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Service sector occupations have historically been a major source of employment for black and white women in the United States. These jobs are typically low paid and offer few promotional opportunities, but their easy entry and flexible hours attract women of all types. Figures indicate, however, that black women experience considerably less occupational mobility than white women working in this sector.

This study seeks to explain these differences as a function of race, class background, child-bearing, and initial occupational category.

METHODOLOGY AND MEASURES OF OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY

The study relies on a sample of women polled by the National Longitudinal Survey of Young Women (NLS) who reported working in service occupations in 1972 and in the same or a different occupation in 1988. The sample includes 261 white and 135 black women who were between eighteen and twenty-eight years old in 1972 and who were employed at least one week in both 1972 and 1988. Rather than limiting itself to conventional regression analysis, the study uses descriptive statistics and "an exploratory, storytelling approach, which more effectively illuminates the complexity of the interaction of gender, race-ethnicity, and class in the lives of women."[---]

For the purposes of the study, occupational mobility was measured in two ways: by occupation and by wage ranking in 1969 and 1988. Occupations were classified according to one-digit census occupational categories; jobs were ranked by mean earnings for full year women workers in the 1970 Census, the three-digit Census occupational categories, and creating an index ranking from one to 15.

FINDINGS

Historically black women have been confined to the lowest level of manual occupations, especially domestic work, farm work, and unskilled factory jobs. However, black women achieved dramatic improvement in the postwar period, through movement out of service and into professional and clerical occupations. In 1960, 20 percent of white and 60 percent of black women were in service occupations. By 1994, the rate had fallen only slightly for whites to 17 percent, but by more than half for blacks to 26 percent. However, this study suggests that among

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women from 1972 to 1988, white women enjoyed a much greater level of occupational mobility than black women beginning in the same sector (see table below).

1988 Occupations of White and Black 1972 Service Workers [44]

Occupation	White	Black
Professional, technical, and kindred	23.0 %	11.1%
Manager, officials, and proprietors	11.5	3.7
Clerical and Kindred	24.5	15.6
Sales workers	3.8	1.5
Craftsmen, foremen, and kindred	1.1	0.7
Operatives and kindred	8.4	11.8
Private household workers	1.5	5.9
Other service workers	24.5	46.7
Laborers, including farm	1.5	2.9
Total	99.8%	99.9%

In 1988, 74 percent of the 1972 cohort of white women had left service work, while only 47 percent of blacks had moved into other categories. For whites, 24 percent had moved into the first two, and most prestigious, Census categories of professional and managerial workers, while the same was true for only 15 percent of blacks.

However, few women of either race were able to enter the relatively highly paid male-dominated occupations. For those women who left service work, the largest single shift was into "clerical and kindred" jobs (24 percent of whites and 16 percent of blacks), which are relatively low-paid positions. Of the women who obtained professional and technical jobs, half became non-college teachers or nurses.

In addition to their place in a major occupational category, the sample participants were also ranked according to their incomes at the beginning and end of the study period according the earnings ranks described above. The ranks ranged from 1.0 for earnings between $0 and $2,000 to 15.0 for incomes between $15,000 and $16,000. As of 1972, white women had a mean rank of 2.75, while blacks averaged 2.36. By 1988, the mean for whites had risen to 4.85, a gain of 2.10 ranking points, while blacks rose to 3.91, a gain of only 1.55 ranking points. Accordingly, not only did white women begin work at higher earnings levels than black women, but the income gap between both groups also grew over sixteen years.

These results "suggest that service work may be more likely to serve as a temporary occupation for young white women who are preparing themselves for better jobs, while for black women service is more likely to become a long-term job category."[44]

CHILDREN, EDUCATION, AND CLASS BACKGROUND

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Women's responsibilities to care for children greatly affect their ability to participate in the paid workforce and pursue strategies for job advancement. Access to financial and other resources can reduce the degree of conflict between the demands of family and work life, an especially important issue to note given that on average black women are likely to have fewer resources than white women.

Within the sample group, black women were also more likely to be limited by family responsibilities than white women because they had more children and began having children earlier. In 1972, blacks had an average of 1.48 children each, while whites had only 0.65; by 1988, black women had 2.96 children on average and white women had 1.99. Additionally, black women were much more likely to be single parents. In 1972, 56 percent of blacks and 84 percent of whites reported being married.

Although the presence of children did not affect the earnings rank of women in 1972, having children that year is associated with lower mobility in future years. By 1988, white women who had children in 1972 had achieved an earnings rank of 4.5, while those who did not have children in 1972 rose to 5.1; for black women, the numbers were 3.7 and 4.2 respectively.

The white women in the sample had higher levels of educational attainment (measured by grade level completed) than blacks both in 1972 and 1988, with the size of the gap remaining constant over time. Whites had 12.0 years of education completed in 1972 and 13.0 years by 1988; blacks had only 10.8 and 11.9 years respectively. In addition, the white women were significantly more likely to be attending school while working in 1972: 24% of white service workers compared to 16% of black service workers were in school. Further, while both black and white women benefited from additional schooling, black women's upward mobility was considerably lower.

Class background is also crucial in young women's opportunities for job advancement. In this study, class is measured by the occupations of the women's fathers. 42 percent of the white women's fathers were in better-paying professional, managerial, and craftsmen occupations in 1968 (when the NLS survey began), while only 9 percent of blacks' fathers were similarly employed. Meanwhile, 36 percent of black fathers were in the lower-paying operatives and service workers categories compared to only 19 percent of the fathers of white women.

The study also suggests that young white women were employed more often than black women in service jobs that allowed for greater flexibility to pursue educational options. As of 1972, 24 percent of whites were waitresses compared to only 8 percent of blacks. Furthermore, 12 percent of whites were "private babysitters" who often enjoyed flexible schedules. Only 6% of black women worked as babysitters, while, 22 percent report being "private household" workers and 8 percent chambermaids. 14 percent of whites and 23 percent of blacks were employed as hospital attendants, a job that usually calls for more rigid scheduling requirements.

CONCLUSION

The sample of participants used for the study were in the same occupational category in 1972, were of the same age group, and were living through the same social and economic changes of the 1970s. Yet, a complex intertwining of race, class background, and family status can be used

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to explain the different levels of occupational mobility achieved by white women and black women. This finding brings into question "the meaningfulness of cross-sectional analysis of occupational distributions" and of statistical studies that treat the effects of race and gender oppression as simply additive. Instead, race, gender, and class background must be viewed as important analytical instruments that allow for the examination and consideration of vastly different life experiences.

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