race and variables that measure human capital characteristics and path to promotion are consistent with the interpretation that African Americans reach both upper-tier occupational categories on the basis of a closer scrutiny of formal credentials and related experience at a similar level in the occupational structure. With respect to the interactions with human capital variables, significant racial differences appear to be more pronounced for the Managers-Administrators category. In particular, African Americans' attainment of the Managers-Administrators category, relative to Whites, increases, respectively, by 1.06 and 1.04 times the marginal odds of not reaching an upper-tier occupation with unit increases in work experience or with time spent with employer. Furthermore, with some college education, the chance of African Americans reaching positions as managers and administrators, relative to Whites, increases by 1.19 times the marginal odds of not attaining an upper-tier occupation. Finally, one interaction term with human capital characteristics—high school education—has a relatively detrimental effect on African Americans: Specifically, African Americans' reaching the Managers-Administrators category, relative to Whites, is reduced by .11 times the odds of not reaching an upper-tier occupation with a high school education. With respect to the Professional-Technical occupational category, African Americans' attainment of this upper-tier occupational category, relative to Whites, increases, respectively, by 1.04 and 1.21 times the odds of not

**TABLE 2: Multinomial Logistic Regression for Determinants of Entry Into Upper-Tier Occupations: Private and Public Sector (N = 2,905)**

Variable	Managers- Administrators		Professional- Technical	
	Coefficient	Odds Ratio	Coefficient	Odds Ratio
Main effects				
Sociodemographic				
Race	-0.25**	0.75	-0.20**	0.8
Background socioeconomic status				
Mother's education	0.03	1.03	0.01	1.01
Family structure	0.04	1.04	0.08*	1.08
Human capital				
Work experience	0.07**	1.07	0.05*	1.05
Time with employer	0.05**	1.05	0.01	1.01
High school	-0.12*	-0.88	0.03	1.03
Some college	0.22**	1.22	0.08	1.08
College	0.03	1.03	0.18*	1.18
Workplace				
Occupational segregation	-0.01	0.99	-0.01	0.99
Public sector	0.13*	1.13	0.15**	1.15
Union status	0.01	1.01	0.01	1.01
Promotion path				
Internal promotion	0.14*	1.14	0.17*	1.17
Prior job-same level	0.18**	1.18	0.08	1.08
Prior job-one level below	-0.15*	-0.85	-0.14*	0.86
Prior job > one level below	0.01	1.01	0.03	1.03
Interactions with race				
Background socioeconomic status				
Mother's education	0.02	1.02	0.01	1.01
Family structure	0.03	0.03	0.10*	1.1
Human capital				
Work experience	0.06***	1.06	0.02	1.02
Time with employer	0.04**	1.04	0.04**	1.04
High school	-0.11*	0.89	0.03	1.03
Some college	0.19**	1.19	0.04	1.04
College	0.06	1.06	0.21**	1.21
Workplace				
Occupational segregation	-0.01	0.99	-0.03*	0.97
Public sector	0.30***	1.3	0.29***	1.29
Union status	0.01	1.01	0.01	1.01
Promotion path				
Internal promotion	0.31***	1.31	0.32***	1.32
Prior job-same level	0.30***	1.3	0.30***	1.3
Prior job-one level below	-0.17**	0.83	0.04	1.04
Prior job > one level below	0.01	1.01	-0.10*	0.9
Constant	-2.65		-2.44	
Log likelihood	-306.56		-303.13	

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

reaching an upper-tier occupation with unit increases in time with employer or with having a college education.

The interaction terms for race and variables that measure path to promotion provide considerable support for the contention that the movement of African Americans through the occupational structure to attain positions in both the Managers-Administrators and Professional-Technical categories is relatively ordered. In this regard, African Americans' movement into managerial or administrative occupations, relative to Whites, increases, respectively, by 1.31 and 1.30 times the odds of not attaining an upper-tier occupation if they were promoted internally or if they were promoted from a next-to-last job that was at the same level in the occupational structure. Similarly, African Americans' movement into professional and technical occupations, relative to Whites, increases, respectively, by 1.32 and 1.30 times the odds of not reaching an upper-tier occupation if they experienced an internal promotion or if they were promoted from a next-to-last job that was at the same level of the occupational structure. Furthermore, African Americans' movement into the Managers-Administrators category, relative to Whites, is reduced by .17 times the odds of not reaching an upper-tier category if their next-to-last job was one level below present job in the occupational structure. Finally, African Americans' attainment of professional and technical occupations, relative to Whites, is reduced by .10 times the odds of not attaining an upper-tier occupation if their next-to-last job was greater than one level below in the occupational structure.

#### PRIVATE SECTOR ANALYSES

Similar multivariate analyses were performed to assess the determinants of the two upper-tier occupational categories for African Americans and Whites in the private employment sector. Although it would have been preferable to also conduct multivariate analyses to assess the determinants of mobility in the public sector, limitations in sample sizes precluded it. Accordingly, recruitment patterns into upper-tier occupational categories in the public sector are inferred from a comparison of analyses for the overall sample with those for the private sector. Table 3 gives the results of the multinomial logistic regression analyses concerning the determinants of entry into the Managers-Administrators and Professional-Technical categories in the private sector.

Based on the same criteria from the multinomial logistic regressions used to evaluate the occupational attainment process in the preceding analysis, it appears—as predicted in Hypotheses 4 through 6—that employment dynamics in the private sector are generating most of the particularism found among

**TABLE 3: Multinomial Logistic Regression for Determinants of Entry Into Upper-Tier Occupations: Private Sector (N = 2,357)**

Variable	Managers- Administrators		Professional- Technical	
	Coefficient	Odds Ratio	Coefficient	Odds Ratio
Main effects				
Sociodemographic				
Race	-0.30***	0.70	-0.28**	0.72
Background socioeconomic status				
Mother's education	0.07*	1.07	0.06**	1.06
Family structure	0.03	1.03	0.02	1.02
Human capital				
Work experience	0.08***	1.08	-0.02	.98
Time with employer	0.10***	1.10	0.06**	1.06
High school	0.06	1.06	0.05	1.05
Some college	0.15**	1.15	0.13*	1.13
College	0.19**	1.19	0.17*	1.17
Workplace				
Occupational segregation	-0.04**	0.96	-0.01	0.99
Union status	0.01	1.01	0.03**	1.03
Promotion path				
Internal promotion	0.16**	1.16	0.19*	1.19
Prior job-same level	0.22**	1.22	0.18*	1.18
Prior job-one level below	-0.17**	0.83	0.06	1.06
Prior job > one level below	0.02	1.02	0.25**	1.25
Interactions with race				
Background socioeconomic status				
Mother's education	0.12***	1.12	0.09***	1.09
Family structure	0.04	1.04	-0.04*	0.96
Human capital				
Work experience	0.10***	1.10	0.05***	1.05
Time with employer	0.08***	1.08	0.11***	1.11
High school	0.02	0.02	0.05	1.05
Some college	0.19**	1.19	0.16*	1.16
College	0.17*	1.17	0.20**	1.20
Workplace				
Occupational segregation	-0.03*	0.97	-0.02***	0.98
Union status	0.04**	1.04	0.01	1.01
Promotion path				
Internal promotion	0.43***	1.43	0.38***	1.38
Prior job-same level	0.39***	1.39	.41***	1.41
Prior job-one level below	-0.40***	0.60	0.04	1.04
Prior job > one level below	-0.03	0.97	-0.28***	0.72
Constant	-2.55		-2.71	
Log likelihood	-310.24		-311.29	

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

the PSID sample. First, in the private sector, African Americans and Whites have taken particularly divergent routes to reach the Managers-Administrators and Professional-Technical occupational categories. Specifically, for each of the two upper-tier categories, more than three quarters of the race-based interaction terms affect African Americans and Whites in significantly different ways. Furthermore, in the models for each of the two occupational categories, the majority of the interaction terms are highly significant.

Second, the findings concerning the variables that measure human capital credentials and path to promotion also demonstrate the decidedly more formal and circumscribed route African Americans take to achieving both upper-tier occupational categories relative to Whites in the private sector. In this regard, interactions with the same four human capital variables—work experience, time with employer, having some college education, and having a college education—increase the odds of African Americans, relative to Whites, attaining both the Managers-Administrators and Professional-Technical occupational categories.

The pattern of significance among the race interactions with variables that measure path to promotion closely indicate that, relative to Whites, African Americans attain both upper-tier occupational categories through a process of ordered and gradual movement through the occupational structure. Specifically, relative to Whites, the movement of African Americans into both the Managers-Administrators and Professional-Technical occupational categories is dependent on internal promotions from next-to-last job at the same level of the occupational structure. In addition, relative to Whites, the likelihood of African Americans reaching the Managers-Administrators category is hampered if their next-to-last job was one level below their present jobs in the occupational structure; furthermore, compared to Whites, the likelihood of African Americans attaining the Professional-Technical category is detrimentally affected if their next-to-last job was greater than one level below their present job in the occupational structure.

## DISCUSSION

The particularistic mobility thesis challenges the notion that traditional stratification-relevant factors structure the attainment of upper-tier occupations in a uniform manner across racial groups. It hypothesizes that the lack of opportunity for African Americans to demonstrate relevant, informal criteria for promotion such as perceived loyalty, sound judgment, and leadership potential results in a more formal and deterministic process of occupational attainment for them, compared to Whites, even when the two groups

have similar human capital credentials and background socioeconomic status and work in similar economic sectors. Findings from the PSID sample support the particularistic mobility thesis. Specifically, promotion into both Managers-Administrators and Professional-Technical occupations for African Americans is dependent on a relatively wide range of human capital characteristics such as educational attainment, labor force experience, and tenure with current employer (Hypothesis 1). Furthermore, more important determinants of movement into upper-tier occupations for African Americans than Whites is tenure with their present employer (Hypothesis 2) and work experience at a similar hierarchical level in the occupational structure (Hypothesis 3).

Significantly, we believe these findings can be interpreted in light of Weber's (1968) notion of social closure, which has been used to characterize the processes that restrict the access of subordinate groups to desirable opportunities in the workplace (Tomaskovic-Devey 1993a, 1993b). For example, African Americans' disproportionate reliance on human capital credentials and relevant job experience impedes access to upper-tier occupations because of discriminatory obstacles encountered in their acquisition. Furthermore, the relative inability of African Americans to offer their fund of human capital to employers other than those for whom they presently work restricts both the pool of prospective employers who will consider them for employment and the number of positions that are available. In contrast, Whites are not similarly handicapped. They attain upper-tier occupations in at least two ways: like African Americans, through a relatively formal process, and also through a variety of informal means not available to African Americans. Overall, the greater range of options available to Whites would seem to broaden the supply of both prospective employers and available occupational positions.

In addition, analyses by employment sector provide a qualification to the scope of the particularistic mobility thesis. Specifically, analyses support hypotheses that particularism is more pronounced in the private than the public sector. In this regard, in the private sector, there are relatively large racial differences in the extent to which mobility into upper-tier occupations is dependent on a traditional range of human capital characteristics (Hypothesis 4), prior work experience with current employer (Hypothesis 5), and previous work experience at a similar hierarchical level in the occupational structure (Hypothesis 6). Overall, we view these findings as evidence of the relatively inhospitable nature of private sector employment for African Americans. In particular, we suspect that particularistic employment practices that are detrimental to the mobility opportunities of African Americans are produced by



the relatively narrow reach and lack of stringent enforcement of equal employment opportunity laws enacted to ensure racial parity in the workplace for minorities.

## CONCLUSION

The findings from this study do not bode well for African Americans in the near future. Particularistic employment practices are most pronounced in the economic sector likely to represent a growing proportion of positions in the occupational structure. Specifically, increasing calls from partisans of virtually all political persuasions to downsize government suggest that the proportion of African Americans in private sector employment will increase in coming years (Edsall & Edsall, 1991; Quadagno, 1994). Accordingly, we believe the main thrust of social policy should be toward structuring and monitoring promotional practices in the private sector. In this vein, we recommend that policies be enacted to ensure that African Americans are increasingly represented in professional training programs as well as in integrated work settings within firms that facilitate integrated formal and informal social networks. We view these measures as indispensable to "leveling the playing field" with respect to providing opportunities to demonstrate the informal criteria that are important bases for promotion into upper-tier occupations. Second, policies should be enacted that minimize employer discretion by establishing clear-cut guidelines for promotion that are based on objective criteria such as educational requirements and relevant work experience.

The reliance of employers on particularistic criteria for promotion into upper-tier occupations constitutes a largely unexamined aspect of racial inequality in the workplace. Accordingly, we offer several suggestions for future research. First, studies should more directly measure particularism by analyzing data from specific organizations where the potential exists to directly observe mobility processes. We recognize limitations in the use of a survey-based approach that bases its results on the explanatory power of a model with a particular focus on sets of variables that measure human capital characteristics and path to promotion. For example, interpretations of occupational attainment processes that are based, in part, on the absence of relationships between objective characteristics such as human capital investments and occupational attainment may be problematic because the lack of significance may be due to unmeasured variables. Second, future analyses of particularistic employment practices need to incorporate a broader range of

racial/ethnic groups. In this regard, minority groups such as Latinos and Asians are experiencing unprecedented levels of socioeconomic differentiation in the labor market.

In addition, we see the need to arrive at a more contextually sensitive account of particularistic employment practices in both the private and public sectors. For example, in both sectors, researchers should strive to assess how particularism varies across different types of occupations within the broad Managers-Administrators and Professional-Technical categories. Furthermore, within the private sector, researchers should examine whether particularism operates to structure access to upper-tier occupations that consist of marginalized, "race-based" job functions and those that involve less marginalized "race-neutral" job tasks. Finally, studies that directly examine public sector dynamics should explore variation in equality across the federal, state, and local levels of the government bureaucracy. Significantly, each of the three bureaucratic levels has been identified as varying in their commitment to legislating and enforcing equal opportunity laws in the workplace (see Burstein, 1998). In sum, we hope our study serves as an impetus for this additional research. It would further enhance our understanding of an increasingly important issue in the American workplace, the extent to which racial inequality permeates the process by which racial minorities move into the upper reaches of the American occupational structure.

**APPENDIX: Descriptive Statistics for Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) Sample**

Variable	African Americans (n = 804)		Whites (n = 2,101)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Dependent				
Professional-Technical	n = 121		n = 524	
Managers-Administrators	n = 132		n = 566	
Independent				
Background socioeconomic status				
Mother's education	10.5	2.7	11.8	2.9
Family structure	Intact = 267		Intact = 1,365	
Human capital				
Education	11.9	2.9	12.5	3.1
Work experience	12.8	3.3	14.1	3.0
Time with employer	5.1	1.3	7.0	1.2
Workplace				
Public sector	29.7%		18.6%	
Union status	n = 102		n = 332	
Occupational segregation	7.3	2.2	4.2	1.8
Promotion path				
Internal promotion	35.1%		47.5%	
Prior job-same level	34.8%		28.9%	
Prior job-one level below	33.0%		32.0%	
Prior job > one level below	32.2%		39.1%	

**NOTES**

1. We recognize that several early studies in the status attainment tradition (e.g., Portes & Wilson, 1976; Turner, 1974) found that the attainment process differs for African Americans and Whites. In particular, for African Americans, aspirations are not a linear function of class background, and racial discrimination acts to sever the link between aspirations and attainments for African Americans. However, the earliest formulations of the status attainment process hypothesize that it operates similarly across racial groups. Furthermore, recent research suggests that the attainment process appears to be converging for African Americans and Whites (see Morgan, 1997).

2. Two studies that fall within the purview of the particularistic mobility thesis—Baldi and McBrier (1997) and Parcel et al. (1989)—use Kanter's (1977) notion of *homosocial reproduction* to argue that the route to occupational mobility for African Americans should be more formal and "sponsored" than for Whites. In this conceptualization, White employers are more likely to promote fellow Whites than African Americans on the basis of informal characteristics because they have more trust in the judgment made by those with similar phenotypic characteristics.

tics and social background. However, as an explanation for racial differences in mobility determinants into upper-tier occupations, we believe the particularistic mobility thesis rests on a more solid foundation of sociological research than does the theory of homosocial reproduction. In particular, the mechanism that generates particularistic employment practices, racial differences in opportunities to demonstrate job-relevant criteria, is rooted in practices of segregation across institutional spheres that are at the heart of contemporary dynamics of race prejudice (see Bobo & Kluegel, 1997; Pettigrew, 1985). Conversely, advocates of the theory of homosocial reproduction do not establish a basis in race relations research for their major premise that Whites have greater faith in the judgment of fellow Whites than African Americans.

3. Although the PSID is a longitudinal data set, significant numbers of individuals both entered and left the study during the 1988 through 1992 period. Accordingly, combining the data over the 5-year period significantly increased the size of the sample. Significantly, efforts were taken to ensure that no sample respondents were included more than once in the analyses.

4. Sample sizes precluded examining racial differences among females in the PSID. In particular, there were too few females to sustain quantitative analyses.

5. Substantial changes in the census occupational coding scheme that began in 1980 precluded translating the 1970 detailed occupational codes assigned to the PSID sample by the Institute of Survey Research at the University of Michigan into the more modern classification scheme. Specifically, the 1980 scheme included many new occupational titles that make it non-comparable to the classification scheme used previously (see Bianchi & Rytina, 1986; Stevens & Cho, 1985). Consequently, converting the occupational codes of the sample into the 1980 codes would result in significant lost information as well as inaccurate conversions.

6. Sample respondents who were in the Managers-Administrators and Professional-Technical categories but had no previous job experience were included in the reference category vis-à-vis the internal promotion variable as well as those variables that measure movement through the occupational structure. In addition, sample members who had no prior job were included in the dummy that measures greater than one category rise between present and next-to-last job. This represents a pattern of broad movement across the occupational structure based on criteria that constitute key aspects of the particularistic mobility thesis—for example, employers' decisions about the necessity of employees' directly demonstrating competence in a first job as a prerequisite for movement into an upper-tier occupation.

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