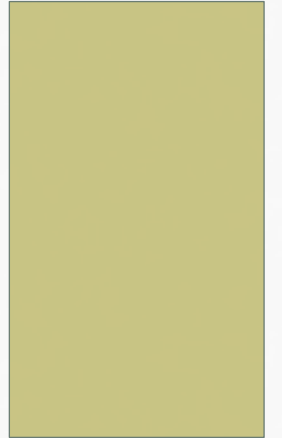


# THE IMPORTANCE OF WORK IN FUNDAMENTAL CAUSE THEORY

BRUCE LINK  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA RIVERSIDE



# POSE AND REFLECT ON TWO QUESTIONS

- What can a focus on work do for fundamental cause theory?
- What can fundamental cause theory do for a program of research on work?

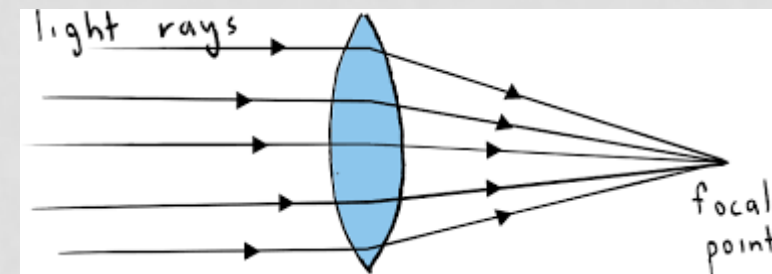
# WORK STRUCTURES MAJOR HEALTH RELEVANT ASPECTS OF OUR LIVES

- Exposures – repetitive movements, chemicals, dangerous activities, nasty bosses, stress, shift work etc.
- Income, prestige/honor, authority, power, access to health care, social networks, a sense of meaning and value.
- It's one important place where discrimination takes place, sexual harassment occurs, implicit biases find subtle expression and where one needs to be vigilant in avoiding or coping with these things.
- Additionally so many quotidian aspects of life are organized around work -- how we get there, who we interact with, what's for lunch, where the water comes from.

- Interdisciplinary



- FCT as one Lense



# FUNDAMENTAL CAUSE THEORY

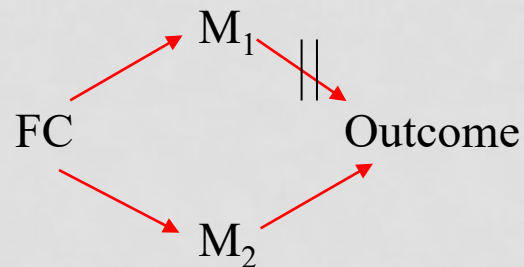
- Fundamental Cause Theory seeks to explain the persistence of health inequalities in different places and at different times.
- We identify socioeconomic status and racism as fundamental causes
  - Each is important for multiple disease outcomes
  - Through multiple replaceable mechanisms
  - Mechanisms are replaced in different places and at different times so as to reproduce the fundamental relationship.

Link, Bruce G., and Jo Phelan. "Social conditions as fundamental causes of disease." *Journal of health and social behavior* (1995): 80-94.

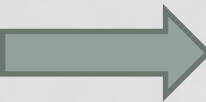
Phelan, Jo C., and Bruce G. Link. "Is racism a fundamental cause of inequalities in health?." *Annual Review of Sociology* 41 (2015): 311-330.

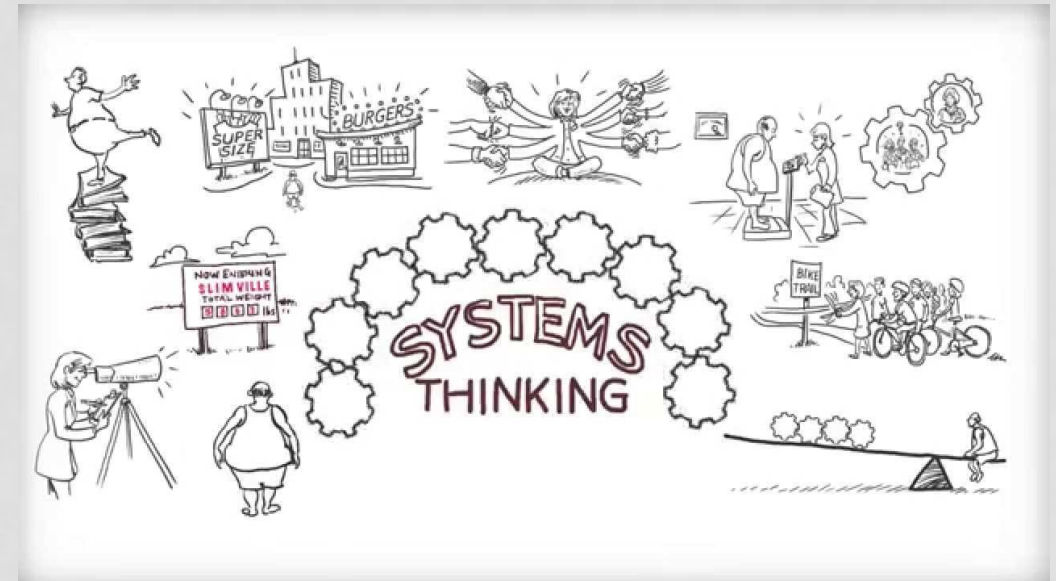
# DIAGRAM OF A FUNDAMENTAL CAUSE

- “Fundamental Cause” (FC) and “Replaceable Mechanisms” (RM)
- If a mechanism linking a fundamental cause to an outcome is blocked the fundamental cause will find expression through another mechanism thereby preserving the fundamental relationship.



# THE THEORY PROPOSES A DIFFERENT TYPE OF CAUSE

- Not just input  output.
- The theory predicts a system of relationships – multiple risk and protective factors and multiple disease outcomes.
- And at its essence a fundamental cause is not a cause of outcomes but a cause of causal relationships. Something that leads to the replacement of causes.



# MAGIC? HOW DOES THIS HAPPEN?

- SES
  - People use flexible SES-related resources of knowledge, money, power, prestige, and beneficial social connections to scramble individually and collectively to obtain health advantageous circumstances for themselves and those in their circle of caring.
- Racism
  - People seeking to maintain their privileged positions in racial hierarchies deploy racism to maintain their advantage thereby harming the health of those who are the target of the racism.

# HOW DOES THIS WORK? “DOING” CLASS – “DOING” FUNDAMENTAL CAUSE

- If fundamental cause theory is correct agentic action of those higher up reliably creates a spread in health fortunes across places and times.
- Now that could sound a bit abstract -- let me make it more concrete by moving no further than within my own circumstances.



Wife Co-Author Jo Phelan

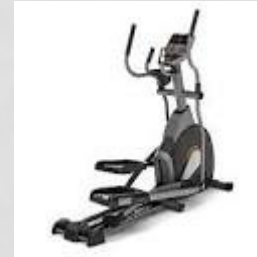


Daughter



# MY DAY

- Safe walk in well kept park, 20 mins on elliptical, fiber.
- House – quiet, safe, not too polluted, police are friendly.
- Seat belt, tires hi quality anti-lock brakes, reliable



# DAY TIME

- Lot 50, work 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, choice of stairs or elevator
- Sedentary all day but in an ergonomic chair
- Place of work negotiates my health care package – it is comprehensive.
- No toxic fumes, dangerous machines, bookshelves are battened down and I have a nice boss



# EVENING

- Relatively healthy dinner.
- Spousal support
- Comfortable, quiet place to sleep



# CONTEXT

- Wife knows about my family history of stroke and so has stroke symptoms fastened to refrigerator.
- Heart Attack? – take an uncoated aspirin.
- Untoward health event – is there expertise in your network for information and the best referral?



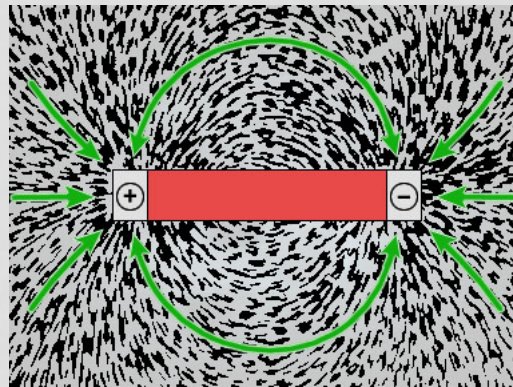
# MULTIPLE HEALTH RELEVANT ASPECTS OF DAILY LIFE SHAPED BY FLEXIBLE RESOURCES

- Health relevant circumstances embedded in multiple aspects of our lives – a massive multiplicity perhaps. We are often unaware
  - Not immediately consequential for health
  - We think about them in terms other than health
  - Only important in rare circumstances
- This massive multiplicity is shaped by our resources – knowledge, money, power, prestige and beneficial social connections.
- And then either through these resources or independently major societal fault lines of “us them” – fault lines supported by racism and stigmatization also shape this massive multiplicity of health relevant circumstances.



# SOCIAL SHAPING

- Resources, racism and stigmatization shape access to health-relevant circumstances like a magnet shapes patterns of filings:



- We expect patterns of health and mortality to result.

# “FLEXIBLE” RESOURCES – KNOWLEDGE, MONEY, POWER, PRESTIGE, BENEFICIAL SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

- Flexible – because they are broadly useful across times and places.
- When a new risk emerges, or a new protective factor is discovered, the use of flexible resources shapes who benefits and who is harmed.
- Mechanisms are replaced.



# FUNDAMENTAL CAUSES – FLEXIBLE RESOURCES

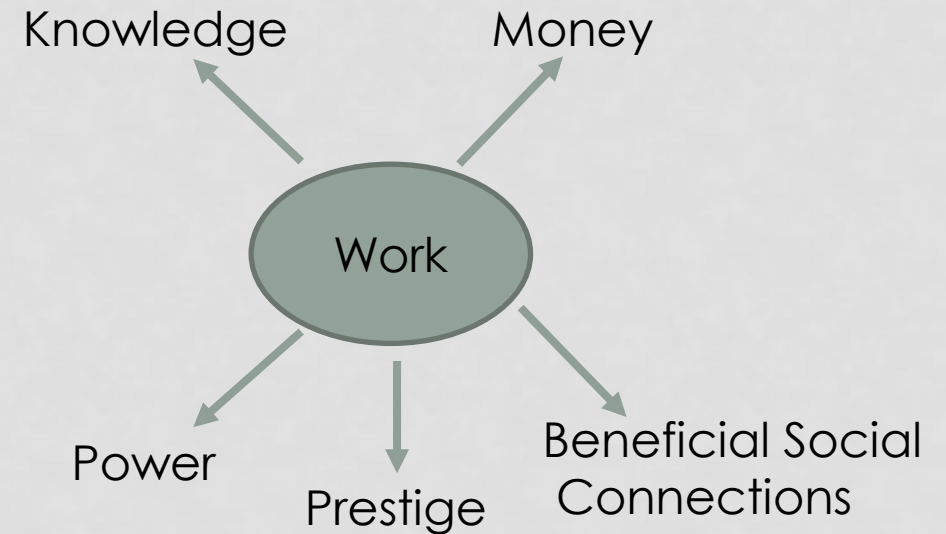
- When people hear “fundamental cause” they often think the cause furthest to the left in a causal diagram or at the top of some multi-leveled model.
- But the key concept in FCT is “flexible” broadly useful resources. What people actually use to gain a health advantage.
- But these flexible resources come from somewhere.





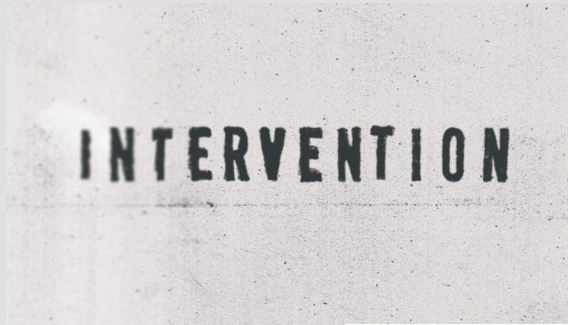
# CENTRALITY OF WORK

- Where these flexible resources come from is complex.
- But a major source/context is work.
- Knowledge, money, power, prestige and beneficial connections.
- Also where discrimination occurs -- the restricting of people's freedom to pursue ends they desire.



# WHAT WORK DOES FOR FCT

- So if you buy or partially buy FCT and you want to address the processes it directs attention to then addressing work makes sense.
- Work is such an important source of the resources the theory suggests are essential.
- So what an emphasis on work does for FCT is to specify a context where the distribution of flexible resources can be altered by intervention or policy.



# WHAT CAN FCT DO FOR A PROGRAM OF RESEARCH ON WORK?

- First, the lens idea – if you think of work from a FCT perspective you will be reminded of the importance of flexible resources and the impact of racism and stigmatization.
- Second, if you are concerned about the reproduction of health inequalities in the work context, FCT gives you a way of thinking about how to address persistence.
- Third, it can help you avoid an excessive burrowing into the mechanistic linkages involved in more proximal causes to the exclusion of inequality generating processes.

- Whac-a-Mole



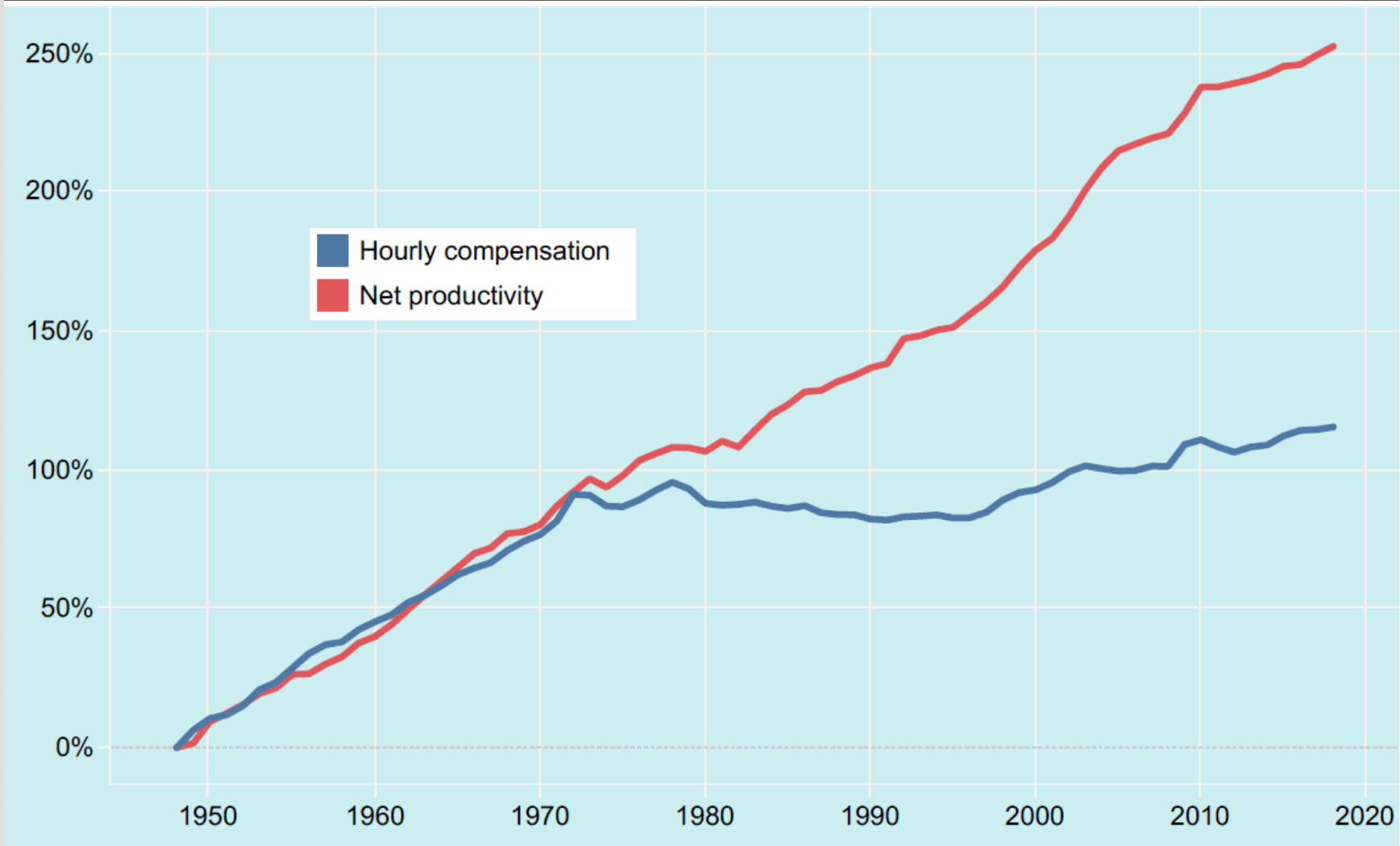
# CAN FLEXIBLE RESOURCES IN THE WORK CONTEXT BE ALTERED?

- Distribution of flexible resources have been dramatically altered over time.
- Relevant to health disparities flexible resources are distributed unequally in work settings.
- Plausible evidence links inequalities in the distribution of flexible resources to discrimination.

MONEY  
COMPENSATION/INCOME SHARE OVER TIME

# Worker Pay Has Not Kept Pace With Productivity Since the 1970s

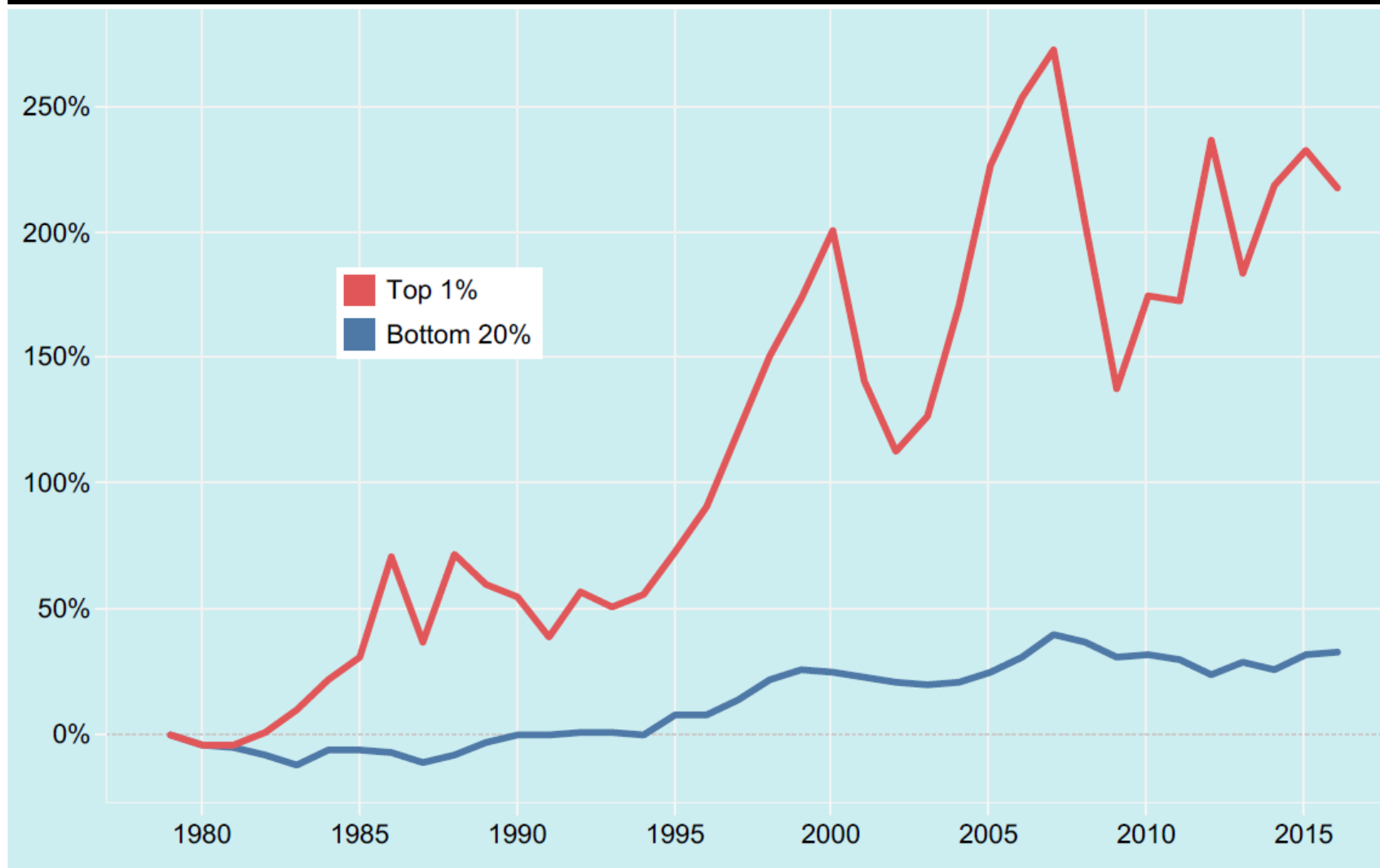
*U.S. productivity and average hourly compensation growth, 1948–2018*



Source: Economic Policy Institute

# The Richest Americans Have Had the Fastest Income Growth

*Growth in U.S. before-tax income, 1979-2016*



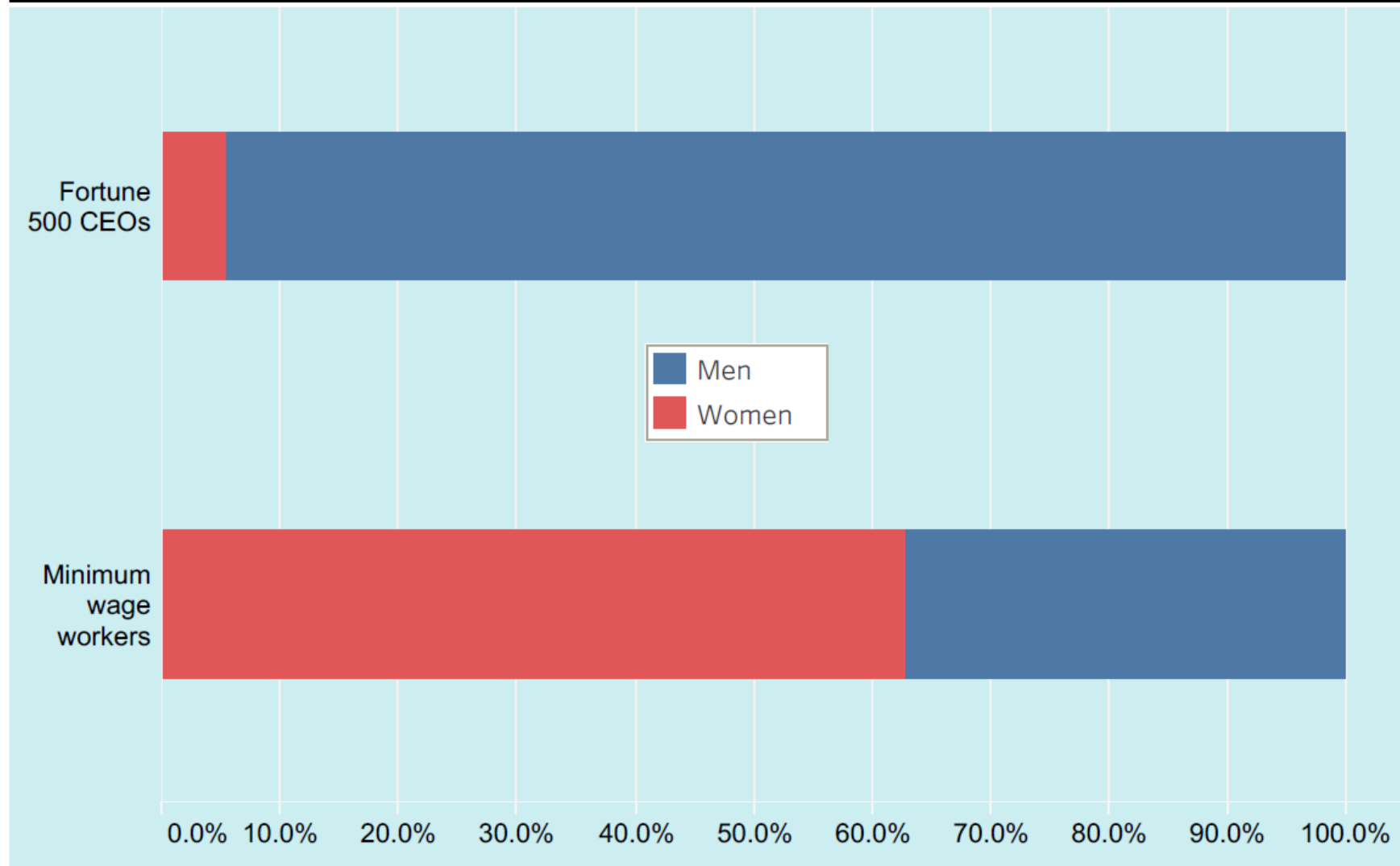
**Source: Congressional Budget Office**

# DISTRIBUTION OF FLEXIBLE RESOURCES OF POWER AND PRESTIGE



# Women Are Scarce at the Top and Overrepresented at the Bottom

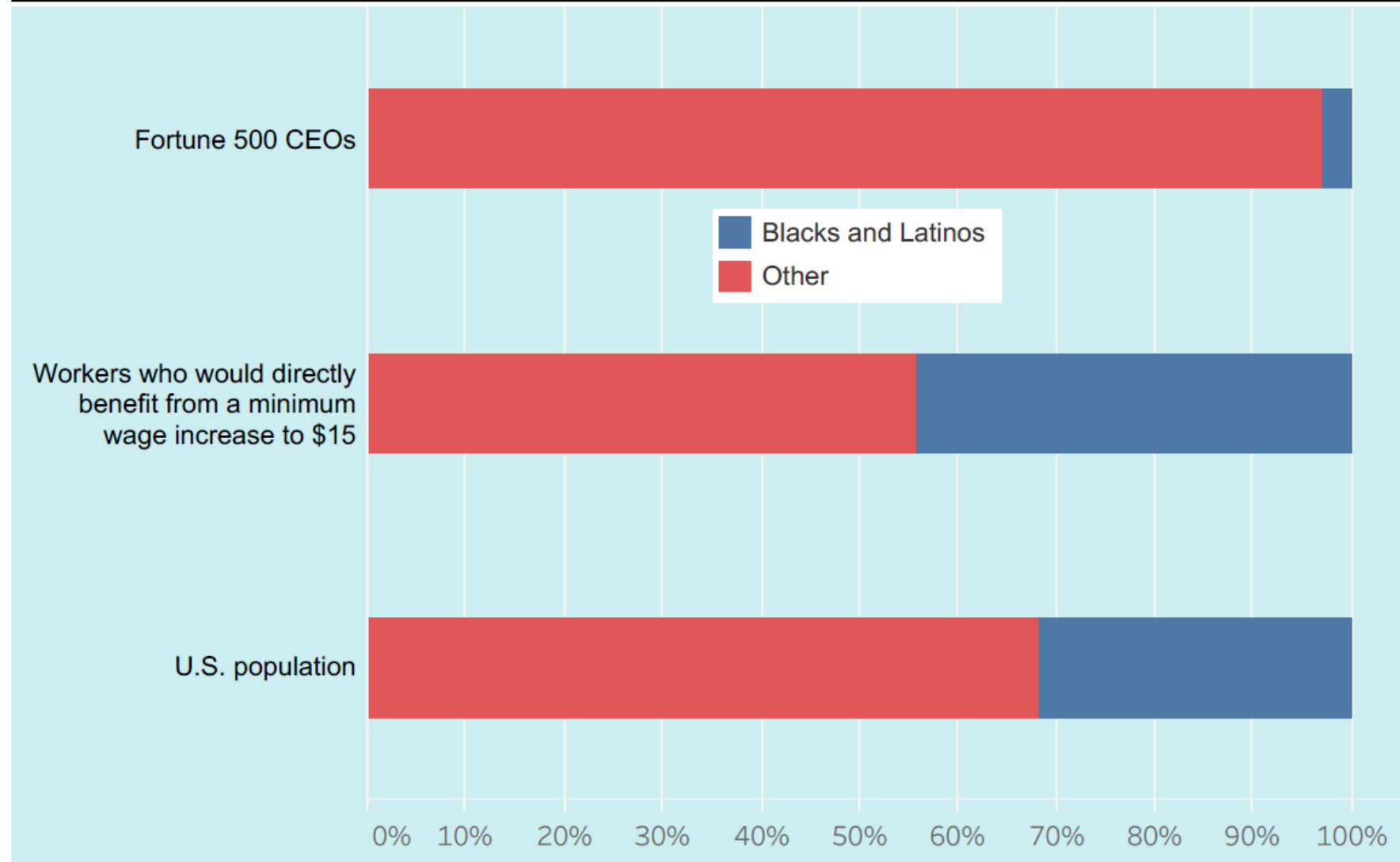
*U.S. men and women as a share of minimum wage workers and Fortune 500 CEOs, 2016*



**Sources: U.S. Department of Labor and Fortune**

# People of Color Are Scarce at Top and Overrepresented at Bottom

*U.S. Black and Latino representation, 2018*

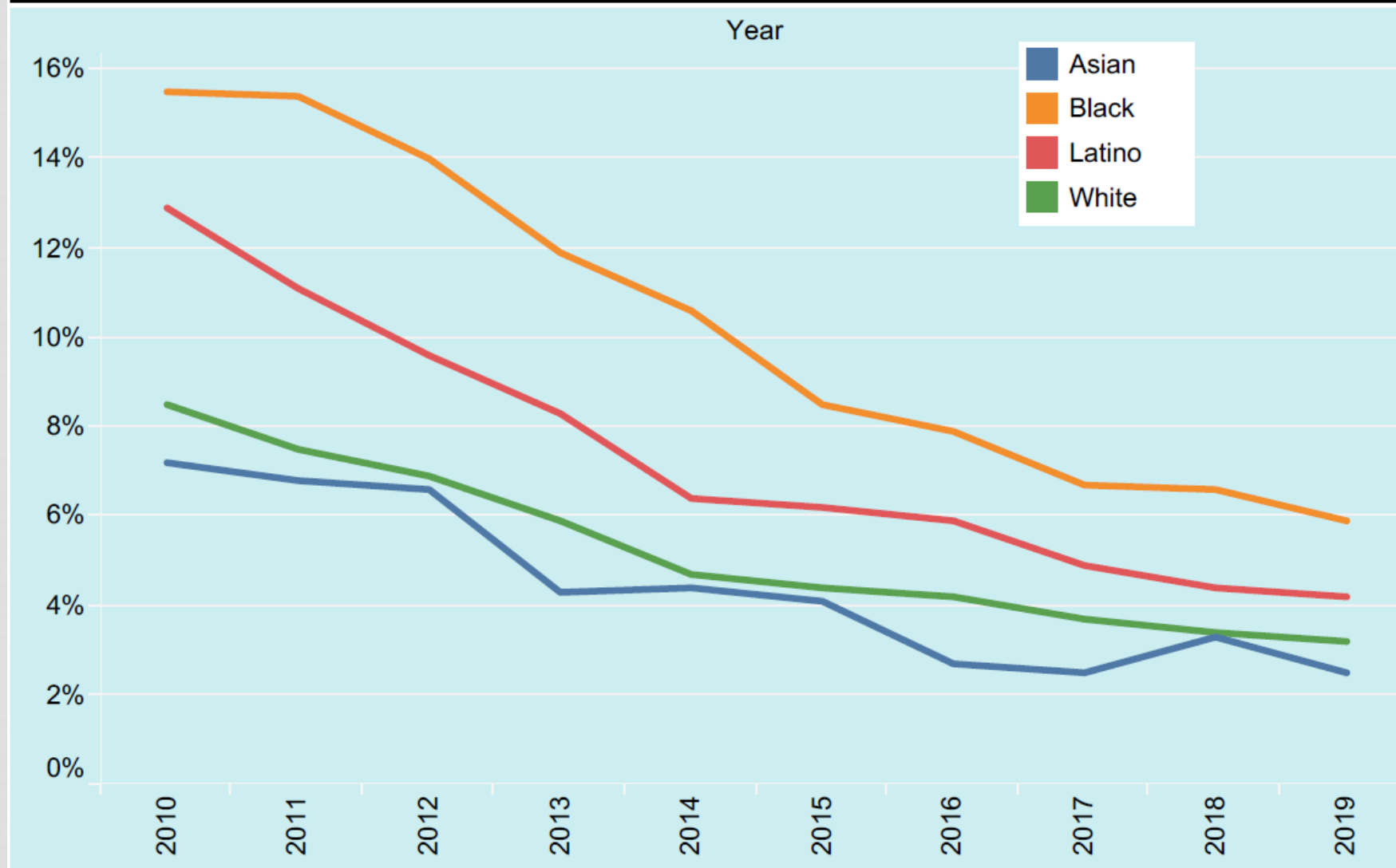


**Sources: Census Bureau, Economic Policy Institute, Fortune, Black Enterprise, and Al Día News**

# UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF FLEXIBLE RESOURCE BY GENDER AND RACE ETHNICITY

# Black Unemployment Runs About Twice as High as for Whites

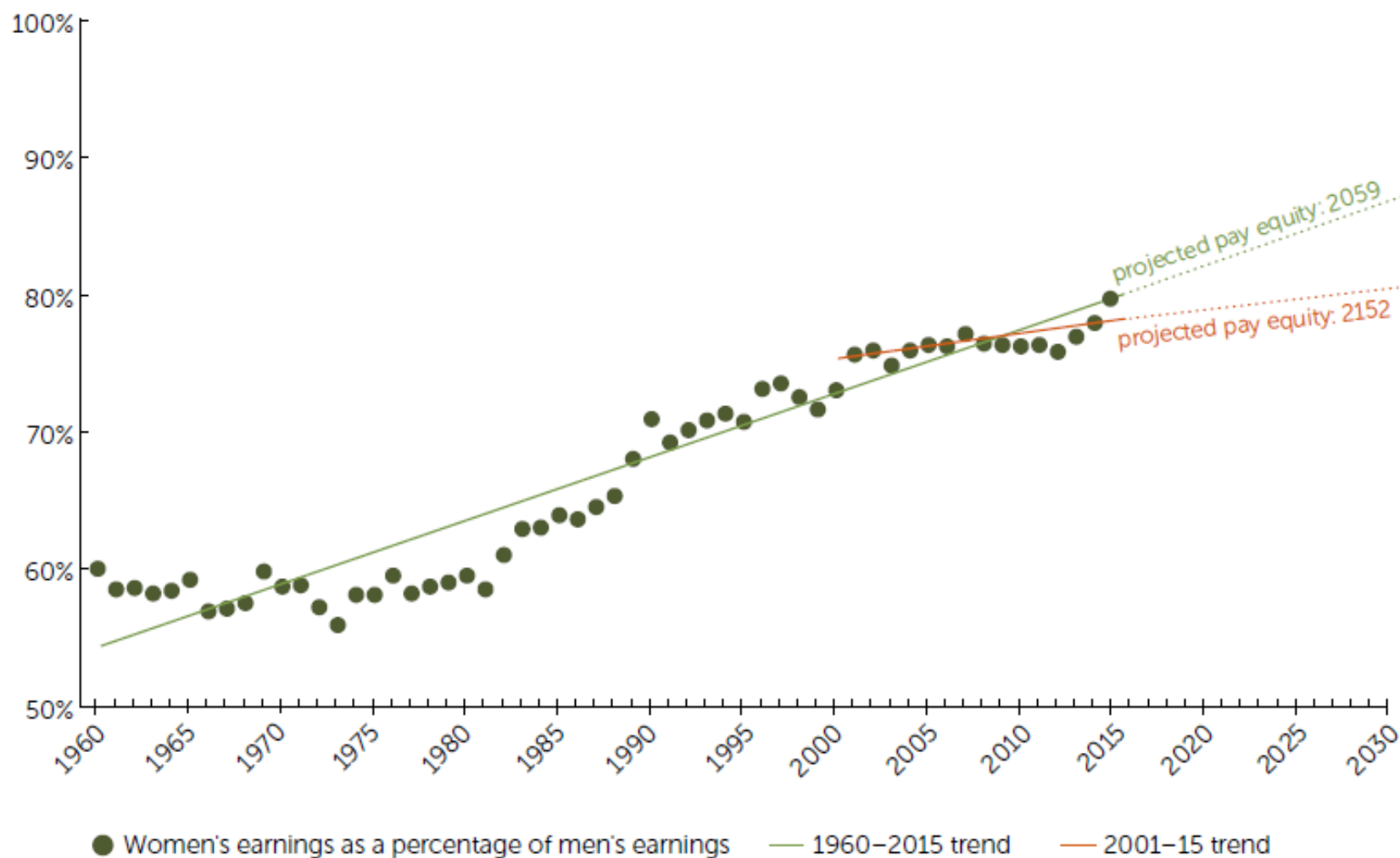
*U.S. unemployment rate by race, last month of the year, 2010-2019*



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

FIGURE 1.

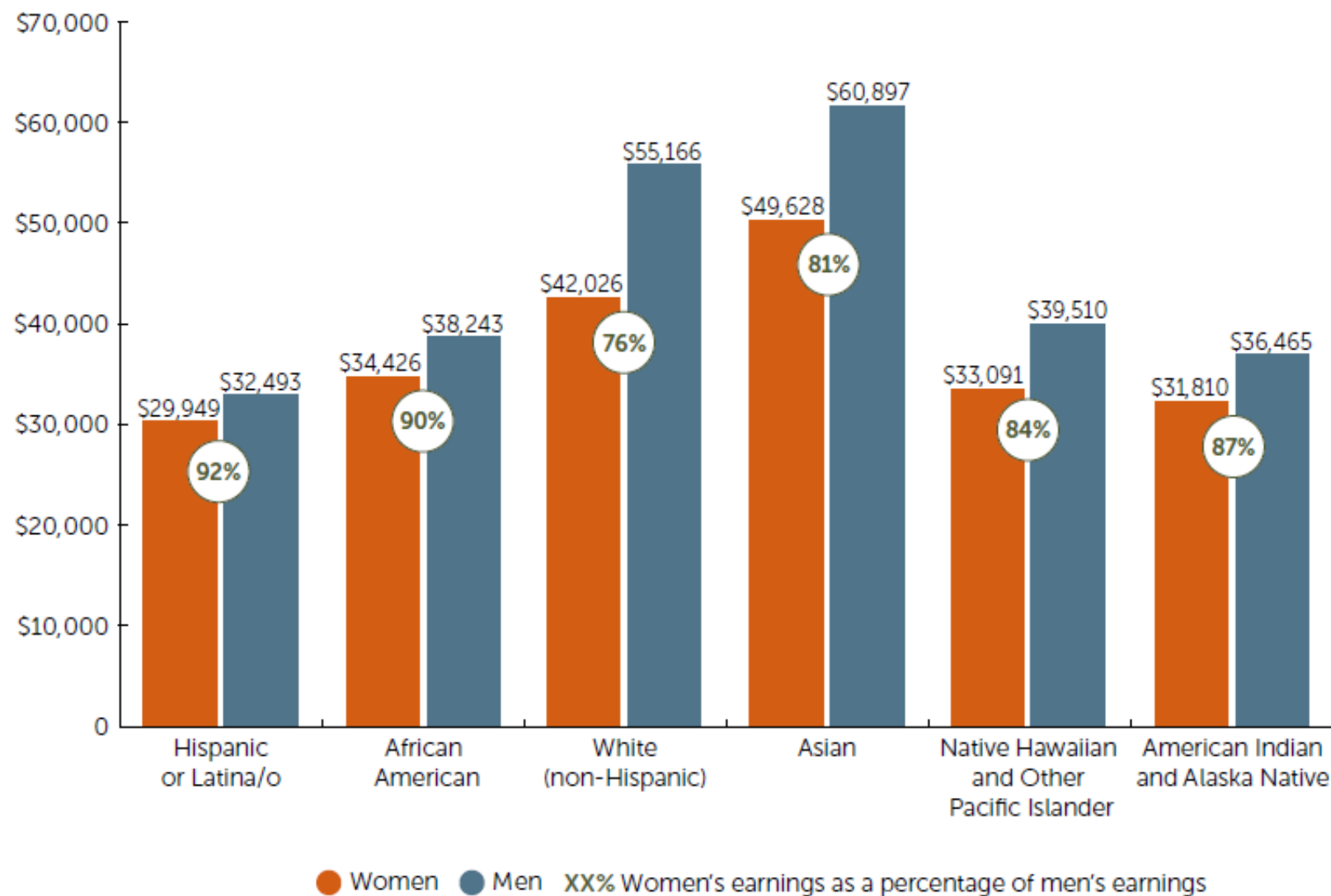
Women's Median Annual Earnings as a Percentage of Men's Median Annual Earnings for Full-Time, Year-Round Workers, 1960–2015



Source: AAUW analysis of data from Proctor et al., U.S. Census Bureau, *Income and Poverty in the United States: 2015*

FIGURE 3.

Median Annual Earnings, by Race/Ethnicity and Gender, 2015



DISCRIMINATION AS A SOURCE OF  
UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF FLEXIBLE  
RESOURCES

# MOTHERHOOD PENALTY – EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE



Shelley Correll

- Correll notes that there is a large wage and occupational prestige gap between men and women in many countries.
- Correll et al. propose that a motherhood penalty may be a partial explanation.
- Women are penalized for being a parent – men are not.
- In a laboratory experiment equally qualified women who are randomly assigned to identification as a mother are seen as less competent and assigned lower recommended salaries than women without children.
- In an audit study of actual job openings mothers receive significantly fewer call backs than women without children.

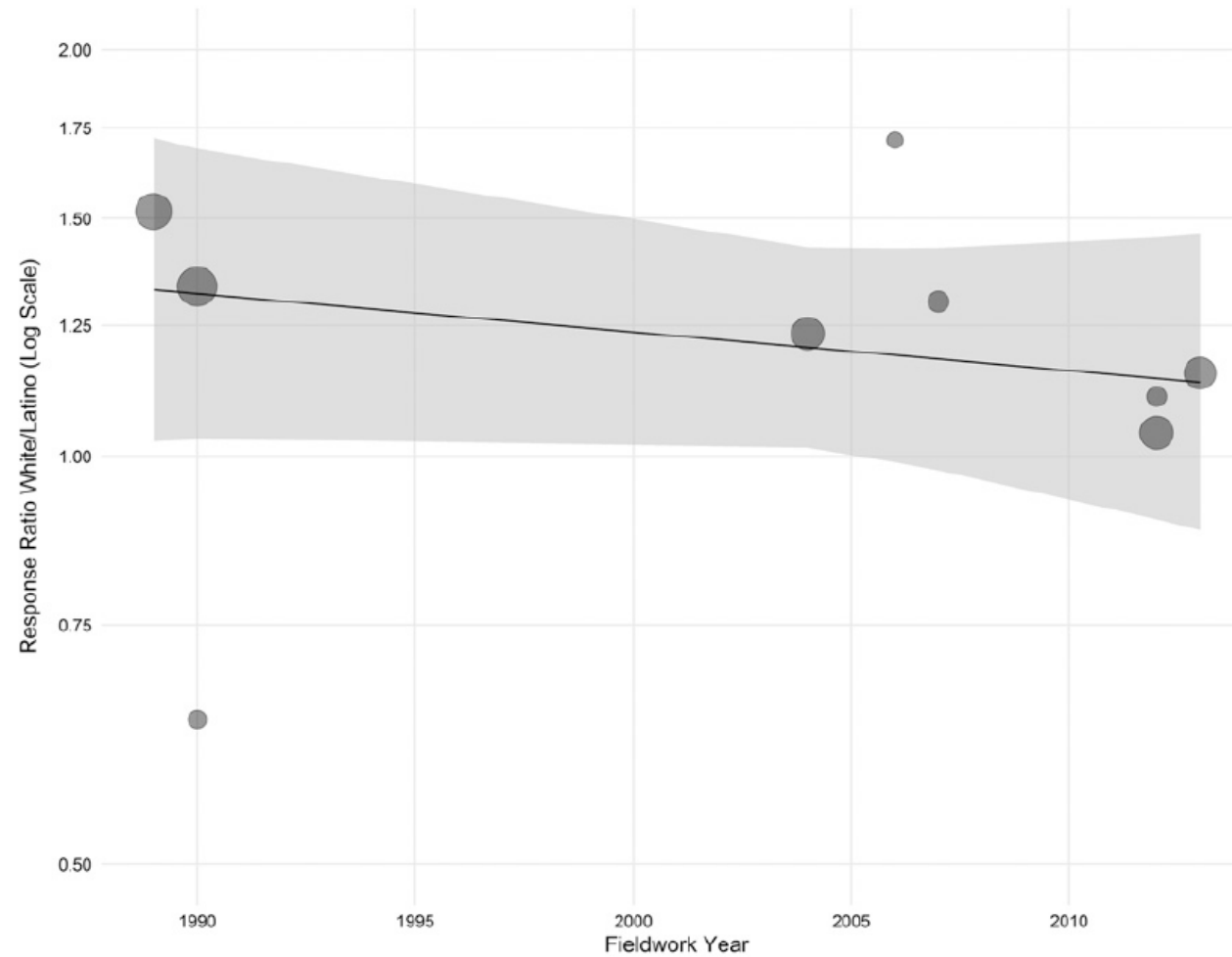
Correll, Shelley J., Stephen Benard, and In Paik. "Getting a Job: Is There a Motherhood Penalty? 1." *American journal of sociology* 112, no. 5 (2007): 1297-1339.



# META ANALYSIS OF AUDIT STUDIES OF RACE ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION IN HIRING

# MODEST DECLINE IN DISCRIMINATION FOR LATINOS?: META-ANALYSIS OF AUDIT STUDIES

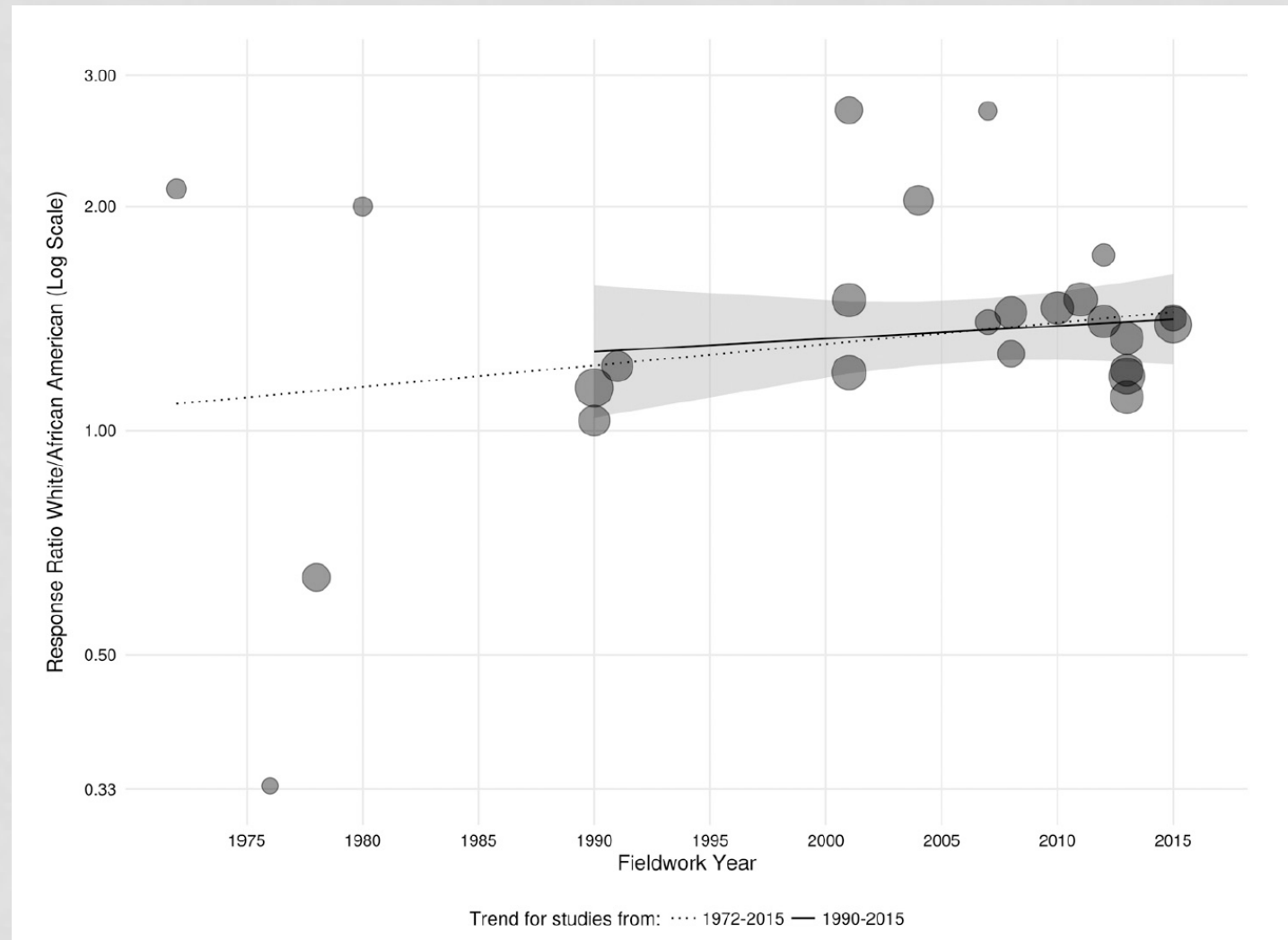
QUILLIAN ET AL. (PNAS 2017 114: 10870-75.)



Note: Size of plotting symbols proportional to meta-regression weights. Shaded region gives 95% confidence interval.

# NO DECLINE IN DISCRIMINATION FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS: META-ANALYSIS OF AUDIT STUDIES

QUILLIAN ET AL. (PNAS 2017 114: 10870-75.)



# SUMMARY

- Fundamental cause theory seeks to account for the persistence of health inequalities across time and place.
- Use of flexible resources in different places and times is how the theory seeks to explain the persistence.
- Work is a critical context in which flexible resources – knowledge, money, power, prestige and beneficial social connections -- are allocated.
- This allocation process is malleable.
- At the current time it is also unequal and unfair due to discrimination.
- A program of research focused on work must focus on the complexity of the work experience.
- However, if blocking the persistence of health inequalities is a goal inequalities in the distribution of flexible resources must be addressed.
- Otherwise you will end up in a lifelong, nightmare inspired game of Whac-a-mole.