



# Location, Race, and Labor Force Participation: Implications for Women of Color

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## LOCATION, RACE, AND LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN OF COLOR

This paper examines racial and ethnic differences in women's labor force participation and in their locational accessibility to employment, and discusses the implications for women of color. General questions that can be raised include the work characteristics of women in different ethnic groups, where they work, and how they get to work. Broad answers to these questions are available from aggregate census data, but analyses of disaggregate data have been able to offer more detailed answers on ethnic and gender differences in work travel behavior.<sup>1</sup>

As female labor force participation has risen, more attention has been given to the locational dimensions of women's employment. Common measures of locational access to employment are the distance between home and work, travel time to work, and suburban versus central city work location. The journey to work is relevant because it connects women's domestic lives with their paid employment. A large body of research indicates that women work closer to home than do men and have shorter commuting times.<sup>2</sup> However many early studies overlooked women of color. Until recently, studies on gender differences in urban travel behavior simply assumed that working women of all racial and/or ethnic groups have shorter work trips than do men. This assumption is unfounded in view of the fact that many studies report significant racial differences in travel patterns.<sup>3</sup>

The literature on racial differences in commuting and spatial access to employment is largely concerned with the spatial mismatch hypothesis. First proposed in 1968,<sup>4</sup> the hypothesis states that African American inner-city residents have poorer spatial access to jobs than do other workers, because of their concentration in segregated residential areas distant from and poorly connected to major centers of employment growth. Lack of access leads to high rates of unemployment and, for persons able to overcome spatial barriers and find work, to long journeys to work.<sup>5</sup> Despite the diversity of findings from empirical tests of the spatial mismatch hypothesis, it is clear that minority workers often differ from European Americans in their commuting patterns and spatial and social access to employment.<sup>6</sup>

Many past studies on racial differences were flawed by not paying sufficient attention to gender differences in the journey to work. More recent analyses of accessibility to employment examine how the unique economic, social, and locational profile of African American and Latina women affect their commuting behavior,<sup>7</sup> but there is as yet very little detailed work on the commuting behavior of Asian and Native American women. Studies indicate that African American women have significantly longer work trips than do White women, especially as measured by commuting time.<sup>8</sup> Another important finding is that unlike European American women, African American women especially, do not have shorter commutes compared to men.<sup>9</sup> This paper provides an overview of findings on racial and ethnic differences in metropolitan women's journey-to-work behavior.

In the first section of the paper, summary statistics from the 1990 U.S. census for metropolitan areas are reviewed to obtain labor force participation profiles of women from different ethnic and racial background. Because of the concentration of ethnic minority groups in the central cities of metropolitan areas, the central city statistics are also provided.<sup>10</sup> The central city/non-central city distinction

is especially crucial in discussions of locational access to employment opportunities. In the second part of the paper, racial and ethnic differences in women's commuting are examined. The information presented in the second section draws on a review of the literature that focuses on research conducted across selected metropolitan areas using disaggregate data bases. The final section of the paper summarizes the findings on racial differences in women's employment accessibility and discusses implications for women of color.

### RACIAL AND ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN FEMALE LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION AND JOURNEY TO WORK

#### FEMALE EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS

Table 1 on female employment characteristics for U.S. metropolitan areas and central cities show well-known and expected distributions. African (Black) American and Asian American women as well as Native American women have slightly higher labor force participation rates than White (European) American and Hispanic (Latina) women, but African American and Hispanic women as well as Native American women have higher unemployment rates than European American and Asian American women. Black and Hispanic women are much more likely to be in service occupations than are White and Asian women. The level of full time employment varies slightly but Asian American women are more likely than other women to work full time year round. The mean incomes of full time White and Asian women are higher than those of other women. Hispanic women have the lowest median income (Table 1).<sup>11</sup>

Over sixty percent of Black women with young (preschool) children are in the labor force. In central cities, compared to other women of color, Black mothers of preschool children are more likely to be in the labor force. The disproportionate number of minority women who are heads of households is well publicized. The data here on the percentage of female heads of households who are employed show that Black, Hispanic and Native American female heads of households are less likely than White and Asian counterparts to be employed. The lowest rate is for Hispanic female heads of households: 50 percent (and 46 percent in central cities (Table 1)).

To summarize, although they are about as likely to work full time as White women, the kinds of occupations that Latina, Native American and African American women hold affect their incomes, so even in households where the husband and wife work, the median incomes of European American families are higher than the incomes of families in these three minority ethnic groups (Table 1). This background on household structure is useful because it shows that an overemphasis on female headed households misses an essential truth about minority women's poverty. As Brewer observed, "Black women are also poor in households with male heads. With or without a male present, there is a strong likelihood that black women and children will be living in poverty in America today".<sup>12</sup> This suggests that the central issue in the well being of women of color is not family structure but access to jobs and income.<sup>13</sup> In light of this point, general measures of the journey to work are now examined.

**Table 1**  
 Employment and Household Characteristics of  
 Women by Race and Ethnicity (1990 Census)

	<b>White</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>Asian</b>	<b>Native American</b>
<b>US Metropolitan Areas</b>					
labor force participation %	57.8	60.7	56.5	60.2	59.4
% unemployment	4.8	11.8	11.1	5.5	10.8
service occupations %	14.2	24.3	23.0	15.8	21.6
year round full time workers %	35.0	36.3	34.2	40.9	33.8
median income of full time workers \$	21,060	19,013	16,528	21,596	18,176
working mothers with child under six %	59.5	63.6	51.8	57.6	54.5
employed female heads of households %	63.0	54.2	50.1	63.1	53.3
median income of families where husband and wife both work \$	50,778	44,115	38,093	53,217	39,900
<b>US Central Cities</b>					
labor force participation %	56.7	58.1	54.7	58.5	59.0
% unemployment	5.4	13.2	12.0	6.0	12.3
service occupations %	14.7	25.8	24.4	16.4	22.3
year round full time workers %	34.0	33.7	32.5	37.8	31.7
median income of full time workers \$	20,907	18,439	15,790	20,622	17,542
working mothers with child under six %	59.3	60.3	49.7	54.6	53.0
employed female heads of households %	59.2	51.1	46.3	58.9	49.7
median income of families where husband and wife both work \$	47,506	42,014	35,394	46,597	37,341

## AGGREGATE JOURNEY-TO-WORK CHARACTERISTICS

For journey-to-work characteristics, census information is available about transportation mode and commuting time of ethnic groups in U.S. metropolitan areas and central cities, but breakdowns by sex are rarely provided (Table 2). One consistent finding is that higher proportions of ethnic minority workers depend on public transportation. The figures are highest for African American workers. In central cities, 23% of African Americans use public transportation for their work trip compared to 8% of European American workers (Table 2). It is not surprising then that the average commuting time of central city African American workers is (about 6 minutes) longer than the average commuting time of European American workers. This information about commuting for 1990 agree with earlier studies based on representative national level data that showed differences between European American and African Americans in their journeys to work.<sup>14</sup> It would be useful to examine differences and similarities in the place of work (since this is relevant for showing trends in commutes to non central city locations) and although this information is collected in the census, it is not provided for different ethnic and sex groups in the census summary tables.

**Table 2**  
Commuting Characteristics of Employed Persons by Race and Ethnicity  
(1990 Census)

	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Native American
<b>US Metropolitan Areas</b>					
% using private vehicles	88.1	74.9	79.1	79.4	83.6
% using public transportation	4.4	17.9	11.9	11.9	6.1
mean travel time	22.6 mins.	26.1 mins.	24.7 mins.	26.0 mins.	23.0 mins.
<b>US Central Cities</b>					
% using private vehicles	82.1	69.2	73.0	69.8	77.2
% using public transportation	8.1	23.2	17.4	18.3	10.6
mean travel time	20.8 mins.	26.5 mins.	24.9 mins.	25.3 mins.	21.9 mins.

In short, the aggregated census summary data reveal important racial and ethnic differences in women's labor force participation. The worker characteristics discussed above (i.e., residential location, occupation status, income status, household structure and transportation mode) usually influence access to employment. For example, the commuting literature shows that workers who hold relatively lower status occupations, or earn low incomes have short work trips; while those who use public transportation have longer work trip times. But because of its aggregate nature, the census summary data is of limited use for detailed gender and racial analysis of locational access to employment.

The next section attempts to summarize the evidence on how Black and Hispanic women’s travel mode, economic and occupation status, domestic roles, and locational characteristics affect their commuting behavior. The review draws heavily on studies that were based on disaggregate data and multivariate in-depth analyses of specific metropolitan areas.

## REVIEW OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN WOMEN’S COMMUTING

### DIFFERENCES IN TRANSPORTATION MODE

Differences in transportation mode are discussed first because disparities in access to an automobile have a fundamental influence on minority women’s work trips.<sup>15</sup> Many early studies documented African American women’s greater dependence on public transit. In a Baltimore study, over 25 percent of African American women used public transit compared to 14 percent of European American women.<sup>16</sup> In northern New Jersey, analysis of 1980 census data showed that 25 percent of African American women used mass transit compared with 14 percent of African American men.<sup>17</sup> Similar patterns were observed in Buffalo and Rochester New York in 1980 where African American women were much more reliant on public transit than were African American men or European American men or women.<sup>18</sup>

More recent analysis using 1990 data for Buffalo showed that public transportation use for Black women was 27.9 percent compared to 4.6 percent for White women.<sup>19</sup> Similar analyses of census Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS) data for three metropolitan areas, Kansas City, Detroit and Miami, reveal the following percentages of women in three ethnic categories who use public transit in 1990:

Kansas: Black women 12.7%	Hispanic women 2.1 %	White women 1.4%
Detroit: Black women 10.9%	Hispanic women 1.0 %	White women 0.8%
Miami: Black women 17.5%	Hispanic women 6.7 %	White women 3.2% <sup>20</sup>

The U.S. census PUMS data set from which the above information is obtained is rich in its detailed individual information about labor force participation, household composition, and the journey to work, and starting in 1980, information on travel time to work. All this information is coded by residential and workplace location. However, there is no information about the distance between home and work, and in order to protect respondents’ confidentiality, locational information in the PUMS is provided at very large geographical scales such as county or subcounty units, which makes the dataset less than satisfactory for locational analysis. Hence in studying the home-work separation for metropolitan workers, the locational distinctions are often between central city and non central city (suburban) locations.

Even with the crude definitions of central city versus suburban areas, studies using PUMS data support other travel data sets in documenting both an increase in suburban commutes, as well as high levels of racial residential segregation in U.S. metropolitan areas. A variety of datasets with measures of residence and work location show that minorities are still concentrated in central cities;<sup>21</sup> and African American workers living in the suburbs are closer to suburban jobs than are central residents who must reverse commute.<sup>22</sup> Even within the suburbs, residential segregation persists,<sup>23</sup> creating separate geographies of employment opportunities for European American women and women of color.<sup>24</sup>

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Because of their relative concentration in central cities, the growth of employment in the suburbs affects Black and Hispanic women's access to jobs. In fact, increasing numbers of African American workers are commuting outward to suburban workplaces.<sup>25</sup> Racial differences both in transportation mode and in the direction of commute affect work-trip length as reported next.

### WORK-TRIP LENGTHS

A comparison of journey-to-work length measured both as distance and travel time for the same group of workers drawn from the 1977 Baltimore Travel Demand dataset revealed that African Americans, females and males, had **shorter work-trip distances** than European Americans, but spent **significantly longer times** travelling to work. Specifically, Black males travelled 7.4 miles while White males travelled 7.8 miles, and Black females travelled 4.9 miles while White females travelled 5.8 miles. However, Black males spent 36.9 minutes compared to 25.3 minutes for White males, and Black females spent 29.5 minutes compared to 23 minutes for White females.<sup>26</sup> Studies which examined both of these two measures of travel length report the same trend of shorter average work-trip distance for African Americans but longer average travel time.<sup>27</sup> There are now more studies on women's work-trip time that examine racial/ethnic differences.

### RACIAL/ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN WOMEN'S WORK-TRIP TIME

Ethnic minority women in New York spent about 10 minutes longer than White women in 1980.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, the difference ranged from over 4 minutes between white and black women in Kansas City to, 6 minutes in Detroit and 9 minutes in Miami (see mean travel times below).<sup>29</sup> Researchers agree that African Americans' dependence on slow travel modes, especially public transit, is a major factor in their long commuting times.

**Table 3**  
Women's Mean Travel Time (all travel modes) 1980 PUMS

	<b>Black</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>White</b>
Kansas City	23.1 mins.	18.7 mins.	18.6 mins.
Detroit	25.5 mins.	19.8 mins.	19.2 mins.
Miami	30.0 mins.	22.0 mins.	21.2 mins.

### TRAVEL TIMES OF AUTO USERS

When travel times of auto users are compared, ethnic/racial differences often reduce or disappear. For instance, in Buffalo, the difference between Black and White female auto users in 1990 is small and no longer significant. Similar patterns of reduced ethnic differences in **travel time of auto users** are found in 1990 for Kansas City, Detroit and Miami.

**Table 4**  
 Women's Mean Travel Time by Auto Use (1990 PUMS)<sup>30</sup>

	<b>Black</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Significant Difference</b>
<b>Buffalo</b>				
all modes	21.2 mins.	----	17.8 mins.	a
auto users	18.1 mins.	----	17.5 mins.	ns
<b>Kansas City</b>				
all modes	22.6 mins.	17.2 mins.	20.2 mins.	b
auto users	21.2 mins.	17.2 mins.	20.3 mins.	ns
<b>Detroit</b>				
all modes	23.9 mins.	19.2 mins.	21.1 mins.	a
auto users	22.3 mins.	19.2 mins.	21.2 mins.	a
<b>Miami</b>				
all modes	26.5 mins.	24.0 mins.	22.8 mins.	b,c
auto users	24.1 mins.	23.6 mins.	22.5 mins.	d

a=Blacks longer than Whites

b=Blacks longer than Whites and Hispanics

c=Hispanics longer than Whites

d=Blacks and Hispanics longer than Whites

ns=not significant

----=not available

Thus while the trip times of African American or Latina auto users in some places are still longer than those of European American auto users (e.g., Detroit and Miami in 1990) the difference is small (under 2 minutes), and the general trend is that by 1990 the racial or ethnic difference in the work trip times of female auto users has reduced or become negligible.<sup>31</sup> Taylor and Ong also find that the commuting time of minority workers is not significantly longer than for Whites once automobile use is taken into account (and on this basis they suggest the importance of an “automobile mismatch”).<sup>32</sup> The “big picture” that is emerging according to more recent data, therefore, is one of convergence in the overall work-trip times of female auto users.

There is some indication however, that the group with longer work trips (relative to other groups of workers) appears to be White male auto users. For example, White male auto users in Buffalo spent about 2 minutes more than Black men or women of both races.<sup>33</sup> It is useful to digress briefly to the question of whether white men are disadvantaged by their long commutes. In the Buffalo study, a typology of four commute types was developed based on travel times and incomes of full-time workers. Convenient and compensatory commutes which are short and long trips respectively to high wage-jobs were distinguished from compromised and constrained commutes which are short and long trips respectively to low-wage jobs.

**Table 5**  
Typology of Commutes

	short commute (<20 mins)	long commute (20+ mins)
<b>high income</b>	convenient	compensatory
<b>low income</b>	compromised	constrained

According to the results, the gender differences were more important than were the race differences. Because of the gender wage gap, women (of both races) not surprisingly, were more likely than men to have compromised and constrained commutes, while men had more convenient and compensatory commutes.<sup>34</sup> The study concluded that the disproportionate concentration of White women in the short trip-low income commute type suggests that their commutes are more accurately characterized as compromised commutes rather than convenient commutes as has been argued in some quarters. However, even though the commutes of women are more similar in their relative concentration in the low-income categories, racial differences in travel times are often still observed among some groups of women. Studies that have examined the commuting times of women in the same income, occupation or family status categories have found some significant racial differences. These are summarized next.

#### RACIAL DIFFERENCES IN TRAVEL TIME AFTER CONTROLLING FOR INCOME AND OCCUPATION

The effects of wages and incomes on commuting are more complex for African American women than for European American women. As shown at the beginning, Black and Hispanic women earn less, on average, than do White women, and theoretically, this should lead Black and Hispanic women to have shorter work trips. Yet as noted above, in the New York metropolitan area for example, African American women's average commuting time was more than 10 minutes longer than European American women's and the racial difference remained even after controlling for income, occupation, and industry of employment.<sup>35</sup> Among low income women who used a car in Baltimore, Black women spent significantly longer times than White women.<sup>36</sup> The expectation that low incomes will lead Black women to have short work trips is therefore not necessarily borne out by much of the commuting data that has been analyzed.

Research on the relationship between occupational segmentation and commuting for minority women is in its infancy, but initial findings show important differences between White and Black women. To the extent that commuting time is indicative of spatial factors, McLafferty and Preston found that for White women, spatial factors directly affect occupational segmentation, but not for Black women. African American women who worked in occupations typical for their gender/race group did not have shorter commute times than those who worked in other occupations, indicating that proximity to home was not a factor in Black women's concentration in gender- and race-segregated occupations.<sup>37</sup> Findings from other multivariate analyses of racial differences in women's commuting indicate an interaction effect between race and occupation: White women in service occupations have short commutes when compared to other White women, but Black women in service occupations do not.<sup>38</sup> Not only are the work trips of Black service workers longer than those of other Black women, their commutes are also often longer than those of White service workers. Thus the generalization that female-dominated occupations such as service jobs are associated with short commutes holds for European American women but not for African American women.

### RACIAL DIFFERENCES IN TRAVEL TIME AFTER CONTROLLING FOR DOMESTIC ROLE

Obtaining a job near the residence continues to be identified as important for women who need to attend to family responsibilities.<sup>39</sup> Yet the limited research about African American women's work trips does not support this otherwise reasonable behavior. In studies of Baltimore, Buffalo, and Rochester, even when they use an automobile for the work trip, African American mothers still travel longer than do European American mothers.<sup>40</sup> In the New York metropolitan region, although the presence and ages of children significantly reduced all women's commuting times, the effects of parenthood were muted for minority women.<sup>41</sup> According to 1990 data, African American mothers in Detroit had slightly longer commutes than European American mothers, and Latina mothers in Miami had slightly longer commutes than European American mothers.<sup>42</sup> From the relatively little evidence available, suffice it to say that family status has less effect on Black women's commuting times. It is possible that current contradictory evidence about the effects of family responsibilities on women's commuting time is due to a tendency to treat women as a homogeneous group, overlooking differences in racial backgrounds, family structures, and places of residence.<sup>43</sup>

### RACIAL DIFFERENCES IN TRAVEL TIME AFTER CONTROLLING FOR DIRECTION OF COMMUTE

In light of the stark residential locational differences between European American women and women of color, it is necessary to control for direction of commute in examining racial differences in journey-to-work time. The conclusions reached on ethnic disparities are unfortunately sometimes compromised by small sample sizes particularly of African Americans who live in suburban locations of the study areas, and in the Mid West cities of Kansas City and Detroit by the small sample sizes of Latino workers.<sup>44</sup> However, the comparisons for women who live in central city locations but commute to noncentral city work destinations (i.e., reverse commuters) are based on sufficiently large numbers of respondents and provide reliable information. For instance, a comparison of the trip lengths of Buffalo White and Black women auto users based on city/noncity locations showed that if the workplace is in the central city, there are no racial differences in trip length, but if the work trip is to a suburban destination, the commutes of Black women are longer.<sup>45</sup> The study concluded that suburban work destination has a lengthening effect on Black women's commutes.

### RACIAL DIFFERENCES IN TRAVEL TIME OF REVERSE COMMUTERS

A very important dimension in locational access to employment is the situation of workers who reverse commute. This is especially relevant because of the sectoral and spatial aspects of the restructured metropolis. Employment restructuring has meant a marked increase in service occupations as well as in suburban employment. For instance, the highest increase for female workers employed in suburban locations in Buffalo between 1980 and 1990 was among service workers; but there was also a significant racial difference: the percentage of female European American service workers employed in suburban location increased by 7 percent between 1980 and 1990, but among African American female service workers the increase was 15.4 percent.<sup>46</sup> For women of color living in central cities, the long commutes required to access growing suburban employment centers can pose a formidable barrier to finding and keeping a job. According to the data below, among female reverse commuters in Buffalo and Detroit, African American women have significantly longer commutes than European American reverse commuters. The racial gap is even more pronounced among service workers.

**Table 6**

Mean Travel Time of Female Reverse Commuters (Auto Users only) 1990 PUMS

<b>Kansas City</b>	<b>Black</b>	<b>White</b>	
reverse commuters (all occupations)	25.2 mins.	23.9 mins.	ns.
reverse commuters (service workers)	24.8 mins.	20.1 mins.	ns.
<b>Buffalo</b>			
reverse commuters (all occupations)	23.5 mins.	19.2 mins.	sig.
reverse commuters (service workers)	25.2 mins.	17.5 mins.	sig.
<b>Detroit</b>			
reverse commuters (all occupations)	25.4 mins.	23.5 mins.	sig.
reverse commuters (service workers)	25.6 mins.	20.1 mins.	sig.

ns=not significant

sig.=significant at p < .05

The 1980 analyses for Buffalo, Miami, Kansas City and Detroit showed much significant differences between White women and Black women who reverse commute—ranging between 5 and 7 minutes difference for these four cities (tables not shown).<sup>47</sup> By 1990, as shown above, the difference between White and Black women reverse commuters is less, and where significant, it is as little as 2 minutes in Detroit and 4 minutes in Buffalo.

Overall then, while the big picture shows a reduced racial gap in women's journey to work time between 1980 and 1990, detailed subgroup analysis reveals a smaller picture that is masked by the overall trend. The evidence points to a continuing and significant travel time cost for Black women service workers with suburban work locations (about 5 minutes or more longer than White female counterparts). The time cost is not trivial if one considers the two-way trip over a prolonged period. It translates into about a work week over a period of one year. Furthermore, it is important to draw attention to the fact that all these comparisons are among women who use automobiles. The findings thus show that even when access to an automobile is not a hindrance, the need to work outside the central city continues to place a disproportionate commuting burden on African American female service workers. This is the little (but important) picture. The emphasis on workplace location in these analyses represents an important refinement that only few previous studies on commuting differences among women have examined.

#### RACIAL DIFFERENCES IN THE USE OF PUBLIC TRANSIT FOR REVERSE COMMUTING

Among non auto users, the incidence of reverse commuting for Black women is still quite high. For example, the use of public transit in 1990 ranges from 17.5% and 9.5% to 6% in Buffalo, Detroit and Kansas City respectively for Black women versus under 4% for White women who reverse commute. This racial difference in women's public transit use for reverse commuting is still rarely documented in studies, but it points to the continuing significance of the relative lack of access to private automobiles in Black women's work access difficulties. There is also some evidence that even among suburban residents, African American women and Latinas depend more on mass transit than White women and spend more time commuting.<sup>48</sup>

**Table 7**  
 Reverse Commuting by Public Transit (1990 PUMS)  
 (percent of female reverse commuters who use public transit)

	<b>Black</b>	<b>White</b>
<b>Buffalo</b>	17.5%	3.5%
<b>Detroit</b>	9.5%	1.7%
<b>Kansas City</b>	6.0%	0.7%

To conclude, survey data and disaggregate data on specific metropolitan areas have allowed more detailed gender- and ethnic-specific studies of differential locational access to employment. However the dependence on the Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS) means that the common measure of locational access that is examined is travel time, and that very large geographical units are used for identifying residential/workplace location. But one should keep in mind that commuting time is a fair estimate of locational access to work because it is a direct measure of the time cost of commuting; and at least one comparison of travel time and trip distance led to the conclusion that “commuting time is more important for workers than commuting distance”.<sup>49</sup> One possible explanation for the longer travel times of some African American women is that African American and European American working women live and work in different sub-areas of central city and suburban locations and face different levels of traffic congestion, but this issue cannot be examined using the PUMS data. In spite of the aggregated definitions of residence and workplace location, and the restrictions of many studies to a single geographical or time context, some general conclusions do emerge.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Studies consistently show that African American women commute longer than do European American women, and the gender gap in commuting, so often noted in the literature, does not exist for African Americans. This review has examined research that explicitly focuses on women and at racial/ethnic differences in commuting and employment access. One important point is that African American women’s long commutes are not simply a result of their economic status or domestic roles. In fact, according to conventional wisdom, African American women’s disadvantaged position in the labor force and their concentration in female-headed households should lead to shorter work trips, not longer ones. As employed mothers, African American women do not enjoy the relative convenience of short commutes to work, nor do they gain any financial payoff for enduring long work trips. Thus the causes of African American women’s long work trips must lie elsewhere—for example, in their lack of access to private transportation or their poorer social and spatial access to jobs.<sup>50</sup>

African American women often incur greater commuting burdens even after controlling for usual racial differences in transportation, sociodemographic, and locational factors. *In spite* of the constraints, many low-income African American women, those with children, or those with suburban jobs still endure longer commutes than do their European American counterparts. The resultant profile of African American women who combine parenthood with wage earning, endure long commutes to suburban destinations, but earn only low incomes (not only contradicts the welfare queen image, but) suggests that a spatial mismatch exists for subgroups of African American women.

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Locational and mobility factors are important reasons for remaining racial gaps in women's travel time to work. If more jobs are available in central cities, there would be less need for suburban commutes. Alternatively, if African Americans had unrestricted access to suburban housing, the racial disparity in access to jobs might be alleviated. Support for this speculation comes from Preston et al.'s finding that race has far less effect on commuting times of female suburban residents; and also from Popkin et al. who report better employment outcomes for black respondents who relocated to suburban areas in Chicago<sup>51</sup>. The benefits of suburban residence may therefore be substantial for African American women's employment prospects.

Most African American women do work in central city locations and only a relatively small fraction of African American women reverse commute in 1990; but if the occupational and locational elements of the restructured metropolitan labor market continue to evolve as they have over the past two decades, such that African American women remain concentrated in service occupations and service occupations continue to suburbanize, then compared to other groups of workers, African American women (even when they use a car) are the ones most likely to experience the disadvantage of long commutes to relatively low-waged service jobs in suburban locations. Blackley observed (based on evidence of spatial mismatch for women from 1980 data) that policy efforts should be targeted at reducing the job access difficulties of women residing in central cities of the North East and North Central regions of the United States.<sup>52</sup> Efforts that combine housing and transportation agendas to bridge the residence-workplace mismatch must be pursued. Initiatives at integrating suburban housing patterns should be continued. But since there is evidence that white resistance (although yielding) is still very strong, city governments will need to invest more effort in better transportation for inner city residents. This could take the form of corporate and government sponsored van pools for reverse commuters.

Improving the employment accessibility of women of color is necessary for a number of reasons that affect minorities in particular and society in general. Spending more time to cover the same distance as Whites amounts to a cost (tax) borne by non Whites. It could lead to lower motivation to seek employment, and for those employed it could mean more lateness and absenteeism at work as well as poorer job performance. If these become factors in promotion decisions, this might mean poorer promotion prospects and less economic gains for women of color.

Examining travel time as a measure of access to employment especially highlights the time burden that minority women bear. The cumulative time costs could be considerable as could the economic value if this time was spent on other tasks. In addition to adverse impacts on economic returns, longer commuting times may also be associated with other indirect or hidden costs. Time spent commuting might mean time spent away from home and family obligations, possibly generating tensions and discords in the family. In particular, the African American or Latina working mother compared to her European American counterpart, faces more stringent time constraints and therefore must depend heavily on family or community-based and informal support networks for child care. Women of color may be expending more time and other associated resources (e.g., income, energy and emotional) than European American workers in order to get to work, thus constrained work trips can impact the economic and social welfare of minority households in several ways.

In future research, it would be useful to obtain information for smaller-sized areas for workplace destinations since this may reveal that European Americans and ethnic minority women have different work destinations in suburban locations which could be related to differences in their occupations. Evidence of differences between Whites and non Whites' workplace destinations would then

raise the possibility of differential hiring of White and non White workers due to either differences in qualifications or to employer discrimination. More details on workers' training, educational qualifications, and about ethnic differences in the kinds of jobs held by Whites and non Whites may be linked to differences in their work locations and therefore to the differing travel times.

Although the work trip is an acceptable indicator of access to employment, it is important to emphasize that studies that utilize commuting data focus only on those who have a work trip thus excluding the unemployed (many of whom are unemployed most probably because of difficult locational access to jobs). The focus here on journey-to-work should not mean overlooking the non-spatial factors that influence access to jobs such as gender and racial discrimination, education and training skills, or economic restructuring. Researchers identify policy directions that emphasize both improved spatial access and improved functional access.<sup>53</sup> Merely improving the transportation opportunities and locational access of inner city minority women for reaching suburban low-status service jobs is not a sufficient policy goal; improved education and job retraining as well as retaining the central city employment base and enforcing fair housing regulations are all complementary steps that will ensure spatial and functional access to jobs.

In conclusion, the results of these sex- and ethnic-specific analyses lend weight to the convictions of some feminist scholars that researchers need to recognize racial and ethnic differences among women in order to avoid falling victim to the "myth of universal womanhood".<sup>54</sup> The clear findings about the longer commutes of many women of color indicate that we should not understate the importance of geographical access to minority women's employment outcomes, and that it would be premature to abandon the possible role of locational factors in analyzing female labor force participation patterns. This conclusion rings true today as it did well over a decade ago when Alexis and DiTomaso grappled with the "elusive triad" of race, transportation and employment.<sup>55</sup>

This paper has summarized results of research conducted in different places and time periods. The paper reports the continuation of many previous trends related to race, gender, and work trips.<sup>56</sup> Even though some key socioeconomic and household information are not included in many studies, it is clear that presently, race and ethnicity remain relevant for differentiating the experiences of female commuters. This is particularly true among inner city residents.<sup>57</sup> While some observers have noted that women's short work trips (when compared to men's) are indicative of a form of spatial entrapment, it is very striking that much of the evidence from studies across different spatial and temporal contexts point to the same conclusion reached in the earliest works of McLafferty and Preston that women of color who spend a great deal of time commuting from the inner city to low-wage, low status jobs in the suburbs experience a more insidious form of spatial entrapment.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I. Johnston-Anumonwo, S. McLafferty and V. Preston, "Gender, race, and the spatial context of women's employment." In J. A. Garber and R. S. Turner (eds.), *Gender in Urban Research* (Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA., 1995).

<sup>2</sup> S. Hanson and I. Johnston, "Gender differences in work-trip lengths: explanations and implications." *Urban Geography* 6,193-219 (1995); P. Gordon, A. Kumar and H. W. Richardson, "Gender differences in metropolitan travel behavior." *Regional Studies* 23,499-510 (1989a); A. Pisarski, *Commuting in America* (Eno Foundation, Westport, CT, 1987); S. Hanson and G. Pratt, "Spatial dimensions of the gender division of labor in a local labor market." *Urban Geography* 9,180-202 (1988); O. Blumen, "Gender differences in the journey to work." *Urban Geography* 16,223-245 (1994); S. Rosenbloom, "Travel by women." In *Demographic Special Reports, 1990 NPTS Report Series* (U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Washington, DC, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> J. Kasarda, "Structural factors affecting the location and timing of urban underclass growth." *Urban Geography* 11,234-264 (1990); J. F. Zax, "Race and commutes." *Journal of Urban Economics*, 28,336-348 (1990); H. J. Holzer, "The spatial mismatch hypothesis: what has the evidence shown?" *Urban Studies*, 28,105-122 (1991); R. Dubin, "Commuting patterns and firm decentralization." *Land Economics* 67,15-29 (1991); K. R. Ihlanfeldt, "Intraurban wage gradients: evidence by race, gender, occupational class, and sector." *Journal of Urban Economics* 32,70-91 (1992).

<sup>4</sup> J. Kain, "Housing segregation, Negro employment, and metropolitan decentralization." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 82,175-197 (1968).

<sup>5</sup> Johnston-Anumonwo, McLafferty and Preston, 1995.

<sup>6</sup> See Holzer, 1991 for an earlier review. More recent evidence is contained in S. McLafferty and V. Preston, "Spatial mismatch and employment in a decade of restructuring." *Professional Geographer* 48:420-431 (1996).

<sup>7</sup> S. McLafferty and V. Preston, "Gender, race and commuting among service sector workers." *Professional Geographer* 43,1-15 (1991); S. McLafferty and V. Preston, "Spatial mismatch and labor market segmentation for African-American and Latina women." *Economic Geography* 68:406-431 (1992); V. Preston, S. McLafferty and E. Hamilton, "The impact of family status on black, white, and hispanic women's commuting." *Urban Geography* 14,228-250 (1993); McLafferty and Preston, 1996; I. Johnston-Anumonwo, "Racial differences in the commuting behavior of women in Buffalo, 1980-1990." *Urban Geography* 16,23-45 (1995a); I. Johnston-Anumonwo, "Locational access to employment: comparing the work trips of African-Americans and European-Americans." *21st Century Afro Review* 1,107-144 (1995b); R. Wilson and I. Johnston-Anumonwo, "A research study on ethnic and racial differences in commuting behavior of men and women: A comparative analysis of Miami, Kansas City and Detroit, 1980 and 1990." submitted to the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration (1996).

<sup>8</sup> See also, M. J. White, "Sex Differences in urban commuting patterns." *The American Economic Review* 76,368-372 (1986); L. D. Singell and J. D. Lillydahl, "An empirical analysis of the commute to work patterns of males and females in two-earner households." *Urban Studies* 2,119-129 (1986); and J. Madden and L. Chui, "The wage effects of residential location and unemployment on employed married women." *Urban Studies* 27,353:369 (1990).

<sup>9</sup> McLafferty and Preston, 1991.

<sup>10</sup> For example, in 1990, U.S. metropolitan areas were 78% white while central cities were only 66% white; metropolitan areas were 13% black while central cities were 22% black; and metropolitan areas were 10% hispanic while central cities were 14.5% hispanic (U.S. Department of Commerce, *1990 Census of population: social and economic characteristics, United States* (1990 CP-2-1) Washington DC: U.S. Bureau of Census, 1993).

- <sup>11</sup>U.S. Department of Commerce, 1993.
- <sup>12</sup>R. Brewer, "Black women in poverty: Some comments on female-headed households." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 13,331-339 (1988, page 334).
- <sup>13</sup>S. McLafferty and V. Preston, 1992.
- <sup>14</sup>U.S. Department of Commerce, *The journey to work in the United States: 1979*. (Current population reports P-23, Special Studies no 122, U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Washington, DC, 1982).
- <sup>15</sup>McLafferty and Preston, 1992.
- <sup>16</sup>Johnston-Anumonwo, 1995b.
- <sup>17</sup>McLafferty and Preston, 1992.
- <sup>18</sup>I. Johnston-Anumonwo, "Racial and gender differences in work-trip patterns." Paper presented at the regional meetings of the Middle States Division of the Association of American Geographers, Syracuse, NY. (October, 1992).
- <sup>19</sup>Johnston-Anumonwo, 1995a.
- <sup>20</sup>Wilson and Johnston-Anumonwo, 1996.
- <sup>21</sup>D. S. Massey and Z. L. Hajnal, "The changing geographic structure of black-white segregation in the United States." *Social Science Quarterly* 76,527-542 (1995).
- <sup>22</sup>M. Schneider and T. Phelan, "Blacks and jobs: Never the twain shall meet?" *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 26,299-312 (1990).
- <sup>23</sup>J. T. Darden, "Differential access to housing in the suburbs." *Journal of Black Studies* 21,15-22 (1990); G. Galster, "Black suburbanization: Has it changed the relative location of races?" *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 26,621-628 (1991).
- <sup>24</sup>Johnston-Anumonwo, McLafferty and Preston, 1995; W. A. Leigh, "Barriers to fair housing for black women." *Sex Roles* 21,69-84 (1989).
- <sup>25</sup>J. Pucher and F. Williams, "Socioeconomic characteristics of urban travellers: Evidence from the 1990-1991 NPTS." *Transportation Quarterly* 46,561-581 (1992).
- <sup>26</sup>Johnston-Anumonwo, 1995b.
- <sup>27</sup>P. Gordon, A. Kumar, and H. W. Richardson, "The spatial mismatch hypothesis: some new evidence." *Urban Studies* 26,315-326 (1989b); B. D. Taylor and P. M. Ong, "Racial and ethnic variations in employment access: An examination of residential location and commuting in metropolitan areas." Paper presented at the 73rd Annual Meeting of the Transportation Research Board, Washington DC. (January, 1994).
- <sup>28</sup>McLafferty and Preston, 1991.
- <sup>29</sup>Wilson and Johnston-Anumonwo, 1996.
- <sup>30</sup>Sources: Johnston-Anumonwo, 1995a; and Wilson and Johnston-Anumonwo, 1996.
- <sup>31</sup>McLafferty and Preston (1996) report some lessening of ethnic and racial difference in women's overall commuting time between 1980 and 1990 in New York.
- <sup>32</sup>Taylor and Ong, 1994.
- <sup>33</sup>I. Johnston-Anumonwo, "Race, Gender and Constrained Work Trips in Buffalo, NY, 1990." *Professional Geographer*, forthcoming.
- <sup>34</sup>Johnston-Anumonwo, forthcoming.
- <sup>35</sup>McLafferty and Preston, 1991.
- <sup>36</sup>Johnston-Anumonwo, 1995b.
- <sup>37</sup>McLafferty and Preston, 1992.
- <sup>38</sup>Johnston-Anumonwo, 1995a.
- <sup>39</sup>S. Hanson and G. Pratt, "Job search and the occupational segregation of women." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 81,229-253 (1991); S. Hanson and G. Pratt, *Gender, work, and space* (Routledge, New York 1995).

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<sup>40</sup>Johnston-Anumonwo, 1992 and 1995b.

<sup>41</sup>Preston, McLafferty and Hamilton, 1993.

<sup>42</sup>Wilson and Johnston-Anumonwo, 1996.

<sup>43</sup>Preston, McLafferty and Hamilton, 1993, page 246.

<sup>44</sup>Preston, McLafferty and Hamilton (1993) and McLafferty and Preston (1996) separated residents in central locations from those in suburban locations of the New York metropolitan region. There were sufficiently large sample sizes of women in three ethnic groups and their findings show longer average commuting times for African American and Latina women, in both 1980 and 1990, especially when compared with White women who live in the center.

<sup>45</sup>Johnston-Anumonwo, 1995a, pages 31-32.

<sup>46</sup>Johnston-Anumonwo, 1995a.

<sup>47</sup>Johnston-Anumonwo, 1995a; and Wilson and Johnston-Anumonwo, 1996.

<sup>48</sup>McLafferty and Preston, 1996.

<sup>49</sup>Dubin, 1991, page 28.

<sup>50</sup>Johnston-Anumonwo, McLafferty and Preston, 1995.

<sup>51</sup>Preston, McLafferty and Hamilton, 1993; S. J. Popkin, J. E. Rosenbaum and P. M. Meaden, "Labor market experiences of low-income black women in middle-class suburbs: evidence from a survey of Gautreaux program participants." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 12,556-573 (1993).

<sup>52</sup>P. Blackley, "Spatial mismatch in urban labor markets: Evidence from large U.S. metropolitan areas." *Social Science Quarterly* 71,39-52 (1990).

<sup>53</sup>J. Kasarda, "Urban industrial transition and the underclass." *Annals of the American Association of Political and Social Science* 501,26-47 (1989); Kasarda, 1990.

<sup>54</sup>R. Sanders, "Integrating race and ethnicity into geographic gender studies." *Professional Geographer* 42,228-231 (1990).

<sup>55</sup>M. Alexis and DiTomaso, "Employment, transportation and race: In pursuit of the elusive triad." *Journal of Urban Affairs* 5,81-94 (1983).

<sup>56</sup>McLafferty and Preston, 1991 and 1992; Ihlanfeldt, 1992.

<sup>57</sup>McLafferty and Preston, 1996.