

Occupational and Residential Segregation: The Confluence of Two Systems of Inequality

Niki Dickerson von Lockette

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Residential patterns that segregate black and white youth in largely black cities and predominantly white suburbs increase the likelihood that these whites will find better-paying jobs in overwhelmingly white occupations and that blacks will end up in lower-paying occupations filled mostly by other blacks.

“For whites, wages increase as the level of residential segregation increases,” Niki T. Dickerson von Lockette, associate professor in Rutgers University’s School of Management and Labor Relations, concluded in her latest study of occupational and residential segregation patterns. Dickerson von Lockette noted that whites who lived in highly segregated metropolitan areas in 1979 earned 20 percent higher wages in 1990 than whites who grew up in less segregated areas.

For blacks, the opposite was true. Blacks who grew up in less segregated metropolitan areas tended to earn 15 percent more in 1990 than blacks who were living in highly segregated areas in 1979.

Residential segregation yields occupational segregation

In short, Dickerson von Lockette found that patterns of residential segregation carry over into occupational segregation. Whites who grew up in highly segregated areas were more likely to end up working in predominantly white occupations, and black women who grew up in predominantly black areas were particularly likely to end up working in lower-paid predominantly black occupations.

Dickerson von Lockette’s link between residential segregation and occupational segregation provides further evidence that “residential segregation contributes to sustaining inequality between racial groups,” which has important public policy implications for officials wrestling with such fundamental questions as how to distribute low-income housing in a city and how to transition to better-paying jobs.

The Rutgers professor’s study used the National Longitudinal Study of Youth and U.S. Census data to analyze the experience of 3,916 black and white men and women who were 14 to 22 years old and living in metropolitan areas in 1979 and who were 25 to 33 years old and employed in 1990. For purpose of analysis, she divided the occupational groups into black-typical occupations (those in which blacks were overrepresented compared to their share of the work force) and white-typical occupations, then subdivided each of those groups into low-segregation, moderate-segregation and high-segregation categories based on the degree of overrepresentation. Similarly, she divided both black and white respondents into categories of high, moderate and low residential segregation based on the percentage of same-race residents living in their city.

“Black occupations” pay substantially less

Dickerson von Lockette found that the median wages of occupations overrepresented by blacks paid an average of \$8,650 less than occupations in which whites were overrepresented – a huge disparity considering that the median wage for all respondents was just \$15,739 in 1990 dollars. The disparity comports with earlier research showing that race employment density – the percentage of blacks or whites in a particular occupation – substantially affects the average wage. In fact, having a high percentage of blacks in a job decreases wages for both black and white workers in that job, although the impact is greater for black workers.

Not surprisingly, Dickerson von Lockette’s research found that increased educational attainment, higher parental household income and higher levels of the mother’s education all increased the likelihood for black youths that they would be employed in jobs in which whites were overrepresented rather than in mostly black occupations. Blacks who had never been married were also less likely to be employed in largely white occupations.

But even after controlling for these human capital and parental resource factors, Dickerson von Lockette still found that the level of residential segregation had a residual effect on adult employment outcomes. Interestingly, that effect was more pronounced for black women than for black men.

Black women feel the impact most

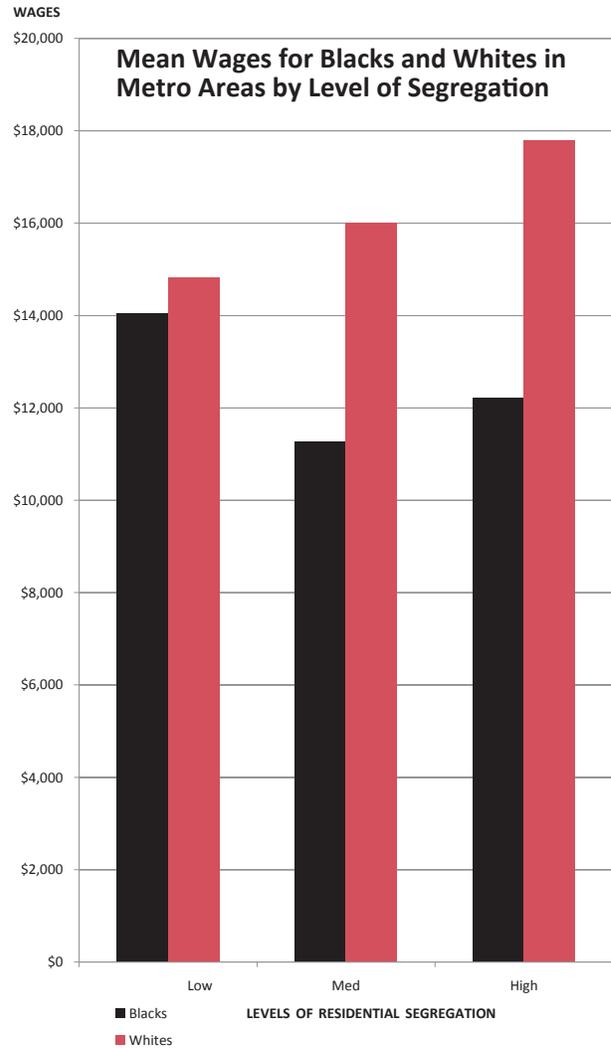
“Black women who lived in more segregated cities during their youth were more likely to be concentrated in occupations overrepresented by other black women (typically lower-status occupations that paid less). Conversely, black women were less likely to work in typically-white male occupations (that tend to be better remunerated),” Dickerson von Lockette wrote.

“Residential segregation experienced before entering the labor market benefits whites as a group, insofar as the occupations to which they have access, and disadvantages black women’s occupational outcomes,” she concluded, pointing to access to resources such as quality schooling in highly segregated white areas as one reason for the disparity.

She suggested that the difference in statistical outcomes for black men and black women may be due to the gendered nature of occupational segregation and the complex overlap of race and gender in racial attitudes and treatment. Statistics on the relationship between residential and occupational segregation for black men may be skewed by employer stereotyping or by the large numbers of young black men who would have been part of the sample group, but who ended up in incarceration rather than jobs.

Similarly, the “lived experience” of black women that is the focus of research by the new poverty theorists of multicultural feminism undoubtedly has an impact. Previous studies have shown a gender difference in commuting distances and in the ways that women look for jobs. “Women tend to search more locally, use community-based contacts for job information, and value distance from home and work hours over wage considerations,” particularly in female-dominated jobs, one study concluded. This is undoubtedly especially true for black women with children, particularly those who are single mothers and those who are in low-income jobs that preclude child care.

Dickerson von Lockette concluded that the complex role of residential segregation in maintaining racial inequality “is underinvestigated and needs additional study.”



Niki Dickerson von Lockette (Ph.D., University of Michigan, Sociology) studies the structural features of the U.S. labor market that enable or hinder access to employment opportunities for black and Latino workers. Her current work investigates the role of residential segregation in the job allocation process and patterns of race/gender occupational segregation in the U.S. labor market. The National Academy of Science awarded her a HUD post-doctoral fellowship to study the impact of residential segregation on the race gap in unemployment and wages for blacks and Latinos in marginalized communities in U.S. metropolitan areas. She has served as a consultant to the U.S. Departments of Labor and Commerce and the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago.

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- School of Management and Labor Relations (SMLR) is the leading source of expertise on managing and representing workers, designing effective organizations, and building strong employment relationships
- Founded by state decree in 1947 as the Institute of Management and Labor Relations, SMLR became a School in 1994. The School is housed in 2 buildings on the Rutgers New Brunswick campus: the Levin Building on Livingston, and the Labor Education Center on Cook/Douglass
- The School contains two excellent Departments – Human Resource Management and Labor Studies and Employment Relations – which together have one of the greatest concentrations of talent in the world on workforce issues
- Our mission is to deliver cutting-edge education, research, and outreach activities to benefit the employers and workers of New Jersey, the U.S., and the world

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- **Master of Labor and Employment Relations** – to develop leaders in employee relations, employee diversity, worker representation, and workplace change
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- Writing many of the main books that have shaped the field