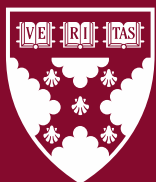


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Racial Inequality in Organizations: A Systems Psychodynamic Perspective

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Racial Inequality in Organizations: A Systems Psychodynamic Perspective

ABSTRACT

This paper uses systems psychodynamic concepts to develop theory about the persistence of racial inequality in U.S. organizations and to inform an approach for disrupting it. We treat White men who aspire to emulate hegemonic masculine ideals as the dominant group and Black people as the archetypal subordinate group. In our theory, persistence is rooted in work contexts that conflate merit with idealized images of White masculinity, which provokes unconscious distress in White men who aspire to meet those ideals. To keep this distress at bay, they covertly construct an unconscious, multilevel defense system, comprising projective identification at the individual level bolstered by a social defense at the organization level. This system is self-sealing: It diverts attention away from the real culprit—work contexts that threaten White men’s self-worth—by contriving a substitute problem—a shortage of meritorious Black people; at the same time, the social defense fuels aspects of the work context that give rise to such threats in the first place. The upshot is the persistence of racial inequality. We offer guidance on how to disrupt these dynamics by building mutually-reinforcing holding environments where organization members can engage in intrapsychic and intergroup reparative work. We conclude by offering theoretical contributions to organizational inequality, systems psychodynamics, and masculinity literatures.

Racial Inequality in Organizations: A Systems Psychodynamic Perspective

I do not know many Negroes who are eager to be 'accepted' by white people, still less to be loved by them: they, the blacks, simply don't wish to be beaten over the head by the whites every instant of our brief passage on this planet. *White people in this country will have quite enough to do in learning how to accept and love themselves and each other, and when they have achieved this – which will not be tomorrow and may very well be never – the Negro problem will no longer exist, for it will no longer be needed.*

James Baldwin, 1963 (italics added)

In U.S. firms, racial minorities and White women lag behind their White male counterparts in securing power and influence associated with high-level positions, contributing to an unchanging race and gender gap in seniority, income, and wealth (Helms, 2020; Tomaskovic-Devey & Avent-Holt, 2019).¹ A multi-billion-dollar industry supplying diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives has emerged to help leaders solve the problems of inequality in their organizations (Mehta, 2019). Examples include interventions designed to eliminate bias in workplace practices, such as hiring (Castilla & Rho, 2019) and evaluation (Rivera & Tilcsik, 2019); employee trainings on the psychological foundations of identity-based inequalities in organizations, including feedback on participants' biases and prescriptions for personal change (Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015; Naff & Kellough, 2003); formal mentoring and networking programs intended to reduce underrepresented groups' exclusion from career-enhancing relationships and eliminate gaps in access to valuable feedback and career opportunities (Kalev, 2009; Srivastava, 2015); and employee resource groups (ERGs), organizationally sanctioned groups comprising employees who share a salient identity and come together for support and networking and to advocate for change (Douglas, 2008; Welbourne, Rolf, & Schlachter, 2017).

¹ We capitalize the words "Black" and "White" throughout this article. Capitalizing "Black" gives necessary weight to an identity that has been pressed upon people of African descent and involves much more than color. Capitalizing "White" affirms the racialization of a group of people whose members too often see themselves as without race, and further, removes the signaling (via lowercase "w") of Whiteness as the standard and norm.

To date and to the best of our knowledge, none of these initiatives has succeeded in changing behavior over the long term or sustaining the advancement of people of color into positions of authority (Dobbin, Kim, & Kalev, 2011; Paluck, & Green, 2009; Paluck, Green, & Green, 2019).

Spurred by protests against racial injustice following the death of George Floyd, many CEOs intensified efforts to address the problem, taking strong, public stances against racism in society as well as in their companies. To signal their commitment, they pledged upwards of \$200 billion, funding such entities as historically Black colleges and universities and Black community organizations (Fitzhugh, Julien, Noel, & Stewart, 2020; Parker, 2021). From our perspective, these kinds of investments, however well-intentioned, are no more likely than previous initiatives to shrink racial gaps because they leave intact destructive systemic forces that lock racial inequality in place. We see instead a portrait of stubborn persistence: Individuals and organizations maintain patterns of thought and action that reproduce, solidify, and justify racial inequality despite significant investments aimed at reducing it.

Taking constructive individual intentions and destructive systemic forces into account, this paper generates theory that helps explain this persistence and offers a theoretically grounded framework for how organizations can play a critical role in disrupting it. Our theory aims to address the current predicament facing many leaders and scholars alike, committed to reducing racial inequality but lacking a comprehensive, actionable understanding of the problem and the covert processes that may be fueling it. We argue that, absent such an understanding, no amount of consciousness raising or attitude change will make an appreciative, lasting difference. In filling this gap, our theory points to the kinds of actions leaders wishing to be part of the solution will need to take if they are to effect real change—actions that will require putting more than their money where their proverbial mouths are—and to the kinds of research scholars will need

to take up if they are to offer useful, theoretically, and empirically grounded guidance.

We take as a starting point for our theorizing both the dysfunctional nature of inequality and its intransigence in organizations. Diversity scholars have long recognized how inequality undermines organizational effectiveness: Organizations that systematically fail to fully acknowledge, develop, or leverage the talent of any group, including those occupying the bottom rungs of societal race, gender, and class hierarchies, are clearly suboptimal (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Phillips, 2014). Moreover, by diminishing the oppressed, oppressors diminish themselves (Alderfer, 1982; Balbus, 2004; Clarke, 1999). Hence, inequality does not simply take a toll on productivity; it also takes a toll on humanity. Yet inequalities are ubiquitous, long-standing, and deeply entrenched in organizations (Tomaskovic-Devey & Avent-Holt, 2019).

These persistent, dysfunctional patterns point to the possibility of concealed, psychological underpinnings—processes unavailable for conscious reflection because their very purpose is to divert attention away from disturbing feelings while ostensibly serving a more honorable purpose (Clarke, 1999; Miller & Rice, 1967; Pratt & Crosina, 2016). From our perspective, it is precisely because such dynamics are unavailable to consciousness that they persist. Hence, we turned to systems psychodynamics—a multilevel, psychological perspective on unconscious processes in organizations (see Jaques, 1955; Menzies-Lyth, 1990; Miller & Rice, 1967; for a review, see Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2020), predicated on values of dignity, equality, and fair treatment for all (Pasmore & Khalsa, 1993)—as the basis for our theorizing.

We are not the first to recognize how unconscious forces shape race relations, but our focus differs from previous theorists'. Nearly seventy years ago, Allport (1954) pointed to such forces when he posited that the roots of discrimination and racism lie in dominant groups' unconscious tendency to externalize their own problems of discomfort and feelings of weakness

onto a scapegoat. Rather than focus, as he did, on the consequences of such scapegoating for subordinated groups, we are interested in explaining dominant groups' psychological process of externalizing, how it is rooted in the unconscious burden they carry from having benefited from a history of systemic oppression, and how they have crafted organizations that necessitate—and hide—what they are doing. These dynamics, we argue, are grounded in dominant groups' illusory sense that “human vulnerability and powerlessness can be overcome by achieving economic and political power and privilege” and the belief that such power and privilege can be attained by contriving sharp distinctions between themselves and “a disempowered and underprivileged other” (Altman, 2006: 56). We share James Baldwin's perspective, as quoted in the preface to this paper, that the resolution to racial injustice thus lies first and foremost in Whites' emotional reckoning with themselves.

We begin by providing an overview of the historical and cultural forces that shaped and justified the particular forms inequality—specifically, White male hegemony—has taken in modern U.S. organizations.² As backdrop to our theory, we explain how White male hegemony can generate deep-seated psychic distress in those White men who aspire, consciously or unconsciously, to master the practices that signify a masculine self—an idealized version of the self that exhibits the unerring ability “to exert control [and] to resist being controlled” (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009: 280)—because tacitly they know that such an ideal is unattainable and the status awarded for appearing to achieve it precarious (Bosson, Vandello, Burnaford, Weaver, & Wasti, 2009) and undeserved (Knowles, Lowery, Chow, & Unzueta, 2014). We then draw on existing theory and research to propose how these White men may use projective identification, an unconscious psychological defense, to deflect this psychic distress; how those in power create

² Though we focus on U.S. organizations, the presence and far-reaching consequences of White male hegemony are global (Connell, 2000).

and propagate organizational arrangements as an unconscious social defense to bolster this psychological defense and maintain the power/status hierarchy; and how, in upholding White male hegemony, these organizational arrangements ironically fuel the very threats to self-worth and status that can put White men on the defense in the first place. This defense system helps explain the persistence of racial inequality in U.S. organizations and lies at the heart of our theory. Finally, we explain how leaders can take advantage of this moment in time, when a rising crescendo of voices is demanding racial justice, to help forge a “new normal”—a better normal in which these defensive organizing processes no longer hold sway and developmental ones take their place, paving the way toward greater racial equality. Implicit in our theorizing is a psychodynamic view of people as both devoted to defenses and desiring of development and of organizations as vehicles that can either dehumanize or rehumanize their members.

Our theory names White men as the dominant group in U.S. organizations because they indisputably hold the lion’s share of high-level positions and treats Black people as the archetypal subordinate group because of their long history of systemic subjugation in the U.S., beginning with the widespread institutionalization of Black slavery. Importantly, whereas all White men operate within a society that valorizes White men who demonstrate idealized masculinity, and penalizes those who fall short (e.g., Connell, 1995), we make no assumption that all (or only) White men personally aspire to such images nor that when they do they necessarily use these defense mechanisms to stave off image threats. When we refer to White men as a group, we are pointing to their experience as members of the dominant group in U.S. society, even if they personally do not feel dominant or exercise dominance. When we refer to “dominants,” we are sometimes referring to those White men who hold positions of formal power and sometimes to those who, with or without conscious awareness, strive to achieve

dominance by projecting an idealized masculine image. We similarly make no assumption that all Black people are subordinate nor that Black people are the only subordinated group in U.S. society. Finally, our approach to disruption recognizes that not all parties to these dynamics will have an interest in or the fortitude to address the problem.

THE EMERGENCE OF WHITE MALE HEGEMONY IN THE UNITED STATES

Historical Backdrop

Understanding the social, political, and economic forces that shaped the founding of the United States (U.S.) is essential to understanding inequality in modern U.S. organizations and, specifically, the forms White male hegemony has taken in these organizations. Central to that history was the New World's promise of freedoms and economic opportunities that had been unavailable to the early settlers in the class-locked, religiously restrictive societies of Europe. Previously deprived of land, mobility, and the ability to self-determine, new Americans of European ancestry had a voracious appetite for freedom (McCraw, 2012). By the time the country had gained independence from Britain, the idealized image of the new American man was, according to an article published at the time, "individualistic, self-reliant, pragmatic, hard-working, a stolid man of the land free to pursue his self-defined goals and, in the process, rejecting the ideological zeal that had racked Europe for centuries" (de Crèvecoeur, 1782). These American ideals provided the cultural foundation for capitalism—a "free" market economy that produced not only things to be sold to others through voluntary agreements, but also selves, "self-made" new American men.

But these ostensibly self-made men were made at the expense of bodies who were denied selfhood, which is to say inequality was fundamental to this system: Slavery was vital to its emergence (Beckert & Desan, 2018; Beckert & Rockman, 2018; Fox-Genovese, 2000; Patterson,

1979; Rockman, 2014; Rosenthal, 2018), and exploitation was integral to its functioning (Henderson, 2020). “[C]apitalism generates and perpetuates unjust forms of economic inequality; it narrows democracy and restricts the freedom of many while enormously enhancing the freedom of some; and it cultivates cultural ideals that endorse individual competitive success over collective welfare” (Wright, 2021).

To conceal these pernicious features of capitalism, racial categories were constructed, reified by slavery. In order to access opportunities in American society purportedly distributed on the basis of individual merit, New Americans of European ancestry constructed themselves as racially unmarked, identifying as “White.” The establishment of a racial hierarchy, which positioned Whiteness at the top and Blackness at the bottom, thus redefined American freedom from propertied independence to being considered “White,” not a slave and not Black (Rockman, 2011; Roediger, 1999). Whiteness became a source of privilege and protection, a credential granting the right to hold power over (at least some) others and to exclude those deemed to be non-White (Harris, 1993). For U.S. political elites seeking to sustain their power, this racial hierarchy helped stifle class tensions among Whites by perpetuating American ideals of individualism and self-reliance while obfuscating the material living conditions of many “White” American workers, which plainly contradicted these ideals (Du Bois, 1935). Wage laborers of European descent, for their part, were able to use the privilege of Whiteness to differentiate themselves from actual slaves and to dull the familiar indignities of their circumstances. “Freedom” was thus predicated on dominance, replicating the very imperial system these new American men claimed to have rejected.

Thus, even when Whiteness did not offer material economic benefits, it still garnered a “public and psychological wage,” a public deference that enhanced Whites’ sense of self (Du

Bois, 1935: 700). Some have posited that this American construction of “White” and “Black” derived from Whites’ emotional needs. As Toni Morrison (1992: 38) argued, to the Pilgrims, who themselves were fleeing persecution, “[n]othing highlighted freedom—if it did not in fact create it—like slavery.” In short, the privilege of Whiteness, relative to the stain of being Black, enabled White Americans to ward off any sense of potential un-freedom.

White Hegemonic Masculinity at Work

To justify the White-male monopoly on resources and control in modern organizations, processes of evaluation and exclusion define Whiteness as the norm and conflate merit with idealized images of White masculinity (Acker, 1990; Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Ray, 2019). These processes give White men the pretext, however dubious, for being seen, and seeing themselves, as deserving. They shape the archetypal White man’s sense of self-worth “from the outside in” by setting the standards against which he is measured, compared, found lacking, and corrected (Covaleski, Dirsmith, Heian, & Samuel, 1998: 298). At the same time, his need for affirmation leads him to appraise himself, using these same standards to gauge his self-worth “from the inside out” (Covaleski et al., 1998: 299).

These standards align with the signifiers of “hegemonic masculinity,” or a culture’s “most honored way of being a man” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005: 832). In modern U.S. organizations, where the hegemonic masculine ideal is “rich, White, [and] heterosexual,” (Berdahl, Cooper, Glick, Livingston, & Williams, 2018: 426; see also Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009: 284), such masculinity is assertive, athletic, confident, courageous, competitive, autonomous, strong, stoic, decisive, agentic, rational, and emotionally detached (e.g., Berdahl et al., 2018; Collinson & Hearn, 1994; Connell, 1987, 1995; Kimmel, 1994). White men’s displays of these traits confer status (Ridgeway, 1991; Tiedens, 2001), legitimate their accrual of power

(Ridgeway & Correll, 2000), and authorize them to claim privilege, elicit deference, and resist exploitation (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). In short, “[t]he hegemonic definition of manhood is a man in power, a man with power, and a man of power” (Kimmel, 1994: 125). Whereas few men embody these idealized images, and even archetypal men exhibit contradictions (Kondo, 1990), many White men aspire to them, and are judged—by themselves and by others—accordingly.

From this context arises a subterranean reservoir of anxiety for White men seeking to prove their fit with this ideal—anxiety stemming from the competitive and ultimately futile nature of this endeavor (Bosson, et al., 2009; Willer et al., 2013), together with these men’s implicit knowledge that the privilege being White and male confers is undeserved and therefore illegitimate (Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). Hegemonic masculinity is an identity some White men strive to achieve by beating “lesser men” in contests of manhood (Kerfoot & Knights, 1993: 672). Those who seek it are “preoccupied with . . . differentiating self by out-performing others [and] validating self by negating others” (Barrett, 1996: 141). Such seekers are “never secure,” however, as they need others “to affirm and reaffirm to themselves and to others who and what they are” (Barrett, 1996: 141; see also Berdahl, et al., 2018; Bird, 1996; Ely & Meyerson, 2010; Messner, 2005). Empirical research on “precarious manhood” substantiates this view of White men as, on average, chronically insecure, perpetually plagued by doubts (Bosson, et al., 2009). In this vein, Jacqueline Rose (2021) calls out the “fraudulent authority” of hegemonic men who, steeped in the unattainable ideal of unmitigated omnipotence, mastery, and prowess, experience recurring if unacknowledged distress related to their inevitable failure to live up to that ideal. Adding insult to injury, White men tacitly know that the competition they stand to lose takes place in a system that is rigged in their group’s favor (Craig & Richeson, 2014; Dover, Major, & Kaiser, 2016; Knowles, et al., 2014; Phillips & Lowery, 2018; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). In

sum, White men competing in this game live in a house of cards, an internal, psychological structure precariously balanced together, perennially in danger of collapse.

Being a White man in U.S. organizations thus risks carrying a concealed cost imposed by a history of systemic oppression in which White men, as a group, have overwhelmingly been the principal beneficiaries (Alderfer, 1982): a secret sense of unworthiness within which hide feelings of shame, anxiety, fear, incompetence, ordinariness, vulnerability. Foundational among these is shame, the “distressed apprehension” of oneself as “lesser” (Bartky, 1990: 86), a feeling of being “small . . . inferior to others . . . wanting to sink into the ground” (Maibom, 2010: 20). At its core is fear of abandonment, for “[b]ehind the fear of shame stands not the fear of hatred but the fear of *contempt*” (Piers & Singer, 1953:16, italics in the original). In our theory, such feelings arise for White men experiencing a threat to their hegemonic masculinity, stoking the fear, “I am inadequate,” together with the fear, “I am undeserving” (Knowles et al., 2014; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008)—fears that call into question the legitimacy of their group’s position atop the race-gender hierarchy. We call this experience White hegemonic masculinity threat, and it is unconscious. We now turn to systems psychodynamics to develop our theory of how that threat, and the way some White men defend against it, lies at the heart of racial inequality’s persistence.³

³ As scholars have noted, women and racial minority men labor under the same White hegemonic masculine norms as do White men (Berdahl, et al., 2018), but conforming to them is more complicated for these groups: Women (Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012), especially White women (Livingston, Rosette, & Washington, 2012) as well as Black men (Livingston & Pearce, 2009) face penalties for displaying White hegemonic masculine behaviors, such as dominance. Moreover, these groups bear a different set of costs from a history of systemic oppression, both psychic and material. Hence, to the extent members of these groups do strive to demonstrate such traits, they are likely to do so more equivocally, in more careful and circumscribed ways, and when their status on these traits is threatened, their emotional and behavioral reactions are likely to differ from White men’s. Consequently, these groups’ relationship to hegemonic masculinity is outside our theory’s scope.

A SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMIC THEORY EXPLAINING THE PERSISTENCE OF RACIAL INEQUALITY

Echoing James Baldwin's provocative claim with which we began this article, scholars have noted that "the core problem of inequality lay not with Blacks . . . nor even with Whites' perceptions of Blacks; rather, inequality ultimately [stems] from how Whites [feel] about themselves in a purportedly meritocratic and democratic society" and their defensive reactions to such feelings (Knowles et al., 2014: 594). We agree and further contend that how many White men, in particular, feel about themselves in this regard is tied to their experiences of White hegemonic masculinity threat; moreover, we maintain that inequality persists in part because of an elaborate system of unconscious psychological and social defenses dominants mobilize to help keep that threat at bay.

Whereas previous scholars have focused on individual-level defenses, as when men double down on dominance to fend off masculinity threats (e.g., Willer, Rogalin, Conlon, & Wojnowicz, 2013) or Whites deny White privilege to deflect meritocratic threats (Knowles et al., 2014; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008), our theory is multilevel, implicating individuals, groups, and organizations. The psychological defense mechanism at the core of our theory is projective identification, an unconscious strategy in which White men facing threats to their hegemonic masculine identity seek to ease their distress by attempting to induce Black people to experience it on their behalf. Meanwhile, dominants construct organizations to serve as an unconscious social defense, ways of organizing that bolster this psychological defense and maintain their position in the power/status hierarchy. Unlike adaptive defenses, which meter rather than remove affect, reduce pain rather than anesthetize, and channel rather than block feelings (Vaillant, 1993), these defenses are maladaptive as they enable actors to stave off disturbing affect by

acting as if it belongs elsewhere (the psychological defense), while at the same time promulgating organizational discourses (the social defense) that facilitate—and conceal—what they are doing. Together, these defenses disconnect actors from reality and lock racial inequality in place.

The psychodynamic, affect-laden conception of the unconscious in our theory is distinct from the more purely cognition-oriented unconscious that appears in theories of implicit bias. Whereas implicit bias is an automatic, involuntary judgment stemming from “introspectively unidentified (or inaccurately identified) traces of past experience” (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995: 15), psychodynamic constructs are imbued with unconscious intentionality, specifically, the wish to defend against anxiety and other unwanted emotions that arise in the course of human relating, working, and organizing (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2022). As such, the unconscious of implicit bias amounts to an undesirable, unintended interference with deliberate judgments that, once detected, people are consciously motivated to minimize. In contrast, the unconscious of systems psychodynamics erects an elaborate defense system culminating in persistent organizational dysfunctions that people are unconsciously motivated to maintain (Jaques, 1955; Menzies, 1960). Finally, while any mode of bias against subordinated groups (or in favor of dominant ones) reproduces inequality, the unconscious activity in the brain that mediates implicit bias operates independent of power relations; in contrast, the unconscious activity of systems psychodynamics is shot through with power relations at multiple levels of analysis, from the individual to the institutional (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2022).

Projective Identification

Projective identification unfolds as follows. A person experiences a threat to their self-worth and responds by splitting off the unwanted, distress-inducing “parts” of themselves;

projecting them onto an external object, or “other,” by contriving those parts as belonging to the other and not to the self; and treating the other in a manner intended to evoke in them an experience analogous to the projector’s split-off parts (Clarke, 1999, 2003; Klein, 1959; for organizational examples of projective identification, see Ashforth & Reingen, 2014; Petriglieri, Petriglieri, & Wood, 2018). The recipient may or may not be induced to behave in a manner consistent with the projection; the aim is for the recipient to feel the emotional distress attached to the projection (Clarke, 2003), thus enabling the projector to unconsciously identify with it as “not-me.” Hence for projective identification to occur, the projection must resonate in some way with the recipient; the recipient must have some way of identifying with it even as the particular projected experience does not actually originate with them. The projector then selectively ignores real aspects of the other that may contradict or invalidate the projection (Shapiro & Carr, 1991), leaving the projector with a strong, clarifying sense of a purified self in contrast to a diminished other (Clarke, 2003). In this way, the other serves as object in relation to whom the projector can (dis)identify with their disowned, disturbing parts. To see the other realistically, as the other truly is, or to test whether the other is truly as the projector imagines, would require the projector to recognize the split-off parts as their own, which would be deeply threatening. In short, “[p]rojection,” writes Dalal (2002: 32), “is a way of hiding things from oneself.”

This (a)voiding of one’s unwanted parts is a form of unconscious identity work (see Petriglieri & Stein, 2012), undertaken in the spirit of the old adage, “the best defense is a good offense.” Although people employ a variety of unconscious defense mechanisms, such as denial and repression, to fend off psychic distress, projective identification is unique in that the projector’s intrapsychic maneuver is not a solo undertaking; it involves recruiting a partner (Gabriel, 1999; Horowitz, 1985): The projector manages disturbing elements within the self by

offloading them onto an “other” and enlisting the other to take up those elements on their behalf—offensive tactics that serve to defend against threats to the self (Bion, 1961; Petriglieri & Stein, 2012). The other may or may not, in fact, take up those elements; what matters for projective identification to complete is that the projector is able to imagine or contrive evidence that the target has done so.

As a real-life example, think of J. Edgar Hoover, a closeted homosexual who “for half a century waged war on homosexuals” (Summers, 2011). In projective identification terms, he can be said to have been disavowing a shameful part of his self, a part that threatened his self-image as a “good” person and thus evoked in him great shame; locating that part in others, where he could more safely demonize it; and persecuting those others as a way to simultaneously detoxify himself and invoke in them the very experience of shame he wished to avoid. By repudiating others for an identity he could not tolerate in himself—an identity widely regarded at the time as morally reprehensible—and imagining his repudiation evoked in them feelings of shame, he could keep his own shame at bay, safely contained in others. In this perspective, his shame, as well as these moves to unburden himself of it, was unconscious. This analysis is consistent with research showing that men who expressed stronger negative attitudes toward gay men reported less—but evidenced more—physical arousal when watching videos of gay male intercourse (Adams, Wright, & Lohr, 1996), suggesting that homophobic men who are sexually attracted to other men may denigrate gay men as a cover for their own “lurking insecurities” (Willer et al., 2013: 981).

Other studies provide additional evidence that people defend against negative appraisals of themselves by appraising others negatively, which subsequently restores their positive self-view. For example, compared to unthreatened participants, those whose self-image was

threatened rated a target lower on the threatened dimension and, subsequently, themselves higher (Schimel, Greenberg, & Martens, 2003). Moreover, self-image-threatened people are more likely to target those belonging to negatively stereotyped groups when seeking to offload negative evaluations of themselves because, unconsciously, it is easier for them to imagine that members of such groups would be able to identify with such projections. Threatened people rated members of negatively stereotyped groups more negatively than did non-threatened people and threatened people who were blind to the target's group memberships (Fein & Spencer, 1997; Govorun, Fuegen, & Payne, 2006); they also rated themselves as more dissimilar to the negatively stereotyped target (Fein & Spencer, 1997).

Projective Identification and White-Male/Black Relations

In our theory, the projectors are White men who face threats to their hegemonic masculine identity, and the likely “others” upon whom they would likely project their feelings of inadequacy, shame, and undeservedness are Black people, a dynamic that is deeply embedded in the country's history of institutionalized racism.⁴ As the archetypal man in power, with power, and of power, White heterosexual men ironically may be the most chronically insecure, held to the highest standard and thus most at risk of failing to measure up. As a result, White male privilege cuts two ways: Preordained by history and culture to occupy the most privileged position in the social order, White men nevertheless must reckon with the internal tensions and contradictions that arise from the tacit knowledge that they are not—cannot possibly be—the man they have been cracked up to be and that their group may not fully deserve the privileged position it occupies in society's power-status hierarchy (Knowles et al., 2014). These internal

⁴ Our theory is situated in modern U.S. organizations, but it should speak as well to organizations in other parts of the world, where men hold the lion's share of power and similarly risk failing to meet their culture's hegemonic masculine standards (Connell, 2000). We would expect that these men might similarly turn to subordinated groups as receptacles for the distress that arises when those failures become salient.

tensions and contradictions set the stage for protective measures to kick in, setting some white men on a course of projective identification.

We theorize that Black people as a group, whose skin color physically marks them as “other” in a White-dominated society, who are marginalized and stereotyped as “unmeritorious,” and whose relative powerlessness in the societal power-status hierarchy leaves many individual Black people ill equipped to reject denigration, are an easily accessible target for dominants’ projections (Rustin, 1991). White men who are unconsciously grappling with threats to their hegemonic masculine identity, turn to “a known quarry”—Black people (Davids, 2011: 44)—as a convenient receptacle for their own “bad” feelings. To complete the process, threatened White men treat Black people in a manner unconsciously intended to evoke in them the very parts these White men have split off—feelings of incompetence, shame, undeservedness. With such feelings safely deposited in Black people, White men experiencing threats to their hegemonic masculine identity are able to restore their personal sense of self-worth and merit. These manipulations are unconscious; hence the motivations underlying them remain invisible to the projector and, often, to the recipient as well (see Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008).

In our theory, White men’s projective identification with Black people can take many forms. Consider microaggressions, the more or less subtle, often unconscious acts of exclusion or devaluation that dominant group members direct towards subordinate group members (Jana & Baran, 2020; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Wells, 1998). Such acts include explicitly derogatory verbal or nonverbal attacks intended to hurt others; rude, insensitive disparagements of heritage or identity; statements or actions that impose, presume, or venerate White perspectives and cultural practices over Black ones (Rabelo, Robotham, & McCluney, 2021); and treatment that excludes, negates, or nullifies others’ thoughts, feelings, or experiences (Sue,

Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007), also known as “gas-lighting” (Sweet, 2019). From a systems psychodynamic perspective, all can be defensive maneuvers by which dominants unconsciously seek to relocate their own anxiety-provoking experiences in denigrated others, who might then carry those feelings for them.

**** INSERT TABLE 1 HERE ****

The nuanced particulars of how these interactions play out—what triggers a threat, which Black person is targeted, and how that person is treated—are shaped by people’s personal attributes as well as their other intersecting social identities, such as their gender, class, and sexual orientation. Table 1 provides examples of how this might play out. While the White man in each example may believe his behavior to be innocent, perhaps even well intended, all of these actions subtly communicate a derogatory racial message or assumption to the target (Jackson & Tewfik, 2022) and, from a systems psychodynamic perspective, could be part of an unconscious maneuver to offload psychic distress onto a Black colleague. As the examples illustrate, the particular dimension of hegemonic masculinity on which White men may feel threatened is likely conditioned on other aspects of their identity—whichever of their personal attributes or social identities are least aligned with the White hegemonic masculine ideal. We contend that projectors in turn are likely to choose Black targets whose personal or social identities would appear to make them most susceptible to feeling denigrated on those dimensions. Moreover, we would expect to see an uptick in projective identification at times when threats are likely to be high, for instance, when lay-offs are pending, business is down, or the organization’s hierarchy is in flux, followed by a boost to projectors’ self-image on the dimensions such threats jeopardized.

Because projective identification involves not only an agent projecting out unwanted parts but also a target who is the intended recipient of those parts, several questions arise: How

might Black people respond to projections sent their way; what price do they pay; and what, if anything, do they gain in this process? We speculate that the virulent and persistent racism that has dominated the U.S. since its founding has produced a power differential between these two groups—White men and Black people—so great that many Black people may have little choice in the matter: They participate in the process without benefit, and they do so because not to risks further marginalization or rejection.

At a minimum, we would expect projective identification to impose on Black targets the burden of what Du Bois called “double consciousness,” or “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (Du Bois, 1903: 3). In our theory, this pervasive imposition of “the White gaze,” whereby Black people are “viewed, interpolated, and evaluated through the lens of whiteness” (Rabelo et al., 2021: 1852), takes a toll on them that accumulates “like a thousand paper cuts as opposed to one deep wound” (Miller & Garran, 2008: 97). Its persistent presence can prompt Black people to take up various forms of accommodation—for example, proving their capabilities, demonstrating their fit with White cultural norms, feigning or hiding emotions so Whites will feel comfortable (Wingfield & Alston, 2014: 281)—that in turn threaten their sense of agency and dignity (see Rabelo et al., 2021, for such effects on Black women, in particular), foster feelings of isolation and marginalization (Feagin & Sikes, 1995), and maintain the racial hierarchy (Ray & Pirofoy, 2019; Wingfield & Alston, 2014). Research on stereotype threat has well documented the psychic distress and subsequent underperformance of Black people when faced with negative stereotypes about their competence (Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). From a systems psychodynamic perspective, many Black people thus may have little recourse but to take in the projected feelings of distress, even as they may resist

internalizing the derogatory content.

As the examples above illustrate, and consistent with embedded intergroup theory (Alderfer, 1982; Alderfer & Smith, 1982), projective identification in our theory is not simply an interaction between individuals; it is also an interaction between members of various social identity groups, shaped by the socio-political and historical factors that mark relations among those groups. Hence, what may appear on the surface to be a racist, insensitive, or culturally incompetent interpersonal interaction represents at a deeper level an intergroup dynamic: A White man, bearing the psychic weight of his dominant group membership, unconsciously turns to a Black person, whose subordinate group membership makes them a vulnerable recipient of the White man's split-off parts. Black people for their part typically lack the institutional power to openly reject those unwanted parts, leaving many holding others' psychic distress.

The Defense System: Social Defenses and the Institutionalization of White Men's Projective Identification in Organizations

In systems psychodynamic theory, people come together in social institutions, such as work organizations, in no small measure to erect social defenses—features of organizational life, such as a workplace structure, practice, or prevalent discourse—that bolster their individual defenses against disturbing emotions whose sources they cannot consciously control; such sources could be outside threats, internal conflicts, or aspects of their work (Jaques, 1955; Menzies, 1960; Miller, 1993; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2020). Social institutions thus serve not only explicit, agreed upon functions, such as an organization's mission or a team's stated task, but also unconscious protective functions. “Individuals invest in institutional features that sustain convenient illusions, and then behave as if those features are necessary even if they are dysfunctional” (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2020: 424). In short, organization members “animate

and protect institutional features that help protect [them].” (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2020: 424).

Although social defenses operate across a broad spectrum of employees, high-power groups have the position and standing to institute features that are especially well-suited to fending off their anxieties while also preserving the power status quo. Research has shown that organizations’ social defenses are more effective in protecting powerful groups from confronting their unconscious emotional conflicts and that these asymmetric protections help maintain and justify asymmetries in power (Kahn, 1993; Padavic et al., 2020).

Individuals’ psychological defense mechanisms, bolstered by social defenses, constitute an organization’s defense system. The classic example of a defense system comes from a study of nurses (Menzies, 1960). To fend off collectively held anxiety raised by daily confrontations with illness and death, nurses used psychological defense mechanisms, such as depersonalization, to distance themselves from patients by expressing indifference or cynicism toward their work. Projective identification between senior and student nurses further relieved senior nurses’ anxiety (although at students’ expense): Senior nurses routinely treated the student nurses as if they were incompetent, splitting off the parts of themselves that felt overwhelmed and projecting them onto their more vulnerable junior counterparts. These defense mechanisms were reinforced by the organization’s social defense—work practices that fortified nurses’ disconnection from patients. For example, they routinely referred to patients by their diseases or bed numbers (e.g., “the liver in bed 10”) and instituted shifts that reduced their attachments to patients.

Defense systems divert attention away from deeply disturbing emotions and, by unconscious design, create a substitute problem. In the nurse example above, the defense system interfered in nurses’ ability to perform their caretaking tasks and rendered the work meaningless,

which gave rise to another problem: student nurses' burnout and turnover. While troublesome, this problem was less threatening than the underlying anxiety raised by encounters with mortality, and for this reason served as a useful substitute problem on which to focus instead. The substitute problem remains unresolvable precisely because members are invested in keeping its sustaining mechanism—the defense system—both intact and invisible so that it can serve its protective purpose. “The operation of a . . . defense system is thus circular and self-reinforcing” (Padavic et al., 2020: 67).

In our theory, modern U.S. organizations operate as they do in part so that dominants can, unconsciously, pool their internal conflicts and externalize them at the collective level via social defenses (Jaques, 1955); that is, dominants have the power not only to project but also to organize in ways that bolster their projections and justify their actions. These ways of organizing are a social defense—discourses and associated policies and practices that dominants have woven so tightly into the fabric of the modern organization that, seamlessly, they protect dominants' emotional and economic interests and maintain the status quo, as if any alternative way of organizing would be anathema to American cultural values.

We focus on three such discourses—meritocracy, colorblindness, and rationality—each imported from the wider culture and etched into the blueprint for modern organizations, where they retain their currency precisely because they serve these protective functions. While social scientists have well documented how each of these discourses is linked to organizational policies and practices that reproduce inequality (see, e.g., McNamee & Miller, 2009, on meritocracy; Ray & Pirofof, 2019, on colorblindness; and Ferguson, 1984, on rationality), we are the first to theorize how they function together as solidifying elements of a social defense. (See Table 2 for examples of policies and practices associated with each discourse, together with research

documenting how they reproduce inequality.) Specifically, these discourses uphold a version of organizational reality that masquerades as “the natural order of the world” (Dalal, 2002: 187), just and even “fair,” while tacitly supporting dominants’ disowning of unwanted parts and maintaining a racial hierarchy in which Black people are often the unwitting recipients of those parts. This defense system diverts attention away from White men’s psychic distress and contrives a substitute problem: a dearth of “qualified” Black people. While troubling, this substitute problem is less threatening to White men than the real one—work contexts that threaten their sense of masculine self-worth. Ironically, and in a twist new to systems psychodynamic theory, this social defense fuels the threat that gave rise to the defense system in the first place.

**** INSERT TABLE 2 HERE ****

The discourse of meritocracy and attendant policies and practices operate as part of the organization’s unconscious social defense by reassuring White men of their deservedness relative to Blacks and paving the way for projective identification. Systems based on “merit” maintain that White men have earned their dominant status just as Black people warrant their subordination. By personalizing outcomes resulting from systemic racism, this discourse not only legitimizes the racial hierarchy but also locates the problem of racial disparities in Black people, who simply fail to measure up. This construction parallels White men’s unconscious fears about their own qualifications, making Black people an easily accessible target for White men’s projections. Moreover, Black people’s presumed inadequacies become the problem on which the organization focuses, deflecting attention away from White men’s distress.

The discourse of colorblindness guarantees that unconscious dynamics regarding race remain undiscussable—and therefore unaddressable. This guarantee effectively nullifies the

impact of racist historical legacies, denies racism's systemic embeddedness, and takes the problem of racial inequality, racist treatment, or racist policies off the table. Rendering race invisible gives cover to the unconscious defensive maneuvers of those who seek to deny their racial privilege. The upshot is a woefully impoverished, non-racialized account of racial disparities in the workplace, an account that directs attention to the wrong problem: how to "fix" organization members who fail to measure up—a group that just so happens to be disproportionately Black.

The discourse of rationality contributes to the unconscious social defense by pressing organization members to quash feelings and control emotional expressions. It discourages White men from acknowledging their distress, and so it goes underground, banished from conscious awareness, only to surface in Black coworkers, who have no recourse but to bear the burden in silence (Matias, 2016).

In sum, these mutually reinforcing organizational features fuel the projective identification processes that reproduce and perpetuate racial inequality. Together, these discourses give dominants the means not only to press Black people into service to meet their unconscious needs but also to cover their tracks in the process (Alderfer, 1982; Kahn, 1993; Voronov & Vince, 2012).

All the while, the defense system creates and perpetuates a substitute problem—a scarcity of "meritorious" Black people. This problem-focus diverts attention away from White men's worries about their own lack of merit. Moreover, a small but visible reserve of "unqualified" others, numerous and Black, bolsters the illusion that White men are more competent and thus deserving. For companies "committed to diversity," the substitute problem manifests itself in much hand wringing about the challenge of hiring and promoting a racially diverse workforce.

Consider, for example, the “pipeline problem,” a challenge that cannot be overcome because its root cause has been misspecified. And yet, at an unconscious level, that is precisely the point: Conveniently, by focusing on Black people’s shortcomings while perpetuating a system that defines Black people as falling short, organizations have an unresolvable (and therefore always available) problem to attend to. The result is an invisible, self-reinforcing, protective system that diverts attention away from the real culprit—organizational contexts that conflate merit with idealized images of White masculinity.

Whereas social defenses typically provide protection for a broad swath of employees, however uneven or costly in the long-term, this social defense is more pernicious—not simply a necessary evil but a protection racket for both White men and Black people, in different ways. For White men, these discourses breed the very threat they were designed to quell. Meritocracy promulgates standards that disproportionately propel White men to the top, but the standards are unattainable; colorblindness denies yet covertly perpetuates racial privilege; rationality validates White men for disavowing the disturbing emotions raised by White hegemonic masculinity threat, even as it reinforces the norms that provoke such emotions. Moreover, insistence on rationality stigmatizes the emotional work White men would need to undertake if they were to face the threat and work adaptively with the emotions it raises. Hence, the defense system in our theory is not simply a protective mechanism for White men but also an amplifier of the threat. Black people, for their part, receive no protection from the social defense. Instead, these discourses and attendant policies and practices extort Black people’s complicity by offering (fraudulent) promises of equality and threatening further marginalization, or rejection altogether, should they give voice to the sham. The upshot is a splitting of White men and Black people into two sides: a side that can never win (White men) and a side that can only lose (Black people).

Costs of the Defense System

In keeping with the focus of this paper on the dominant group's experience, we describe the costs of the defense system to White men and the ensuing effects of those costs on the organization more broadly. The costs White men bear for striving to achieve a hegemonic masculine identity are inseparable from the costs they bear for defending themselves against threats to that identity (Hughey & Byrd, 2013).

In our theory, the defense system renders for dominants a partial and distorted view of reality. This distortion leaves dominants ill-equipped to identify their distress or to do the work of reclaiming the parts of themselves they have disowned (Shapiro & Carr, 1991), which can lead them to feel disconnected and alienated from one another and from colleagues from subordinated social identity groups (Alderfer, 1992; Balbus, 2004). As a result, they remain limited in their ability to decode and navigate the realities of racialized and gendered organizations (Leonardo & Porter, 2010) or to understand the meaning and costs—personal, organizational, and societal—of their position (Helms, 2020). Such limitations undermine the very relationships in which these men might learn about how others experience them or gain insight into themselves as racialized beings (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). Moreover, because projectors view others as receptacles for their own disturbing affect (Vaillant, 1993), they have difficulty seeing others and themselves accurately, acknowledging others' competencies, and remedying their own incompetence (Shapiro & Carr, 1991; Petriglieri & Stein, 2012).

Organizations also pay a price: Defense trumps a focus on task, undermining the purposes for which organizations exist (see Jaques, 1955; Menzies-Lyth, 1990): Hospitals exist to provide care, schools to provide education, auto repair shops to fix cars, child welfare agencies to protect children, bookstores to sell books, and so on. When organizations are hijacked by

individual and collective defenses against disturbing emotions, their members are less able to collaborate effectively on behalf of the organization's purposes (see Petriglieri & Stein, 2012, for an illustration of how this dynamic played out at Gucci). Members lose sight of what drew them to the work in the first place. They get stuck expending effort on substitute problems, while ignoring—and perpetuating—real ones. In short, the defense system exacts a steep price, not only on subordinated groups but also on White men and on the primary tasks organizations and their members are meant to perform.

Summary

**** INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE ****

Figure 1 illustrates our process model of how an organization's defense system helps perpetuate racial inequality. Set against the backdrop of capitalism in the U.S., our model begins with organizational work contexts that conflate definitions of merit with idealized images of White masculinity, pressuring White men to emulate an unattainable and fraudulent standard. We propose a process that unfolds as follows: The prospect of failing to meet the standard, together with implicit knowledge that the system is rigged in their favor, gives rise to unconscious psychic distress for some White men; to reduce their internal conflict, they turn to projective identification, an unconscious psychological defense mechanism whereby they externalize their distress by denigrating subordinated others, such as Black people; Black people in turn experience the distress on White men's behalf, enabling White men to safely (dis)identify with it as "not me." Projective identification here plays out not simply as an interaction between individuals (interpersonal) but also as an interaction between members of social identity groups (intergroup), shaped by the socio-political context within which relations between their respective social identity groups are embedded. The organization-level social defense, made up

of prevalent discourses, such as meritocracy, colorblindness, and rationality, operates synergistically with this unconscious process. Together, the psychological and social defenses constitute the defense system, which helps White men fend off the psychic distress arising from threats to their hegemonic masculine identity. At the same time, the social defense comprises the very features of the work context that call for the defense system in the first place, thus simultaneously amplifying the threat and defending against it, further ensnaring White men in a no-win situation. Meanwhile, the defense system contrives a substitute problem—a scarcity of "meritorious" Black people—further diverting White men's attention away from their feelings of inadequacy and shame and giving them an unresolvable, ever-present problem on which to focus. The defense system exacts a price on the organization: the loss of its primary task.

Moderating Conditions

While our theory is a process, not variance, model (Langley, 1999)—a not unreasonable approach given the widespread, long-standing intransigence of racial inequality—it is very likely that organizations, and the people within them, vary in ways that would moderate the process we describe. For instance, White men vary in how much they resist or comply with hegemonic masculine pressures and thus vary in their need to enact defenses. Rather than addressing all potential sources of individual variance, which is beyond the scope of this paper, we speculate briefly on the potentially moderating role of variance in organizational context (Johns, 2006; 2017).

Organization-level features enter our model in two places. First, they shape the work context in ways that give rise to White hegemonic masculinity threat. Research suggests that industries and organizations vary in the extent to which they embrace norms that promote idealized images of masculinity and reward men who best align with them (Berdahl et al., 2018).

The more an organization embraces such norms and reward systems, the more they valorize hegemonic masculine traits such as dominance, strength, and stamina (Levant, Rankin, Williams, Hasan, & Smalley, 2010; Mahalik, 2003); punish weakness, doubt, and emotional expression (Kupers, 2005; Thompson & Pleck, 1986); and permit bullying, hazing, and harassment (Glick, Berdahl, & Alonso, 2018). Second, organization-level features constitute the discourses and associated policies and practices that make up the social defense. Since organizations vary in the extent to which they have institutionalized these features (Amis, Mair, & Munir, 2020; Miller, 1993; Starnski & Son Hing, 2015), and because the social defense amplifies aspects of the work context that give rise to the originating threat, we propose that these two elements of our model—the work context and the social defense—go hand-in-hand as moderators of the degree to which organizations erect the defense system in our theory. The more deeply the discourses of meritocracy, colorblindness, and rationality are embedded in the organization's culture, and the more committed dominants are to upholding these discourses, the more deeply and strongly institutionalized is the White hegemonic masculine ideal. In turn, the greater the threat, the greater the need to erect the defense system to protect against it and the more consistently projective identification is employed. Finally, organizations with stronger, more deeply institutionalized defense systems likely contain more widespread, intractable race disparities and less capacity to focus on their primary tasks.

A SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMIC APPROACH TO DISRUPTING RACIAL INEQUALITY

Racial protests in 2020 raised the public's consciousness and galvanized many senior leaders to call for action against racial injustice (McElwee, 2021). Using systems psychodynamic

concepts, we propose how such a call might be operationalized by actions that senior leaders and their employees can take to dismantle the multilevel system that perpetuates racial inequality.

To disrupt racial inequality requires making a shift from defensive to developmental organizing whereby members of both dominant and subordinate groups have opportunities to take stock of how they are experiencing their work, the organization, and each other so that they might learn new ways of relating, anchored in less simplistic, more realistic views of self and other. The mutual objectification and dehumanization embedded in defensive organizing is antithetical to such learning. Developmental organizing entails moving toward rather than away from complex emotions and interactions; in this process, organization members rehumanize themselves and others, and learn how to work constructively (rather than destructively) together on behalf of the organization's primary tasks.

The approach we propose features two interrelated concepts drawn from systems psychodynamic theory: containment and holding environments. Containment is the psychological experience of being held. It begins in life, ideally, with the parent's holding of a child and graduates to more sophisticated holding over time (Winnicott, 1965). In adult versions, one person offers welcoming acceptance of another, invites the other to show or verbalize seemingly unbearable thoughts and feelings, and then helps the other make sense of those thoughts and feelings without judgment (Bion, 1970; French & Vince, 1999). This metaphorical arms-around experience, which helps people manage and modify their psychic distress (Josselson, 1992), occurs in the context of holding environments: settings that allow for increasingly manageable and interpretable feelings to be reflected on and worked with rather than defended against (Diamond & Allcorn, 2009; Hinshelwood, 2001; Kahn, 2001). Holding

environments enable individuals to be and feel real—to discard the need to falsify or hide a precarious self—and develop emotionally (Josselson, 1992; Winnicott, 1965).

In our approach, holding environments can play a critical containment role at three levels—organizational, intragroup, and intergroup. Organizational holding environments are systems of meaning that senior leaders develop to license, anchor, and motivate members as they struggle with complicated emotional dimensions of their work or relationships. Intragroup holding environments are small-group settings where people who share salient identities, such as White men or Black people, can examine and make sense of their experiences. Intergroup holding environments are small-group settings where White men and members of other racial groups can undertake their primary tasks together with opportunities to reflect on and reconstruct cross-race relationships. We propose that these mutually-reinforcing holding environments are crucial to the work of disrupting persistent racial inequality in organizations.

We continue with our focus on White men. As the dominant group, the locus of power and control, they hold the key to reparative organizational change, even as they are most likely to resist it. This focus is not to suggest that other groups have no role in this process or that engaging only White men would be sufficient, but rather, that racial inequality will persist absent critical groups of White men coming to terms with the full complexity of themselves, of others, and of what it will take to advance racial equality in their organizations. We hold that as White men develop their capacities to acknowledge and adaptively process their psychic distress, they will become more available psychologically to undertake, in collaboration with other groups, systemic organizational change. Of course, White men vary in their ability and willingness to shift from defensive to developmental organizing processes, which in turn puts boundaries—

restrictive or expansive—on the extent to which an organization is able to become a force for racial justice.

Organizational Holding Environments

Senior leaders—as stewards of the organization’s culture and those most responsible for the welfare of the organization and its members—construct an organizational holding environment by articulating compelling reasons to undertake the complex and demanding emotional work of dismantling persistent racial inequality, creating structures and processes to support that work, and being role models by describing elements of their own emotional work publicly (see Ely & Meyerson, 2010; Nadella, Shaw, & Nichols, 2017; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2020). In providing organizing principles—vision, purpose, goals—senior leaders give members ideals to which they can aspire as they grapple with the complexities of race relations. These “larger systems of meaning . . . [can] anchor our lives and comfort us by providing something ‘to hold on to’” (Josselson, 1992: 39). Ideally, these principles are sufficiently compelling that at least some White men see the value of disrupting a status quo they may long have been committed to maintaining. In other words, senior leaders need to motivate White men to reorient toward goals that are more compelling than psychic self-defense (see Ely & Kimmel, 2018). At the same time, these principles can make clear to all organization members that senior leaders are awake to, and taking steps toward dismantling, racial inequality—steps that call on White men, including those in senior leadership, to consider how they may have participated in maintaining it. These principles also assure those in racially subordinated groups that their role will not be primarily to educate their White counterparts but instead to examine and learn from their own experience.

Senior leaders ground an organizational holding environment by inviting members into

the shared task of developing non-defensive cross-race working relationships that serve the organization and members alike (Shapiro & Carr, 1991); focusing member attention on the need for both learning and behavioral shifts in order to take up the shared task (Mosse, 1994); and defining the organization as a site where members learn to develop sophisticated views of themselves, views that acknowledge and reintegrate previously split-off parts (Brown & Starkey, 2000). In this process, senior leaders make clear that it is not subordinated racial groups who need to be “fixed” but the whole system that must develop and change, starting with the top (Alderfer, 1991).

The personal trigger that inspires senior leaders to start down this path may come from different places. It might be from a sense of moral outrage about racial injustice. It might be that the recent public reckoning brings to consciousness their own felt shame over their collusion in sustaining racially unjust systems. It might be a personal trauma that ignites a commitment to creating a workplace that honors people’s humanity (for an example, see Nadella et al., 2017). It might be from the deep satisfaction they anticipate feeling by helping create a more humanitarian society. Or it might be because they are deeply committed to their organization’s purpose and have come to understand how persistent racial inequality, and the dysfunctional working relationships that sustain it, undermine that purpose.

We anticipate that while a number of senior leaders are likely thus motivated, it is the relatively rare senior leader who has the legitimacy, political capital, and leadership capabilities to create and maintain an organizational holding environment for this work; they can, however, develop them. Scholars note how people can develop, for example, growth mindsets (Dweck, 2006) and learning orientations (Senge, 2006); humility and an awareness that they might not know what they do not know (Morris, Brotheridge, & Urbanski, 2005); and more complex ways

of thinking about organizational issues at multiple levels of analysis (Alderfer, 1982). We also expect that senior leaders will benefit greatly from working with external consultants skilled in the theory and practice of system-psychodynamics and embedded intergroup theory (Alderfer, 1991). Such consultants can bolster the will of senior leaders as they face backlash and their own regressive retreats from the complex and challenging work of disrupting the status quo.

Intragroup Holding Environments

Taking a systems psychodynamic view, we hold that the initial work of organization members who choose to enlist in the struggle for workplace racial equality is, at its core, intrapsychic and relational. In practice, this means giving White men opportunities to identify and own, rather than defend against, fears, anxieties, and other disturbing emotions that beleaguer them, including psychic distress they may have felt around threats to their masculinity. It also means, in parallel, subordinated racial groups sharing and making sense of the psychic distress they may have experienced at work, how they handled it, and how they want to respond going forward. The model here is individual therapy, in which the individual, together with a skilled clinician who can provide the experience of holding, learns to identify and manage complex emotions as the individual strives toward more reality-based forms of relating (Shapiro & Carr, 1991). The workplace corollary is the intragroup holding environment: relational space in which willing and able individuals who share salient social identities come together to do the intrapsychic work necessary to contain and work with their emotions.

More specifically, it is a space in which White men come together, ideally with the help of a White male consultant trained in systems psychodynamic perspectives and embedded intergroup theory, to take up a sequence of reparative work that begins internally and culminates in more authentic, vulnerable, reality-based relations with others (see Vaillant, 1993). They start

this work by coming to terms with the psychic burden of living and working in cultures that conflate merit with idealized images of White masculinity. They share experiences of what it has been like to live their lives as White men; where and from whom they learned how to be White men; what has happened when they have deviated or fallen short of expectations, especially in the workplace; what they did and how they felt at such times. They also consider what benefits they and others have received from their participation in this system as well as the price they have paid, the harm this system has inflicted on others, and the damage their organization's primary tasks have sustained as a result. To the extent that they allow themselves to be vulnerable in this process—no simple matter, given the force of White hegemonic masculine norms—they can develop a growing awareness of their own complexity as individuals composed of different psychic bits, some of which they are proud, others of which they are ashamed, all parts of themselves. Acknowledging and reclaiming those parts is integral to the work of making themselves whole again (Balbus, 2004; Hirschhorn, 1988).

In this process, some White men may uncover what Wendell Berry (1989) called “the hidden wound,” the deep and persistent self-inflicted wound that White men bear from having colluded with systemic racism and the oppression of Black people, a realization that causes feelings of shame, sadness, despair, and guilt (Balbus, 2004; Rasmussen & Salhani, 2010). These feelings are different from those prompted by masculinity threats. The latter feelings arise from a diminished sense of self, unacknowledged and unconscious; the former come from the conscious awareness of having participated in and benefited from others' systematic diminishment. In intragroup holding environments, White men can help one another comprehend and bear rather than defend against this awareness (Kahn, 2001), as they come to terms with the loss of their falsely supreme identity (Zienert-Eilts, 2020). In essence, these holding environments are

identity workspaces (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010) in which White men can learn who they have been and who they might yet become absent the mantle of White hegemonic masculinity.

Self-reparation paves the way to developing more realistic representations of and relationships with Black (and other) coworkers (Balbus, 2004). To get there, White men may need to reckon with how they may “consciously or unconsciously carry images of [Black people] as lesser than ... and scapegoat [them]” (Foldy & Buckley, 2017: 276) or how they may in other ways projectively identify with them. In this process, they may come to see these coworkers as people who are as complex as themselves (Dalal, 2002; Rustin, 1991). In short, our approach rests on the view that the more White men connect to their own humanity, the more willing and able they are to connect to the humanity of others.

Alongside this work, group members can learn about the history of racial inequality (see Kendi, 2016; Wilkerson, 2020) as well as concepts and theory to help them make sense of what they are learning emotionally and experientially, such as different perspectives on racial identity in the workplace (Helms, 2020); limiting discourses of meritocracy, rationality, and colorblindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; McNamee & Miller, 2009; Weber, 1946, 1981); and systems psychodynamic perspectives on race (Clarke, 2003; Rustin, 1991).

Undertaking this work is not for the faint of heart. White men need to have personal, intrinsic motivations for taking it up, as neither external coercion and surveillance nor the constant evoking of persecutory guilt and shame are sufficiently sturdy foundations for change (Alderfer, 1982; Rustin, 1991). Research suggests that outward-focused goals, such as contributing to the well-being of the whole, may be suitable to the task because they are intrinsically compelling: They satisfy a basic human need for relatedness and thus are inherently more rewarding to pursue than inward-focused goals, like proving self-worth (Deci & Ryan,

2000; Sheldon, Ryan, Deci, & Kasser, 2004). A relevant illustration comes from research on offshore oil platform workers: When these men saw that their efforts to prove masculinity compromised the more meaningful goals of safety and community, they were willing to risk their self-image—for instance, to admit having made mistakes—in order to accomplish them (Ely & Meyerson, 2010: 15). Another motivation might be to develop greater competence as a leader in a world riven by racial conflict. As Alderfer (1982: 159) noted, “To contribute even a small part toward solving this problem can be a deeply satisfying experience ... and can call forth the most creative of our impulses.”

We suspect that as the emotional work in these groups becomes difficult, participants will, perhaps inevitably, slide back into familiar defensive modes (Krantz, 2001). Consultants to the intragroup work are critical for helping group members work through their resistance and stay the course. Senior leaders can also help prevent a regressive retreat (Brown & Starkey, 2000) by holding tightly to the vision, purpose, and goals of this work and its importance to the organization and its members. That said, irrespective of how strong the organizational holding environment, we recognize that the demands on some White men may be too great, as they struggle with the tension between the defensive pull of anxiety and the developmental pull of reparation (Hirschhorn, 1988). In short, some may be simply unable to help create a work culture that challenges the masculine conception of organizations (Hirschhorn, 1997). Absent a critical mass of White men committed to undertaking this developmental work, however, we would posit that the prospects for real organizational change are likely fairly grim.

Organization members from subordinated social identity groups can also make use of intragroup holding environments to work through their experiences on the receiving end of projective identification and other elements of the defense system. The task here is similar: for

members to prepare themselves psychologically to work with others in the organization so that they might create realistic working relationships that account for the complexities of race relations. Thus, Black members, for example, would work together in small groups, composed around other identities that may also be salient, such as gender, to identify, make sense of, and manage the complex emotions that arise in their work with White people and one another. Affinity groups could undertake such work with the help of skilled facilitation by Black consultants (see Alderfer, 1982). Such facilitation would help group members understand how projective identification processes, aided by the discourses of meritocracy, colorblindness, and rationality, may help explain some of their experiences; come to terms with their own responses to those experiences; and respond consciously and intentionally going forward (see Clarke, 1999; Rustin, 1991).

Intergroup Holding Environments

The intrapsychic work of White men and others working in their respective racially homogeneous intragroup holding environments is meant to prepare them to relate with one another in ways that attend to rather than simplify the complexities of race relations at work. We focus less on intergroup relating for its own sake and more on how racially mixed groups that include White men can come together to take up their daily work with a commitment to addressing manifestations of inequality, both in their interactions with one another and in the organization more broadly.

This work is best suited for intergroup holding environments: small, cross-race group settings in which members learn to contain and interpret difficult thoughts and feelings that arise, reflecting on what is occurring within and between them, as they go about their daily work together (see Alderfer, 1991). With practice, they might also consider how their interactions may

be representative of intergroup dynamics active in the organization more broadly (Alderfer, 1982). Insight occurs as members reflect together on the “here-and-now” of what they unwittingly re-present of those intergroup dynamics. Intergroup holding environments thus become important reflective spaces for cross-race relations. As Bain (1998: 425) notes, “Organizations that lack reflective space which allows for organizational awareness are asleep to their own behavior. The organization may appear to be awake and responsive, but in fact is acting in a repetitive way without thought or reflection.” Disrupting the repetitive dynamics of racial inequality depends on White men reflecting and learning with and about other members and in real time reworking those dynamics (Foldy & Buckley, 2017).

Such learning will be aided as members establish new norms and learn key skills together: how to surface, frame, and conduct difficult conversations about race and gender; non-defensively and without judgment discuss difficult feelings, including anger, despair, shame; explore unconscious meanings behind people’s actions; solicit, give, and receive difficult feedback; investigate the unintended (at a conscious level) consequences of people’s actions or of the organization’s policies and practices; and, more generally, allow themselves to become appropriately vulnerable with their coworkers (Foldy & Buckley, 2017; Helms, 2020; Leonardo & Porter; 2010). Ideally, these groups are facilitated by a consultant team composed of individuals who share salient social identities with group members and who are trained in systems psychodynamic perspectives and embedded intergroup theory (Alderfer, 1991).

To the extent that key elements of intergroup holding environments become embedded in the daily workings of the organization—in senior teams, staff groups, project teams, and other group configurations—members will have many opportunities to construct together realistic work relations that acknowledge the complexities of race. As they undertake their day-to-day

work, these groups can hold space in which to reflect and learn rather than react. In practice, this means White men and others becoming more mindful of how they are doing their daily work—how, for example, they hire, conduct performance reviews, award bonuses, assign projects, address conflict, manage teams, and innumerable other tasks. Each of these activities becomes an opportunity for organization members to reflect on—and transform—how they approach their work and relate to one another.

Summary

**** INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE ****

Figure 2 depicts our approach to disruption, grounded in systems psychodynamic concepts of containment and holding environments. Senior leaders initiate the work of disrupting persistent racial inequality by offering organizing principles—vision, purpose, goals—and creating an organizational holding environment, an outer layer of containment that licenses, anchors, and motivates members’ intra- and intergroup work. Senior leaders maintain the organizational holding environment by reorienting members away from the substitute problem and keeping them focused on the organization’s primary task. Reparative intrapsychic work is facilitated in separate intragroup holding environments for White men and Black people. Once that work is underway, a third layer of containment, in the form of intergroup holding environments, enables White men and members of other racial groups to join together as they undertake reparative work on behalf of the organization as a whole: reconstructing work practices and policies to support genuine, anti-oppressive collaborations across differences and enabling individual and collective efforts to advance organizational purposes. The intrapsychic work that occurs in intragroup holding environments, and the relational and organizational work that occurs within intergroup holding environments, are mutually reinforcing. Each of these

holding environments gives meaning and momentum to the other. Collectively, the three holding environments enable members to refocus on the primary task of the organization.

DISCUSSION

This paper makes theoretical contributions to three literatures. First, we bring a systems psychodynamic perspective to the organizational inequality literature, which has several advantages. Whereas most inequality scholars focus on mechanisms that explain inequality, we explain its persistence, an undertheorized topic for which this perspective is particularly well-suited. In addition, systems psychodynamics offers a rich conception of the unconscious, one that operates at multiple levels and is imbued with emotion, intentionality, and power asymmetries (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2020); we compare this conception to the inequality literature's more commonly conceived unconscious of implicit racial bias, an individual-level, purely cognitive construct (Banaji, 2005). This move has the potential to deepen extant theories of organizational inequality. For example, we show how the discourses of meritocracy, colorblindness, and rationality, long theorized as drivers of inequality (Ferguson, 1984; McNamee & Miller, 2009; Ray & Pirofoy, 2019; Weber, 1946, 1981), may also serve a covert, defensive function that helps explain why inequality persists. Our theory also points to how extant explanations of inequality may sometimes collude with the defense system we have identified: for example, studies have pointed to "impostor syndrome"—the phenomenon whereby a person, often identified as a woman or racial minority, doubts their skills or accomplishments and fears being exposed as a fraud (Bernard, Lige, Willis, Sosoo, & Neblett, 2017; Calvard, 2018; Tulshyan & Burey, 2021)—as one explanation for race and gender gaps in career attainment. But research shows no sex or race differences in either worries about being an imposter or personal consequences of having such thoughts supports this idea (Tewfik, 2022). Our theory suggests that such scholarly

or cultural attributions may be collective, unconscious attempts to facilitate projections of White men's imposter worries into subordinate groups. We also help explain why DEI interventions have largely failed to deliver on their promise and, moreover, expose how—and why—many such interventions exacerbate the very problem they seek to redress. In their place, we offer a new, potentially more effective approach to advancing racial equality, one that targets White men's psychic distress and the work contexts that give rise to it, heretofore unacknowledged as drivers of racial inequality. Finally, we focus on race, but our theory may be generalizable to other dimensions and manifestations of persistent workplace inequality. At a minimum, this theory contains a rich, potentially generative set of concepts and relationships to investigate in future research, which may lead the field in promising new directions and point the way to addressing the intractability of inequality in organizations.

Our second contribution is to the systems psychodynamic literature. By incorporating insights from embedded intergroup theory, we help flesh out the multilevel nature of systems psychodynamic theory. Specifically, our model shows how interpersonal encounters between coworkers from different identity groups can “carry” societal dysfunction, inevitably recreating in the pair societal relations between those identity groups; how organizations become stages on which those intergroup relations play out; and how societal problems, such as persistent racial inequality, can hijack organizational functioning (Alderfer, 1982; Alderfer & Smith, 1982). Drawing on embedded intergroup theory also furthers the nascent body of work that brings a power-based perspective to systems psychodynamic theory (see Kahn, 1993; 2019; Padavic et al., 2020), again by grounding the defense system in the broader societal context of racial inequality. Whereas previous research has considered defense systems in which members of both dominant and subordinate groups invest in order to fend off shared anxiety (Menzies, 1990;

Miller & Rice, 1967; Padavic et al., 2020), we are the first to develop theory about a defense system that emanates from the distinctive anxieties and defense needs of a dominant social identity group. Moreover, we detail a defense system that ironically amplifies the very threats to self-worth and status that put dominants on the defense in the first place. Thus, we reveal a more pernicious self-sealing defense system than found in past literature. Further, we argue, the societal power imbalance between White men and Black people is so great that the defense system offers no real benefits to Black people. Rather, the virulent and persistent racism that has dominated the U.S. has created the conditions for a violent process of projective identification, one that enforces Black people's collusion, and a social defense that not only fails Black people but also victimizes them in the process. Thus the social defense in our theory is a protection racket for both White men and Black people.

Third, our intersectional theorizing about White men is a contribution to masculinity studies. We offer a theoretical perspective on how White men's efforts to fend off psychic distress raised by organizational contexts that conflate merit with idealized images of dominant masculinity, defined implicitly as White, heterosexual, and class privileged, contribute to the persistence of racial inequality. Whereas previous research has recognized the elite, intersectional (white, monied, heterosexual) nature of hegemonic masculinity and the distress it provokes in White men (e.g., Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009; Berdahl et al., 2018), we are aware of no theory that elaborates the specifically racial component of hegemonic masculinity or addresses how this distress plays out in interactions with members of racially subordinated groups, perpetuating racial inequality. In addition, we further develop the idea of hegemonic masculine identity as a zero-sum endeavor (see, e.g., Berdahl et al., 2018). Masculinity research has documented the zero-sum nature of contests over who best embodies masculine ideals and

accrues resources accordingly. We extend this idea by theorizing a parallel, far less conscious zero-sum dynamic played out over anxieties that arise at the unrelenting prospect of losing such contests in the workplace: the unconscious illusion that one can relieve oneself of shame, fear, incompetence, ordinariness, or vulnerability by provoking those same feelings in others.

Our theory is rich with testable hypotheses in both laboratory and field settings. By drawing on experimental paradigms from literatures on masculinity and White identity management, future research can deepen our theoretical and empirical understanding of White hegemonic masculine identities, the conditions under which threats to it give rise to projective identification, and how these dynamics might vary across cultures. Our research also begs the question of how organizations' hegemonic masculine ideals play out for aprototypical men, who have cross-cutting identities. As men, they belong to the dominant gender group, but on at least one other salient identity dimension, such as race, class, sexual orientation, or age, they belong to a subordinate group (see Purdue-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008, for a discussion of aprototypical men's experiences). Using our theory as a framework, future research can investigate how such men experience and manage the emotional fallout from pressures to conform to hegemonic masculine norms and with what consequences. Finally, our proposed approach to disrupting racial inequality invites field researchers to refine and test our ideas about how multilevel holding environments can be constructed to instill less defensive ways of relating within and across racial groups and in turn foster workplaces in which all members are able to thrive and have their contributions recognized and rewarded accordingly.

CONCLUSION

Our theory helps explain why the problem of racial inequality has been so intractable even as current social movements in the U.S. have spurred organizations to embrace an antiracist

agenda. Missing from current approaches is attention to unconscious dynamics playing out at multiple levels of analysis between members of dominant and subordinate racial groups. As Rustin (1991: 68) argued over 30 years ago, “The tendency to see racism as a system of ideological or false beliefs, to be banished by anti-racist teaching and propaganda, fails to see that its main power lies at an unconscious level.” Hence, it is not enough to raise dominant groups’ consciousness about unconscious bias, microaggressions, or the importance of allyship; they must also be supported as individuals and as a group to recognize and reckon with the emotional fallout from workplace pressures that compel hegemonic masculine striving. Absent a systemic, multilevel framework that centers dismantling psychological and social defenses, the status quo will remain firmly in place.

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Tables and Figures

TABLE 1
Illustrating Projective Identification through Examples of Microaggressions

Target	Projector's behavior	Projector's psychic distress	Projector's unconscious intention	Citation
Well-educated Black person	Exclaims "You're so articulate!"	Insecurity about intelligence or lack of a college degree	To trigger distress in the target by raising the negative stereotype of Black people as unintelligent	Alim & Smitherman, 2020
Black woman	Touches natural or braided hair without permission	Feelings of powerlessness; insecurity about sexual/physical prowess or strength	To invoke in the target a feeling of powerlessness by violating her personal boundaries (e.g., personal space, body)	Rabelo et al., 2021
Black man	Remarks on the "stud-ly" appearance of a Black man	Feeling personally devalued, diminished, degraded	To invoke in the target a sense of being devalued by fetishizing him, invoking the stereotype of Black men as no more than studs who are expected to reproduce	Sommers, 2018
Black mother	Asks an unwed mother of three who is pregnant "Are you sure you can afford another child?"	Feeling diminished by working class background	To patronize the target by prompting negative stereotypes about Black women as "welfare queens," women who "choose to be on welfare" and who lack American middle-class values of individualism and egalitarianism	Dow, 2015; Gilliam, 1999
Black woman	Calls a Black woman "sassy"	Feeling inadequate or insecure about social standing	To imply the target is impertinent, to put her in her place on a lower rung in the social hierarchy	Troutman, 2022

Black man	Calls a Black gay man as “sassy”	Feeling inadequate or insecure about social standing	To denigrate him as feminine and knock him down a peg	Guobadia, 2018
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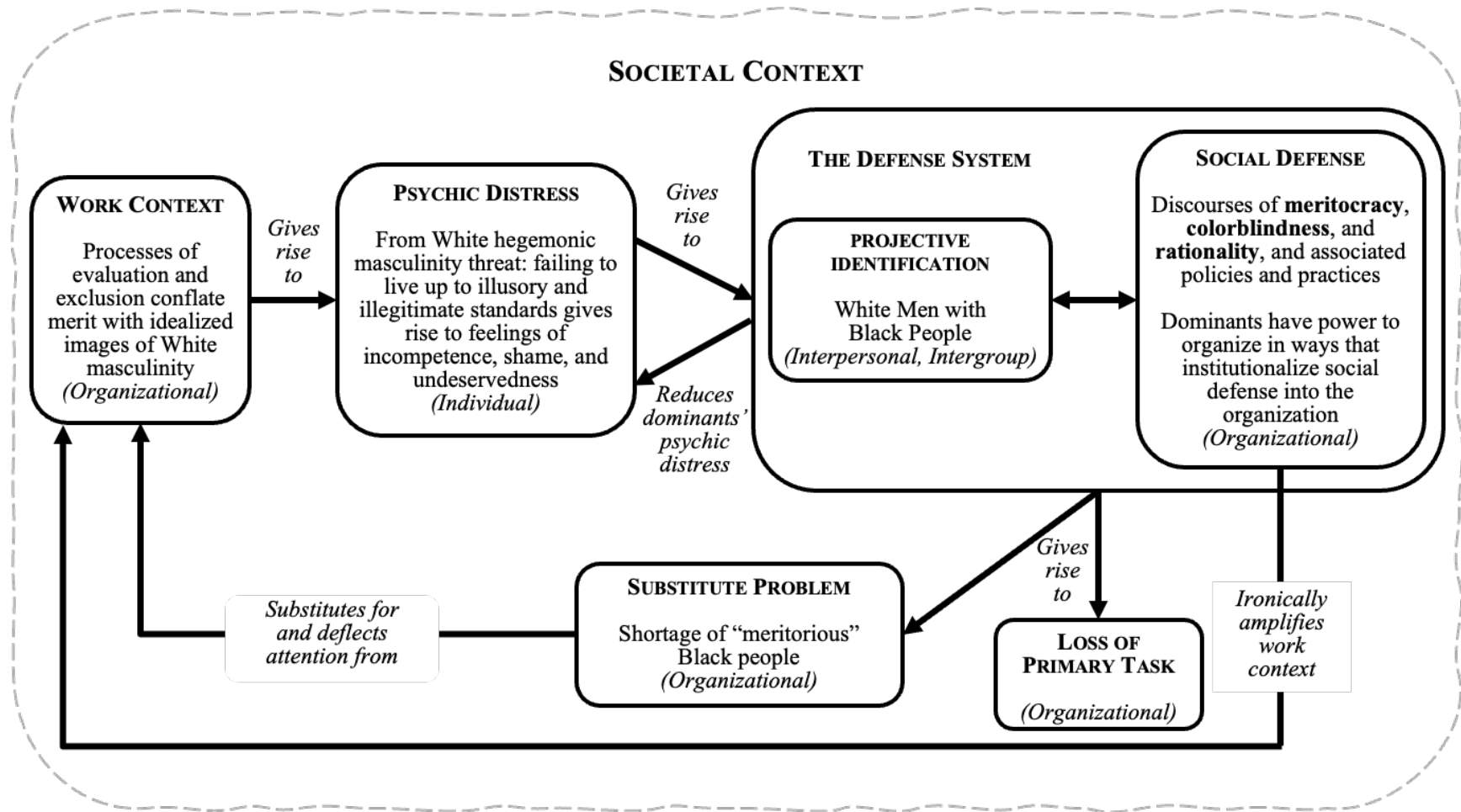
TABLE 2
Organizational Discourses as a Social Defense

<p>Meritocracy: The idea that power and wealth are vested in people based on qualities they acquire through individual talent, effort, and achievement—a core tenet of the American Dream and the bedrock on which the country’s capitalist system is based (Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Ladd & Bowman, 1998; Lemann, 1999; Longoria, 2009)</p>		
Attendant policies and practices →	Reproduce racial inequality →	Fuels projective identification
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hiring and promoting based on employee merit is an approach widely regarded as fair, legitimate, and opportunity-enhancing (Castilla, 2008; Cooper, 2015; McNamee & Miller, 2009; Scully, 2000) ● Formal evaluation systems deemed to be “meritocratic” ● Compensation systems that award bonuses according to how much business an employee brings to the firm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Meritocratic” formal evaluation systems permit managers to be less vigilant in their efforts to eliminate race and gender bias from employee evaluations, undermining the very meritocratic ideals on which they are based (Castilla & Benard, 2010; Dencker, 2009; Monin & Miller, 2001) ● “Meritocratic” compensation systems fail to recognize the value of less visible work that is nonetheless mission critical; very often, White women and people of color take up the invisible work that enables White men to do the more highly compensated tasks (Fletcher, 2001; Rabelo et al., 2021) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Justifies and maintains the racial hierarchy by constructing White men as deserving and Black people as undeserving ● Engenders hubris in winners and humiliation in losers (Sandel, 2020)
<p>Colorblindness: The “belief that racial group membership and race-based differences should not be taken into account when decisions are made, impressions are formed, and behaviors are enacted” (Apfelbaum, Norton, & Sommers, 2012: 205; see also Plaut, 2002, 2010); implies that if race is invisible then it is impossible to racially discriminate (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Ray & Purifoy, 2019); is not the absence of race but “a particular deployment of race . . . a selective way [of seeing race] that makes whites acceptable, not to people of color, but to themselves” (Leonardo & Porter, 2010: 150)</p>		
Attendant policies and practices →	Reproduce racial inequality →	Fuels projective identification
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Race-blind” hiring practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Colorblind” hiring practices consistently produce a pattern of homosocial reproduction in which White men 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Upholds Whiteness as the norm and muzzles any discussions of

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Objective” merit criteria ● “Colorblind” team norms (Carbado & Gulati, 2000) 	<p>manage profit and loss and Black people are relegated to routinized positions involving less authority and independent judgment (Stainback & Tomoskovic-Devey, 2012, Wilson, 1997; Wilson & McBrier, 2005)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Colorblind” merit criteria implicitly favor characteristics stereotypically associated with White men (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Rivera, 2012) ● “Colorblind” team norms favor White cultural expressions but also dictate that racial minorities overlook racist treatment and policies (Ray & Purifoy, 2019) 	<p>race that might raise people’s consciousness about inequality</p>
<p>Rationality: A key characteristic of bureaucracy (Weber, 1946, 1981); maintains that organization members should strive to be logical, unemotional, impersonal, and guided by deductive reasoning in workplace interactions and decisions (Diamond & Allcorn, 2009; Ritzer, 1996)</p>		
<p>Attendant policies and practices →</p>	<p>Reproduce racial inequality →</p>	<p>Fuels projective identification</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Organizational rules and norms pre- and proscribe what to feel and how to express emotion in order to reduce uncertainty, enhance efficiency, and ensure survival ● Discourses that insist on rationality and disparaging emotionality as a non-rational basis for decision-making; render using or expressing emotions in the workplace taboo (Strati, 2005), except insofar as such expressions can be commercialized (Hochschild, 1983) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Rational” feeling and display rules coerce compliance with a central dictum of White hegemonic masculinity—that “real” men do not have or express emotion (Shields, 2002); reinforces White male hegemony in organizations (Ferguson, 1984; Martin, Knopoff, & Beckman, 1998) ● When White men convey emotional weakness, as when they disclose a troubling personal problem (Derlega & Chaiken, 1976), or fail to control their emotions, as when they express fear in the face of physical danger (Martin, 1999; Ely & Meyerson, 2010), they are often disliked, ostracized, bullied, and hazed (Erikson & Einarsen, 2004) ● Rationality norms discount subordinate groups’ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Proscribes attending to certain emotions in the workplace, silencing the subordinated and leaving dominants little recourse but to deal with emotions unconsciously

	<p>emotional expressions by deeming them dubious and unworthy of attention relative to the emotional needs of dominant group members (Matias, 2016; Turner, 2010), e.g., when women of color expressed anger about bearing a greater share of administrative and financial work than their White colleagues, their feelings were neglected, and they were problematized as insensitive and “nasty” (Srivastava, 2006: 70)</p>	
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FIGURE 1
 A Systems Psychodynamic Theory Explaining the Persistence of Racial Inequality in Organizations



Note: Level of analysis is indicated in parentheses and italics

FIGURE 2
 A Systems Psychodynamic Theory of Disrupting Racial Inequality in Organizations

