EXPERIENCES OF WHITE-COLLAR JOB LOSS AND JOB-SEARCHING IN THE UNITED STATES

Abstract: Unemployment is a pervasive and stubborn feature of contemporary social and economic life. This review article focuses on the meaning and experience of contemporary white-collar unemployment in the United States. After explaining the empirical and theoretical rationales for the focus on white-collar workers, this review delves into three aspects of white-collar unemployment: who loses jobs; what unemployment means for one's sense of self, marital relationships, parent-child relationships; and how the process of job-searching and re-employment unfold for unemployed white-collar workers in the US. Throughout, I take an intersectional approach, identifying how sensitivity to structural location in the labor market and the family can augment our sociological understandings of these important issues. I close by suggesting directions for future research.

Keywords: Gender, Job loss, Job-search, Intersectionality, Race, Unemployment, White-collar

Introduction

Unemployment is an important aspect of social, cultural, and economic lives. Recent decades have witnessed two key developments in sociological understandings of unemployment. First, unemployment is now a ubiquitous experience (Greenhouse 2009; Sharone 2013) that impacts workers with high levels of educational credentialing, such as with college degrees, who were usually protected from the tumults of the labor market in prior decades (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018). Second, contemporary unemployment occurs within a broader context that is rife with precarious and unstable participation in paid work. Restructuring of

organizations resulting in layoffs, downsizing, outsourcing have become integral to business practices (Davis and Kim 2015; Krippner 2005). Employment practices have eroded protections, including job security, that were evident in prior employer-worker relationships (Kalleberg 2009). The growth of contract and temporary workers point to a decline in employment stability (Hatton 2011; Osnowitz 2010); acutely evident in the rise of platform economies which frequently tout the entrepreneurial potential of "gig work" whilst engaging in exploitative practices (Ravenelle 2019; Rosenblatt 2019; Schor 2020).

Unemployment does not occur as a one-off, anomalous event. It occurs alongside complex forms of joblessness, which include a growing number of prime age workers who are not in the labor force (Krueger 2017). Unemployment itself is ubiquitous and experienced repeatedly by workers. The vast majority of college-educated workers can expect to experience unemployment at least once; most will experience unemployment many more times (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016a). Of course, precarity looks and feels very different depending on where in the occupational hierarchy and geographically you are situated (Kalleberg 2011, 2018). Those with recognized educational credentials are able to access "better" jobs which, while they may not offer stability, do offer high salaries and benefits making any job loss economically bearable. This polarization of jobs is raced and gendered (Misra 2021). Unemployment should be understood within this broader context of insecurity, including how one's structural position as shaped by race, class, and gender, matters for the kinds of economic risks to which one is subjected.

Within this larger context of insecurity, and given that the less privileged are more economically vulnerable, how might the unemployment experiences of white-collar[1], college-

[1] By referencing white-collar workers, I prioritise education level, which typically includes a four-year college degree, as well as occupation – crudely contrasted to manual or service work – and encompassing a range from secretarial work to high-wage knowledge work. The studies in this review variously described their participants as college-educated, white-collar, affluent, professional middle class. I selected *white-collar workers* as a term that is capacious

educated workers illuminate processes of gender inequality? The experiences of such workers are important empirically given that unemployment amongst them is newly pervasive. Their experiences are also important conceptually because they illuminate what economic uncertainty means for gender inequalities. First, college-educated women in professional positions are most likely to have uninterrupted employment histories (Landivar 2017) and are typically best placed to break through glass ceilings. These women are also often "cultural arbiters" (Stone 2007:7) who define gendered ideals in society . The unemployment experiences of more privileged women – especially when contrasted with those of similarly placed men – can serve as canaries in a coalmine (Stone 2007), providing a "conservative test" (Collins 2020) of how workers' responses to economic insecurity (as due to unemployment) illuminate how and why such insecurity may foster or impede gender inegalitarian behaviors. Second, the more privileged may be better able to buffer themselves such that economic insecurity does not seep deeply into personal lives (Pugh 2015); yet these strategies of security often rely on the unpaid work of women (Cooper 2014; Stone and Lovejoy 2019). Finally, the economic impact of unemployment on privileged workers is typically less severe than on less educationally credentialed workers. Yet, college-educated workers nonetheless have worse well-being outcomes due to job loss (Brand 2015). The loss of social status, professional identity, or "relative deprivation" (Newman 1999) strikes privileged workers acutely, but the mechanisms for this require attention. The transformation of unemployment into a stubborn and widespread feature of working life, reaching into even jobs that were considered secure, has tremendous implications for social inequalities which need to be more fully understood.

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enough to capture the sense of being occupationally and educationally advantaged. This can be a large term and requires attention to the same kind of consideration that the issue of defining social class broadly does. For more on social class, see: Lareau and Conley, 2008. For a critique of sociological definitions and applications of social class, see Streib, 2020.

A common definition of "unemployment" comes from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2014) which counts the unemployed as those who currently do not have a job, have actively looked for work in the prior four weeks, and are currently available for work. (For a critique of this measurement, see Sheehan 2019). Being unemployed is intertwined with both social and economic relationships. Work is a key component of social belonging in contemporary societies, often perceived as providing insights into the "moral character" (Goffman 1963) of the individual. Participation in paid work is closely tied to one's social status, mediating relationships, especially spousal and parental relationships within families. The *absence* of work can mean not just the absence of economic security but also a slew of concerns about one's role in society.

This review piece focuses on recent developments on sociological research on what unemployment means to white-collar workers in the U.S. and how they experience unemployment. The remainder of the review consists of four sections: how race and gender shape who loses jobs in the first place; what job loss means for one's sense of self, marital relationships, and parent-child relationships; job-searching; directions for future research. Throughout the review I attempt to take an intersectional lens (Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1989), in explaining how the absence of research that considers race, class, and gender in conjunction detracts from a full understandings of what white-collar unemployment means for the unemployed, and how it is experienced. Given the aim of this manuscript to review experiences and meanings of white-collar unemployment, I focus primarily on qualitative research.

Who loses jobs?: gendered and racialised distribution of job losses

Unemployment is not equally distributed, including because employment itself is not evenly distributed and gendered occupational segregation, whereby men and women get funneled

into different occupations persists (England 2010). Further, race intersects with gender to shape professional pathways for men and women (Wingfield 2009). Because race and gender crucially shape what industries and roles people are likely to get sorted into, these characteristics also matter for unemployment. At any given time, the rate of unemployment amongst U.S. Blacks appears to be twice the average unemployment rate (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016b).

The Great Recession, officially lasting from 2007-2009, severely impacted industries which are dominated by men, such as construction, to the point that it was at times called a "Mancession" in mainstream media (Thompson 2009). Emerging data suggests that the economic downturn catalyzed by the Covid-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted women, especially women of color. Sectors of the economy in which these workers tend to be concentrated, such as service industries have been enormously impacted through lockdown measures and beyond. While women constitute 47% of the US labor force, they accounted for 54% of lost jobs in the initial days of Covid-19 (Madgavkar et al. 2020).

The reasons women of all races and people of color lose jobs is not reducible to the sector of the economy in which they are concentrated. In a study of over 327 downsized organizations between 1971 and 2002, Kalev (2014) shows how even ostensibly "neutral" layoffs more adversely impact women of all races and men of color. When it comes to mass layoffs, organizations tend to follow formalized procedures to determine what positions should be laid off. Deciding which positions are essential is, fundamentally, a subjective process shaped by the preferences of organizational decision-makers. Kalev's study shows that the positions most commonly deemed expendable tend to be those populated by women or minorities. Christine Williams' (2019) study of the oil and gas industry illuminates these decision-making processes. Williams finds that when decision-makers have to decide who gets laid off, they draw from raced and gendered ideas about what an employees' job means

to their families. In Williams' study, married, White men are typically framed by decision-makers as "deserving professionals" whose jobs are crucial because they are family breadwinners. Jobs held by men of color or women are not seen as needing this protection.

What white-collar unemployment means for sense of self, marital life, and parenting

Sense of self

The Great Depression provided fertile ground for sociological studies of unemployment, and at the crux of these studies were expansive, often existential, questions about stigma, social belonging, and sense of purpose in life. One important study that continues to exert theoretical influence was *Marienthal* (1971) which focused on a community in Austria experiencing unemployment when the factory that employed the vast majority of the community shut down during the Great Depression. Marie Jahoda (1982) built on this initial study to explain that while the "manifest function" of employment was to provide an income, employment also has five "latent functions": expanded social contacts, structured time, sense of collective purpose, status and identity, and mandated regular activity. During unemployment, these latent functions do not get fulfilled, leading to a tremendous sense of apathy in individuals. Scholars have extended Jahoda's work to assert that rather than employment/unemployment, entry into and out of the labor force is now more critically linked to the latent functions that employment had typically provided, (Wiertz and Lim 2019).

When it comes to unemployment and sense of self, a longstanding area of inquiry has been on stigma. Research on unemployment stigma shows that this stigma is lessened depended on *when* unemployment occurs. In times of large scale economic downturns, there is less stigma at being unemployed (Buffel, Missinne, and Bracke 2017). This is also the case when unemployment is seemed to stem from a morally righteous stance (Newman 1999). The

well-being of people who lose jobs during broader downturns tends to be better than that of those who lose jobs in times of economic prosperity, even though finding re-employment is far more difficult for the former. Research from the UK, however, found that with rising unemployment rates, the stigmatising rhetoric of the poor rises, except at the very height of deep recessions (McArthur and Reeves 2019). White-collar unemployed workers are not usually the "poor," however this finding is important in terms of not simply assuming that the ubiquity of unemployment necessarily means a loosening of the stigma surrounding it. Scholars have suggested that unemployment may have lost its sharpness when it comes to adjudicating the moral worth of individuals given how it is an expected occurrence across a variety of workers; instead the location of stigma has shifted: for white-collar workers it is vested in how long it takes to find a new job (Sharone 2013).

Jahoda (1982) suggested, but did not empirically explore, that there may be gendered differences in what unemployment means for men and women. In the US, hegemonic conceptions of masculinity render employment central to men's roles as husbands and fathers (Connell 2005; Cooper 2000; Townsend 2002). Employment is, however, posited as being in tension with dominant ideals of femininity. Mothering is framed as women's highest calling in dominant discourses which typically focus on White, middle-class mothers (Hays 1996).

Cristobal Young (2012) finds that unemployment catalyses adverse changes in well-being, with eligibility for unemployment insurance mitigating some of the more severe impacts. Re-employment also helps individuals recover from approximately two-thirds the harm of job loss. Young also finds *stronger* unemployment effects for women than for men. In this way, Young's findings empirically build on Jahoda (1982) who had pointed out that while for some women the culturally prized identities of motherhood and roles of caring may alleviate some impacts of unemployment, these roles and activities may not be available or appealing to all women. While women may more easily find culturally valued identities

outside of paid work, there may a selection effect for women who become unemployed (instead of exiting the labor force). For these women, their investment in their employment may be stronger than for men.

Young's contention is supported by some qualitative research. Studying job loss in Dallas in the early 2000s, Carrie Lane argues in her book, *Company of One* (2011), that the unemployed women she spoke with felt a deep sense of shame and stigma at being unemployed. By prioritizing their careers and employment, such women could be seen as deviating from normative expectations of femininity. When the rationale for that deviation – a successful career – is thrown into question, that may be particularly damaging for their well-being. As I show in the next two sections, what unemployment means for sense of self is mediated by marriage and parenthood.

Unemployment and marital life

Roughly around the same time as the Marienthal study, Mirra Komarovsky was conducting a study that would become a classic in unemployment research – *The Unemployed Man and His Family* (1940). This was a study of 59 families in New York City where unemployed men had lost their jobs. Komarovsky was interested in how unemployment shaped men's status and authority within their own families. She found that when men held on to their identities as breadwinners, their families experienced an enormous amount of tension, within the couple of the unemployed husband and his wife as well as between fathers and children, especially sons. In contrast, men who formulated new roles for themselves, particularly in terms of their participation in unpaid work in the home, experienced a more fulfilling family life in terms of both the marital and father-child relationships.

Komarovsky's question about unemployed men's status and authority in their families continues to resonate. Drawing from these insights, including those collected through subsequent economic downturns throughout the 20th century, scholars developed the Family

Stress Model (Conger et al. 1990). This model posits two main pathways through which men's unemployment impacts families: 1) the stresses caused by economic hardship; 2) stresses caused by men's lack of compliance with hegemonic masculinity which requires men to provide economically for their families.

Komarovsky's study continues to be important for qualitative researchers as well. Decades after Komarovsky, Katherine Newman too studied unemployment in New York City of the 1980s, albeit amongst managers. Newman (1999) found that unemployment was so devastating to these men's sense of self that they often hid the fact of being unemployed from their wives and children as well as from friends – often getting dressed as though for work and then spending their days in public libraries or cafés. When their families came to know that these men were unemployed, wives often felt as though husbands had broken the marital bargain, creating deep tensions in the families. Newman studied unemployed male managers, and in the second edition of her book she speculates on the potential experiences of unemployed women:

> We still honor mothers, but working women are now fully invested in their public lives and do not find it any easier than their husbands to contend with the consequences of losing a job or taking a new one that is below their station. (Newman 1999:xx).

However, other quantitative research complicates this understanding by showing that husbands' unemployment has stronger impacts on heterosexual marriages than wives'. Killewald (2016) finds for instance that husbands' lack of full-time employment, but not wives', is associated with a higher risk of divorce. Similarly, Inanc (2018) finds that husbands' unemployment spills over and adversely impacts wives' well-being but this is not the case for wives' unemployment. Husbands' unemployment thus likely carries a distinctive meaning, extending beyond simply financial implications. Within the institution of the

heterosexual marriage, the gendered obligation for men to provide economically continues to exert an important influence on marriages.[2]

Parenting during unemployment and economic uncertainty

What unemployment means for parenting, is best understood within the broader context of what parenting means during economic uncertainty. Parents try to help their children develop selves that are best suited to weather the risk climate they perceive their children will encounter. Affluent parents prioritize raising "flexible" and "passionate" children (Nelson 2010; Pugh 2019), who are able to adapt to the changing circumstances parents view as central to the new economy. Using their own experiences in the new, unstable economy, parents in managerial positions transmit lessons about flexibility in the professional arena (Mendenhall et al. 2008), preparing their children for a world of work where children can expect to encounter rampant job uncertainty (Gershon 2017), and be "companies of one" (Lane 2011). Further, affluent parents guide their children away from expectations of a linear career, encouraging children to focus on self-discovery and striving for passion in their future careers (Nelson 2010). Affluent parents frame a deep commitment to (expensive) enrichment activities, such as athletics, as a way to develop a passion. These activities are also a mirror through which values such as strength of character, morality, and integrity are reflected in an unstable context which often tests these (Pugh 2015).

In her analysis of the culture of insecurity Allison Pugh (2015) explains that people have diminished expectations of loyalty from their employer. Instead, Pugh contends that people place their extensive expectations around loyalty in the personal realm of intimate

[2] The broader trends of labor market changes, the shrinking of "good" jobs, and rising socio-economic inequality have impacted marital and fertility trends. A discussion of these trends is outside the scope of this review, but see: (Autor, Dorn, and Hanson 2019; Cherlin, Ribar, and Yasutake 2016; Kearney and Wilson 2018).

relationships which are often too fragile to bear such a demanding burden. Marianne Cooper (2014) explains how such a culture of insecurity plays out for families and is shaped by their social class, and within families by gender. Families in the US, Cooper argues, pursue "security projects" which are "the economic and emotion work done by a family to create, maintain, and further their particular notion of security" (Cooper 2014:20). Families in the upper class have "upscaled" security projects which include concern with securing their children's future educational and occupational advantages. These parents strive to perfect their children's lives by an excessive focus on ensuring that children receive top grades, excel in extra-curriculars, have the correct social skills, and get admitted to the most selective universities is paramount. In contrast, poor families have "downscaled" security projects, where parents try to instil a sense of play and security in their children even when unable to pay for basic needs like running water, heat, and electricity. Relatedly, focusing on mothers, Ana Villalobos posits that a context of instability in both personal and professional domains has altered motherhood such that the mother child relationship is "endowed with the precious power to produce security…" (Villalobos 2014:11). Broader economic shifts have significant consequences for families' emotional landscapes, including their parenting ideologies and behaviors.

Other recent studies have focused on unemployment specifically to see how it shapes, and is shaped by, raced and gendered understandings of parenthood. In her study of unemployed, white-collar workers, Norris (2016) finds that unemployment is particularly devastating for men, while women tend to find some solace in their motherhood identities. Building on this by using Jahoda's (1982) formulation of the latent functions of unemployment, Rao (2020b) explains how, for unemployed mothers, motherhood often fulfils several latent functions of unemployment such as: sense of purpose, organizing time, and expanded social contacts. At least in the initial months of unemployment, unemployed

mothers in Rao's study derive an enormous sense of legitimacy from their motherhood. This wanes over time for some mothers.

Ideologies around paid and unpaid work as well as one's labor market position are profoundly shaped by race, class, and gender (Dean, Marsh, and Landry 2013; Dow 2016; Glenn 2002). For Black women in the middle-class for instance, intensive motherhood is not a particularly powerful ideology. Dawn Marie Dow (2016) points out that Black mothers expect to integrate their paid an unpaid work and expect help from kin in order to meet these obligations. Dow (2015) further explains that because the trope of the Black mother as a "Welfare Queen" is so entrenched, mothers she studied did not want to be mistaken for being unemployed, even if they had lost their jobs. For instance, when going to the park with their children, they took great care to dress in professional, business outfits. This cultural legitimacy of being a stay-at-home mother which shaped the responses of women in Norris's (2016) and Rao's (2020b) studies is likely due in significant part to their status as White middle-class women. The emerging body of research on gender, unemployment and job-searching would benefit enormously from future studies designed to parse out how race shapes unemployment and job-searching experiences.

When it comes to fatherhood and unemployment, research suggests that some men may be able to access an alternative model of modern masculinity in response to their unemployment (Lane 2011). This alternative model of masculinity is uncoupled from breadwinning and emphasizes how men's participation in unpaid work – for instance focusing on childcare and housework – was a moral and enlightened choice. Chesley (2011) and Demantas and Myers (2015) whose studies include unemployed men with and without college degrees, have made similar arguments, emphasizing how the availability of an alternative cultural model of masculinity mitigates some aspects of men's job loss. Other research, however has shown that amongst white-collar workers, both economic uncertainty

generally, and men's unemployment in particular, tend to reinforce the notion of men as primary breadwinners and become pivotal for producing gender inequalities in times of uncertainty which ostensibly could have catalysed gender inegalitarian change within families (Cooper 2014; Rao 2021; Stone 2007). How unemployment is framed and understood has bearing on how unemployed workers search for jobs and think about re-employment. The next section focuses on recent research pertaining to this.

White-collar job-searching in the U.S.

Emotional labor and moral flaws

How people search for and find jobs has attracted longstanding sociological attention, often by centering the role of social ties in job-searching (Granovetter 1973; Smith 2005, 2010). When it comes to white-collar job-searching, research has also identified emotional labor as a central aspect of white-collar job-searching. In *The Corrosion of Character* (1999), Richard Sennett explained how one of the costs of constant change and flux, the fragmentation of time, the specialisation of tasks was the toll it took on how people understood their moral center, their ethics of life. This emotional cost of work, particularly white-collar work, has been an important area of research. Studying white-collar job-seekers, authors have explained that emotions are at the crux of the US white-collar job-search process (Smith 2001; Sharone 2013; Ehrenreich 2005). Job-seekers have to cultivate a specific presentation of self which emphasizes personal characteristics such as passion, cheer, and friendliness (Rao and Neely 2019).

This issue of self-presentation in white-collar job-searching has been comprehensively explained in Ofer Sharone's *Flawed System/Flawed Self* (2013), through a comparison of unemployed white-collar job-seekers in the technology sector in the US and Israel. In the US, Sharone argues, emotional labor is key in the job-search process as job-

seekers are expected to create a sense of "chemistry" with potential employers. Building on Burawoy's concept of "work games" (1979), Sharone terms this the "chemistry game." This emphasis on creating a sense of chemistry with potential employers in the US context means that job-seekers blame themselves for unemployment. When job-seekers receive rejection after rejection from jobs, they wonder about their individual flaws. The primacy of emotional labor in the job-searching context obfuscates the structural reality where precarious work is rising and stable, standard, and secure jobs disappearing. In the Israeli context, in contrast, Sharone explains that job-seekers are matched to jobs through a relatively straightforward and de-personalized process which emphasizes having the right technical specifications for the job in question. As such, Israeli job-seekers are engaged in a "specs game." Israeli job-seekers view their enduring unemployment not as an individual failure, but rather as a failure of the labor market which is unable to reach an equilibrium between available skills and available jobs. Sharone's work explains how the very process of job-searching in the US labor market facilitates a sense of individualised failure.

Linking this research on white-collar job-searching in the US with the institution of the heterosexual marriage, Rao (2017) shows that unemployed men often receive the benefit of their wives' emotion work targeted to buoy husbands' spirits to enable then to job-search more effectively, albeit at an emotional cost to wives. The emotional labor of white-collar job-searching seeps into the private realm of the family becoming another form of invisible and often unrecognized emotion work that women do at home (Daminger 2019; Daniels 1987; Hochschild 2003). This study points to the importance of viewing unemployment in a broader context that takes seriously the institution of the family in shaping experiences in the institution of paid work.

In research conducted after the Great Recession, Lopez and Phillips (2019) contend that Sharone's argument does not fully capture the current reality in the US. Instead, Lopez

and Phillips say that the Great Recession was a seismic event that altered cultural understandings of unemployment. They suggest that an awareness of structural factors – such as a weak economy – entered the cultural lexicon of white-collar job-seekers. Drawing on interviews with 43 white-collar workers conducted in 2012 and 2013, they show that although the chemistry game continues to exist it leads to *both* self-blame and system blame; these two responses are not mutually exclusive. They explain that the unemployed have a sophisticated awareness of a shift in the economic system. Their respondents are critical of what neoliberalism has meant for employment practices and the social contract that used to exist between the employer and employee.

Sheehan (2021) has examined the thread of how the moral flaw of unemployment is adjudicated by labor market institutions and they intermediaries that occupy them by researching "unemployment experts" in the white-collar job-search process in the US. He identifies a threefold typology of such experts: "job coaches" who see the solution to unemployment as obtaining mastery over job hunting strategies; "self-help gurus" who diagnose the problem of unemployment as stemming from job-seekers' inappropriate attitude toward paid work; and "skill-certifiers" who focus on increasing job-seekers' human capital. All three types of experts, their diagnoses of unemployment, and their proffered solutions individualise the problem of unemployment, (unintentionally) shepherding workers away from focusing on structural issues that lead to recurrent unemployment in the first place. This study points to the important role of unemployment experts as one form of labour market intermediaries who shape the job-search process.

Gender and job-searching

Research has also started paying attention to gender and job-searching in white-collar professions. In her study of unemployed men and women job-seekers across the working and middle classes, Damaske (2020) finds that middle class women in her study are most likely to

adopt a "deliberate" approach to their job-search. She describes the deliberate approach in the following way: starting "searches quickly and methodically after their job loss (sometimes before a job was lost) and treated their job-search as if it were a job—clocking in and out and networking with colleagues to help them find work." Damaske finds that the middle-class men in her sample have a "take time" approach to their job-search. She describes this approach in the following way: "deciding their next steps, considering a change of career, or enjoying time off before the search began." Damaske argues that a factor in middle-class women's deliberate job-search is their desire to distinguish themselves from stay-at-home mothers. In contrast, middle-class men describe wanting a break from the obligations of being a breadwinner.

Building on this body of work, Rao (Rao 2020a, Forthcoming) explains how both the gendered institutions of the workplace and the heterosexual, married family, matter for job-searching. Rao (Forthcoming) describes that men and women interpret their job loss in gendered ways, often vested in how they are differently treated in the workplace, including when it comes to the process of losing a job. Men tend frame their job loss as a "business" decision, necessitated by the economic conditions for the company and emphasize that employers highlighted men's professional value even in the process of letting them go or eliminating their positions. Women too often see their job loss as a business decision, but do not view their job loss process as highlighting their professional worth. Many women also interpreted their job loss as the culmination of a long history of being devalued and demeaned in the workplace and saw it as being "personal." These interpretations matter to an extent for the professional pathways men and women pursue. While men continue to center participation in paid work, for women with young children their job loss often became a pivotal time to refashion their relationship to paid work.

Rao additionally explains (2020) that job-searching is deeply shaped by gendered expectations and understandings of how important participating in paid work *ought* to be for men and women. Coining the concept "the ideal job-seeker norm," Rao explains that the ideal job-seeker is someone who is devoted to finding work and expends tremendous time and energy engaging in activities that are understood to hasten re-employment, such as networking, working with career coaches, acquiring new credentials and developing new skills. Complying with this norm requires resources such as time, space, and money. Unemployed men are most readily able to comply with this norm because men's unemployment is framed by families as a problem which needs to be urgently rectified. Household resources such as time and space are redirected to facilitate men's job-search. Women in Rao's study did not receive the kinds of resources to job-search that the men did, usually because women's job-search was not seen by the family as being urgent.

Damaske and Rao have opened a conversation on how job-searching is gendered, although both studies focus primarily on white women. These findings can be extended by future research to better parse out how race in combination with gender may matter for the white-collar job-searching process. There are two important ways in which race, alongside gender, may shape job-searching. First is in terms of the institution of work broadly conceived. Research has shown the importance of emotional labor and the "chemistry game" (Sharone 2013) when it comes to white-collar job-searching. Other research has shown that race matters profoundly in terms of unstated norms about appropriate workplace emotions, and their public display (Wingfield 2010). While anger or frustration exhibited from a white worker may be viewed as evidence of commitment to and passion about their work, the same from a Black worker may be viewed as evidence of inappropriate workplace behaviour (Wingfield 2010). How the emotional labor of job-searching itself and trying to achieve "chemistry" may be raced and gendered can be further explored for a fuller understanding of

how white-collar job-searching may advantage some workers over others. In the context of widespread race and gender discrimination in hiring (Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007; Mischel 2016; Mize 2016; Pager 2003; Pedulla 2018; Quadlin 2018; Rivera and Tilcsik 2016), understanding the qualitative dimensions of the job-search process in these regards remains imperative.

Second is in terms of the role of the family. As emerging research shows, the institution of the family is crucially important in shaping white-collar job-searching. Prior research however has tended to focus on heterosexual, married, white families in this social class. Given research which has pointed to substantive racial differences in norms and expectations within the family (Dean et al. 2013; Dow 2019) vis-à-vis the obligations of paid and unpaid work. It is thus important to pay attention to how these differences may also manifest in terms of the "resources" provided for men and women on the home front as they search for jobs.

Job loss and job-searching have become pervasive, in good economic times and bad, with grave consequences for aspects such as well-being, re-employment, and lifetime earnings (Brand 2015; Young 2012). An intersectional lens will allow for a fuller examination of how an individual's structural position as well as statuses – in terms of gender, race, sexual orientation, social class and so on – shape not just their risk of unemployment but also their experiences and outcomes when it comes to job-searching.

Directions for future research

First, future research on job-searching must take into account the established fact that experiences of unemployment, job-searching, and re-employment are shaped by one's structural position in the labor market, access to things like quality and affordable childcare, as well as by ideologies around paid and unpaid work. Taking these factors into account is

important for qualitative studies seeking to illuminate experiences of job-searching. Doing so requires designing studies which are sensitive to the role of race, class, gender, sexual orientation amongst other dimensions. This is important for rigorous sociology which avoids conflating the experiences of one specific group of people as somehow universal.

Second, prior research shows that parental status intersects with gender to produce different experiences of unemployment, but this ought to be explored more. Research indicates that there may be systematic differences in how women without children and those with children experience unemployment, and this is important to explore. Research till date has identified the heterosexual married family as key in shaping the gendered experience of job-searching. Yet, more and more individuals now spend more time outside the institution of marriage, including due to an uncertain labor market (Cherlin 2014). Additionally, individuals also belong in and create a variety of family structures, and how this matters for experiences of job loss and job-searching also require attention (Pfeffer 2016; Robinson 2020).

Third, the institution of the labor market and intermediaries therein are pivotal in shaping the experience of white-collar job-searching, especially in terms of emotional labor. This would include focusing on the perspectives of individuals and groups who populate the industry around unemployment from hiring managers, career coaches, head-hunters, recruitment professionals to secular and faith-based job-searching groups. Because these intermediaries appear to play a salient role in perpetuating ideas of moral flaws in unemployed individuals – as well as in shaping who gets hired at all – it is important to study such groups of professionals (Sheehan 2021), including through a consideration of gendered and racialised ideals that may underpin the diagnoses made by different types of "unemployment experts." For instance, understanding how these intermediaries conceptualise ambiguous concepts like "merit" "talent" and "worthiness" of unemployed job-seekers,

including in terms of the career advice they provide, will likely yield important insights into some of the mechanisms through which raced, gendered, and classes inequalities are produced. As ideologies about work and the functioning of labor markets evolve, professions comprised of labor market gatekeepers and intermediaries become especially important, and worthy of studying in their own right.

Unemployment now comes part and parcel with employment in the US, including for white-collar workers. Recent research has shown how gender matters considerably in shaping both how unemployment is understood and experienced, as well as how individuals approach job-searching and re-employment. Future research should build upon the important insights by deploying an intersectional lens in order to offer a fuller analysis and explanation of who loses jobs, how people search for jobs, who gets re-employed, and why.

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