

The Effects of Race and Family Structure on Women's Spatial Relationship to the Labor Market

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This study examines the intersection of race, family structure, and economic inequality through women's spatial relationships to the labor market. Using survey data from three major metro labor markets, we operationalize spatial relationships in two ways: first, using a conventional measure of commute time, and second, using an indicator of neighborhood job contacts to obtain employment. Results indicate that family structure exerts no direct effect on women's spatial relationship to the labor market. Race, by contrast, plays a strong role, mediating women's reliance on mass transit, their response to teenage kids in the household, and their likelihood of using neighbors to find employment. The result is a situation in which black and Latina women are more likely than white women to rely on localized job networks to obtain employment that requires longer commutes from home.

This study examines women's spatial relationships to the labor market and the consequences of these relationships for expected earnings. We focus on spatial inequalities because they are central to recent debates over gender *and* racial inequalities in the labor market, thereby providing a "strategic research site" in which to explore their intersections. Regarding gender, a common argument is that cultural expectations associated with marriage and motherhood encourage women to work closer to home, thereby "shrinking" their opportunity structures and, consequently, expected wages. Regarding race and ethnicity, a common argument is that minorities, because of residential segregation and often a lack of private transportation, must commute longer to find suitable job opportunities. In addition to these arguments, we examine the extent to which family structure and race intersect to influence the spatial dimensions of women's job networks, specifically the use of neighborhood contacts to find work.

The data for our analysis come from the Multi-City Survey of Urban Inequality, which provides information on commute times, modes of transit, and job contacts for a heterogeneous population of working women in a diverse set of metro areas. This social and spacial heterogeneity is important because it allows us to move beyond conventional one-city case studies to assess the generalizability of prior research findings.

Background

We begin with the basic assumption that race and gender represent social relations, not individual attributes, and that these relations are generally unequal.

Men, as a group, benefit, intentionally or not, from the subjugation of women; likewise, whites, benefit from the subjugation of racial minorities. In this study, we are particularly interested in how these ascriptive relations influence women's spatial relationship to the labor market. Below we review respective literatures in this area and clarify expectations for empirical investigation.

Gender and Spatial Relationships to the Labor Market: Family Structure

Prompted by women's increasing labor force participation and the rise of dual-earner households, researchers have begun to pay closer attention to the opportunities and constraints that shape women's relationship to the labor market. Central to this line of investigation is the notion that although men now contribute more time to housework and childcare than in the past (Levine and Pittinsky 1997; Thompson and Walker 1989), women still adjust their paid-work lives much more than do men to accommodate domestic responsibilities (Gerson 1985, 1998; Hochschild 1989, 2001; Reskin and Padavic 1994). One way this adjustment is presumed to occur is through restricted spatial relationships to the labor market. Specifically, researchers argue that in order to accommodate the dual demands of home and formal employment, wives and mothers voluntarily restrict their commute times to maximize time for (increased) domestic responsibilities (Chapple 2001; Fagnani 1984; Gordon, Kumar, and Richardson 1989; Hanson and Johnston 1985; Hanson and Pratt 1991; Madden 1981; Preston, McLafferty, and Hamilton 1993; Singell and Lillydahl 1986). This spatial restriction, in turn, is presumed to suppress women's wages by truncating the range of jobs for which they make themselves available—if "good jobs" are hard to find, then spatial restrictions do not help, and are likely to hurt, in obtaining them (Hanson and Pratt 1991, 1995; Singell and Lillydahl 1986).

Some readers might object that these "gendered" social relationships are outdated and that men now do more domestic work than ever before. While this claim holds some truth, research continues to show that the distribution of household chores remains far from equitable and that traditional gendered expectations regarding household and childcare responsibilities remain pervasive in the general population (Gerson 1985, 1998; Hochschild 1989, 2001; Reskin and Padavic 1994). Data from the General Social Survey, for example, indicate that roughly 60 percent of respondents in 1996 claimed that "everyone in the family benefits" when the woman in the household is responsible for home and childcare and the man is responsible for providing financial support. Moreover, 84 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that women are typically more responsible for the care of home and children because "they are trained to perform this role from childhood." These patterns suggest that one way "gender" is constructed in the labor market is through traditional expectations about wives'

and mothers' domestic responsibilities—responsibilities that encourage wives and mothers rather than single and childless women to work closer to home.

Race and Spatial Relationships to the Labor Market: Spatial Mismatches and Transit

If, spatially, gender inequality is conceptualized in terms of shorter commutes, then racial inequality is conceptualized contrarily, in terms of longer commutes. According to research on the “spatial mismatch” thesis, whites tend to live closer to booming suburban job opportunities, and urban minorities tend to remain isolated in inner cities where they are spatially “mismatched” from new job opportunities for which they are qualified (see Holzer 1991; Ihlanfeldt and Sjoquist 1998; Kain 1992). The result is presumed to be twofold: (1) higher unemployment rates among minorities, particularly inner-city blacks, as a result of insufficient information and access to available jobs; and (2) longer commutes for minorities who do secure employment, which leads to more time away from home and, hence, greater potential conflict between home and employment responsibilities.

While housing discrimination is presumed to be the primary force behind this “spatial mismatch” of minorities and jobs, researchers also realize that modes of transit can also play a key role. This is true for a couple reasons. First, an individual's mode of transit determines how much time a given commuting distance will take to cover: Five miles by bus are likely to take far longer than five miles by car, especially if these five miles cross municipal boundaries. Second, minorities are more likely than whites to use mass transit, and so failure to account for this fact can lead to incorrect conclusions about the extent to which “race matters” for commuting. For the purposes of the present research, we privilege the temporal dimension of commuting, as opposed to the spatial dimension, because we believe that the temporal dimension is how people generally think about their commutes and because it relates more directly to the expectation that traditional marriage and motherhood roles encourage women to spend less time commuting and more time tending house. Based on these perspectives, we might expect, first, that minority women spend more time commuting than do white women, regardless of family structure, and second, that a significant portion of racial variation in women's commute times is explained by differences in modes of transit.

Family Structure, Race, and Spatial Relationships to the Labor Market: Likely Intersections

To the extent that above expectations hold, they suggest that gender and race relations intersect to pull minority women in countervailing directions with respect to their spatial relationship to the labor market. On the one hand, family

responsibilities associated with being wives and mothers presumably encourage proximity to home; on the other hand, racial segregation, the geographic unevenness of job opportunities, and relative reliance on public transit conjoin to encourage longer commutes. A central question for us is which set of factors tends to prevail and to what extent each influences women's expected wages.

In considering these issues, it is important to recognize not only that metro labor markets are racially uneven but also that family structures tend to differ significantly by race and ethnicity (Bennett, Bloom, and Craig 1989; Bennett, Bloom, and Miller 1995). These differences are important because they suggest that part of the statistical effect attributed to women's "gendered" family roles (i.e., being a wife and/or mother) might really be "race effects." For example, if married women are found to have shorter commutes than single women without controlling for race, it could be that this finding reflects the fact that white women (who are more likely to be married) tend to have shorter commute times than minority women (who are less likely to be married). Thus, empirical analysis ought to examine race and family structure simultaneously in order to minimize the risk of drawing improper conclusions about each factor's "main," or independent effect, on women's spatial relationship to the labor market.

In studies that have examined these dynamics, researchers have affirmed the importance of race in explaining women's commute times, over and above family structure. For example, Preston and colleagues (1993) used ANOVA techniques to analyze 1980 census data from New York City and found that race was more important than family status as a predictor of commute times. In a follow-up study of New York City, McLafferty and Preston (1996) found that only *white* women significantly reduced their commute times in response to marriage and motherhood. Drawing from this research, we expect that race and ethnicity will account for a significant portion of observed differences by family structure.

Family Structure, Race, and Neighborhood Job Contacts

As the above discussion reflects, prior research has tended to conceptualize women's spatial relationships to the labor market in terms of their commuting behavior, focusing on the spatio-temporal distance between female-labor supply and demand. However, research on labor markets informs us that there are intermediary social networks that often sort and link jobseekers to different segments of local economies. Granovetter (1995) describes these networks as the "missing piece" in orthodox discussions of labor market dynamics. His argument is that individuals often learn about and fill jobs with the help of personal contacts, who because of homophilous social relations, tend to share the same race, gender, and family characteristics as those they help. As a result, processes of "social closure" tend to prevail in the labor market, whereby particular race

and gender groups concentrate in unique segments of local economies and reproduce this concentration over time through network referrals.

This “social embeddedness” perspective—wherein economic relations of supply and demand are regulated by, or embedded in, preexisting social relations among participants, which are themselves shaped by race, gender, and class relations—suggests that another way to conceptualize women’s spatial relationship to the labor market is in terms of their socio-spatial distance from job contacts. In this study, we focus on the likelihood that women of different races and family structures rely on neighbors to find employment. In this framework, we interpret reliance on neighbors as an indicator of relative isolation and disadvantage, rather than as a social resource. Regarding family structure, we suspect that if wives and mothers are indeed more “home-centered” than are single and childless women, then they will be more likely to know and use neighbors to acquire jobs. This expectation derives in part from opportunity—more time at home means potentially more time with neighbors—and from motivation—wives and mothers who wish to limit their commutes are presumably more likely to seek out job contacts who have succeeded in limiting their own commutes to and from the same neighborhood.

In one of the few studies to examine the spatial structure of women’s social networks, Moore (1990) produced general support for these expectations. Specifically, she found that women’s social networks are more likely than men’s to include neighbors. Furthermore, Ishii-Kuntz and Seccombe (1989) found that the presence of children in the home positively correlates with the number of neighbors in adults’ social networks. Finally, in their study of Worcester, Massachusetts, Hanson and Pratt (1991) found that women are much more likely than men to use “community contacts” to obtain jobs. They also found that this likelihood was stronger among lower-income, working-class women than among higher-income professionals (see also Henly 1999). These findings suggest that mothers and women with lower economic status are more likely than their respective counterparts (i.e., women from wealthier households and single women) to utilize spatially restricted job networks to obtain employment.

Research on race and ethnicity suggests similar expectations for minority workers, particularly those of lower economic status. For example, Elliott and Sims (2001) found that blacks and Latinos rely more frequently on neighborhood job contacts to find employment than their white counterparts, even after controlling for individual-level characteristics and neighborhood racial and poverty concentrations (see also Elliott 1999). This finding, when juxtaposed to the spatial mismatch literature, highlights the peculiar way in which residential segregation can both insulate *and* distance minority workers, particularly those of lower economic status, from employment opportunities, leaving them reliant on local contacts to find jobs relatively far from home.

Spatial Relationships to the Labor Market and Wage Determination

Finally, we are interested in the extent to which these different spatial relationships to the labor market influence women's hourly wages. The general expectation is that longer commutes and more spatially expansive job networks (i.e., networks that draw on personal contacts beyond an individual's own neighborhood) lead to better paying jobs, all else equal, because these factors presumably extend workers' range of opportunity. Inversely, if marriage and motherhood restrict this range of opportunity, wives and/or mothers presumably receive lower returns for their employment efforts than do single and/or childless women. If, however, longer commutes are more a function of social isolation, employer discrimination, and spatial mismatches than freedom from traditional household responsibilities, then there may be a null, or even negative, correlation between women's spatial relationship to the labor market and wages. For these reasons, we leave the question of wage determination an empirical one. Below we discuss the data we use to examine these different expectations.

Data

Data for our analysis come from the Multi-City Survey of Urban Inequality (MCSUI), which is a multistage stratified random sample of adults living in Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, and Los Angeles from 1992 to 1994. In stage one of the MCSUI's sampling design, census tracts were stratified by race/ethnicity and poverty status in each metro area. In Atlanta these census tracts were drawn from all nine counties of the 1990 Atlanta metropolitan area (Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry, and Rockdale). In Boston, census tracts were drawn from the entire Boston-Lawrence-Salem Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area. In Los Angeles, they were drawn from the core county of the metro area, Los Angeles County, which is ethnically and economically diverse. In stage two, households were randomly selected from within these stratified census tracts. Face-to-face interviews were then conducted with individuals from the selected households. These interviews lasted approximately two hours, with the race/ethnicity of respondents and interviewers matched to minimize well-known race-of-interviewer effects (for details see Johnson, Oliver, and Bobo 1994; O'Connor, Tilly, and Bobo 2000).

For analytical purposes, we pool data from Atlanta, Boston, and Los Angeles and include only white, black, and Latina women, ages 21 to 64, who work for pay outside the home and who are not self-employed. Although the three metro areas differ in their racial and ethnic compositions and patterns of residential segregation, we contend that pooling the data across all three metro areas is useful for several reasons. First, by examining patterns in three very distinct labor market settings, we can develop a better sense of the extent to

which findings from prior case studies of particular metro areas (e.g., Preston, McLafferty, and Hamilton's [1993] study of New York or Hanson and Pratt's [1995] study of Worcester, Massachusetts) can be reasonably generalized to women's experiences in large metro labor markets as a whole. Second, by including indicators of metro residence and neighborhood-racial composition in our analyses, we can examine empirically the relative statistical significance of each of these types of contextual factors for explaining variation in women's spatial relationships to the labor market. Third and finally, by pooling the data across all three metro areas we can obtain sufficient subsample sizes to examine interaction effects of interest, such as the interaction of race/ethnicity and family structure on women's commuting and job search behaviors.

Dependent Variables

Dependent variables in our regression analyses include one-way commute time, use of neighborhood job contacts to acquire employment, and the natural logarithm of hourly wages. *Commute time* is a continuous variable measured in minutes ranging from 0 to 120. The information is self-reported and obtained from the question "How much time do you spend traveling to work one-way?" The original data contained seven outliers over 120 minutes, which we recoded to an upper-bound of 120 minutes. Although women may report time running errands as part of their commute times, we are unable to control for this fact and, thus, must assume that the responses are reasonably comparable across individual respondents.

Our second dependent variable is the use (yes/no) of a *neighborhood job contact* to acquire employment. Information for this variable comes from two nested questions. The first question asks, "Did you find your (last/present) job through friends or relatives, other people, newspaper ads, or some other way?" If the respondent reported using a personal contact, then the interviewer asked about the characteristics of the contact, including whether he or she lived in the respondent's neighborhood. We code this variable as a binary outcome (1 = neighborhood contact; 0 = some other means).

Our third dependent variable is the natural logarithm of hourly wages. We use hourly wages instead of weekly or annual earnings to control for the number of hours worked. Thus, this analysis focuses only on one factor indicative of a "good job" (hourly pay); it does not examine part-time versus full-time employment, nor salaried versus contract employment.

Independent Variables

Consistent with prior research (Browne, Tigges, and Press 2001; Preston, McLafferty, and Hamilton 1993; Johnston-Anumonwo 1992), we define family structure along two primary dimensions. One is the marital status of the respondent

(married = 1; single = 0). The other is a series of dummy variables indicating the age of the youngest child in the household: no children (reference category); under 6-years-old; 6 to 12-years-old; and 13 to 18-years-old. Because prior research suggests that household structure also influences women's relationship to the labor market (see Tienda and Glass 1985), we include three respective dummy indicators: presence of an adult partner in the household (yes = 1; no = 0); presence of an adult family member in the household (1 = yes; 0 = no); and presence of an adult non-partner/kin in the household (1 = yes; 0 = no). The expectation is that additional adults in the household relieve some of the domestic responsibilities that traditionally befall wives and mothers, thereby rendering marital status and motherhood less salient to women's spatial relationships to the labor market.

We measure race and ethnicity as a series of dummy indicators for (non-Latina) whites, blacks, and Latinas, with white women serving as the reference category. Implicit in this measurement is the idea that race and ethnicity are not just characteristics of individuals but also social relationships that influence spatial access to jobs.

Control Variables

Indicators for *mode of transit* come from the question "Do you regularly travel to your job in your own car, in a car pool, on public transportation, or in some other way?" To control for *city of residence*, we include a series of dummy indicators and, in supplemental analyses, normalize respondents' commute times around their local average. These statistical controls help to ensure that observed findings are not simply a function of city differences in average commute times. To assess the effects of *racial residential segregation* we include indicators of the percent of the respondent's block group that is black and the percent that is Latino. Drawing from conventional understanding of the "spatial mismatch" thesis, we would generally expect block groups, or neighborhoods, with relatively large black and/or Latino populations to be more spatially distant from skill-appropriate job opportunities than block groups, or neighborhoods, with relatively small black and/or Latino populations.

Because human and household capital can also influence women's spatial relationship to the labor market, we include statistical controls for educational attainment, work experience, and total family income. The former is a continuous measure of the total number of years the respondent reports attending school. Work experience is a continuous measure of the number of years of employment since first leaving full-time school. Household income is self-reported and includes salaries, pensions, and public assistance of all members of the family. The variable was originally coded as an ordinal scale ranging from 1 (\$4,999 or less) to 20 (\$150,000 or more). We substitute the midpoints for each category and treat the variable as continuous.

To control for “job attachment,” we also include indicators of job tenure and hours worked per week. The job tenure variable refers to the self-reported number of years a respondent has worked at her current job. Work time is measured according to the “usual” number of hours the respondent reports working per week. A full list of pooled and race-specific means and standard deviations for these variables appears in Table 1.

Results

Descriptive findings in Table 2 indicate that, as expected, single women tend to commute longer than do married women (29 minutes one-way compared with 25 minutes). By contrast, results for parental status reveal relatively little difference between mothers and childless women. For example, married women with and without kids exhibit average one-way commute times of 24.8 and 25.3 minutes, respectively; likewise, single women with and without kids exhibit average commute times of 30.2 and 29.2 minutes, respectively. These patterns are consistent with those found by Preston, McLafferty, and Hamilton (1993) in New York and suggest that, among women, links between home and employment are influenced more by marriage than by motherhood.

Further investigation reveals that these observed marital differences pale in comparison with observed racial differences. For example, while the difference in average commute times between married and single women is roughly four minutes, the difference between white and black single-women’s commute times is nearly nine minutes (24.3 minutes compared with 33.1). Further review indicates that the largest racial difference in commute times occurs among mothers of teenagers, with white mothers having an average commute time of only 18 minutes compared with 28 minutes among respective Latina mothers and 35 minutes among respective black mothers. These patterns suggest that racial and ethnic differences shape commute times much more than marital and parental status do, and that these differences become especially acute in juggling the responsibilities of formal employment and teenage children—a pattern heretofore undocumented because most prior research aggregates all children over six years of age. To determine if these patterns are statistically significant, net of other factors, we turn to Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression.

Does Family Structure Influence Commute Time, Net of Other Factors?

In Table 3 we estimate a series of nested regression models that predict individual commute time by marital and parental statuses, controlling for key background factors.¹ Consistent with Table 2, results from Models 1 and 2 indicate that, net of other factors, marriage but not children (regardless of age) significantly correlates with shorter commute times—a finding consistent with multivariate analyses from prior research (Gordon, Kumar, and Richardson 1989;

Table 1
Sample Means and Standard Deviations (in Parentheses)

	All Women	White Women	Black Women	Latina Women
All Job Seekers	<i>N</i> = 2,171	<i>N</i> = 614	<i>N</i> = 954	<i>N</i> = 603
<i>Family Structure</i>				
Married (0 : 1)	.32 (.47)	.47 (.50)	.21 (.41)	.34 (.47)
No kids < 18-years-old (0 : 1)	.47 (.50)	.58 (.49)	.50 (.50)	.29 (.46)
Youngest kid < 6-years-old (0 : 1)	.27 (.44)	.20 (.40)	.24 (.38)	.38 (.49)
Youngest kid 6–12-years-old (0 : 1)	.17 (.38)	.13 (.33)	.17 (.38)	.22 (.41)
Youngest kid 13–18-years-old (0 : 1)	.09 (.29)	.08 (.28)	.09 (.29)	.11 (.31)
<i>Household Structure</i>				
Partner present (0 : 1)	.06 (.24)	.06 (.23)	.05 (.22)	.08 (.27)
Adult kin present (0 : 1)	.15 (.36)	.08 (.28)	.16 (.36)	.22 (.42)
Adult non-kin/partner present (0 : 1)	.04 (.20)	.06 (.25)	.02 (.14)	.06 (.23)
<i>Mode of Transit</i>				
Car (0 : 1)	.60 (.49)	.80 (.40)	.58 (.49)	.42 (.49)
Walk (0 : 1)	.05 (.22)	.04 (.19)	.02 (.16)	.11 (.31)
Carpool (0 : 1)	.06 (.24)	.03 (.18)	.03 (.18)	.14 (.35)
Public transit (0 : 1)	.24 (.43)	.07 (.26)	.33 (.47)	.28 (.45)

<i>Controls</i>				
Education (years)	12.56 (3.04)	13.84 (2.27)	13.19 (2.00)	10.30 (3.78)
Family income (\$000)	29.77 (26.35)	43.00 (32.04)	26.91 (22.38)	20.77 (.45)
Work experience (years)	15.0 (10.81)	15.46 (10.28)	15.80 (10.99)	13.24 (10.89)
Tenure at current job (years)	5.39 (6.50)	5.86 (6.42)	6.15 (7.31)	3.71 (4.65)
Hours worked per week	37.31 (9.92)	36.62 (10.72)	37.47 (8.93)	37.77 (10.51)
Los Angeles	.45 (.50)	.39 (.49)	.44 (.50)	.54 (.50)
Atlanta	.25 (.43)	.32 (.47)	.35 (.48)	.02 (.18)
Boston	.30 (.46)	.29 (.46)	.20 (.40)	.44 (.50)
% Black in census tract	.39 (.36)	.12 (.18)	.69 (.27)	.20 (.26)
% Hispanic in census tract	.26 (.28)	.16 (.19)	.16 (.19)	.53 (.28)
One-way commute (minutes)	27.88 (21.60)	23.41 (19.51)	32.18 (22.64)	25.64 (20.70)
Hourly wage	10.12 (6.84)	12.35 (7.53)	10.14 (5.93)	7.83 (6.73)
<hr/>				
Recent Job Seekers	<i>N</i> = 1,604	<i>N</i> = 440	<i>N</i> = 679	<i>N</i> = 485
<i>Method of job acquisition</i>				
No search	.13 (.32)	.14 (.33)	.11 (.30)	.13 (.33)
Formal application	.44 (.50)	.51 (.50)	.48 (.50)	.32 (.47)
Informal search	.43 (.49)	.35 (.48)	.41 (.49)	.51 (.50)
Used a neighbor to acquire job	.20 (.40)	.12 (.33)	.18 (.39)	.30 (.46)
Used a neighbor of same race to acquire job	.17 (.17)	.10 (.30)	.16 (.37)	.24 (.43)
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Table 2
 Mean One-Way Commute Times (in Minutes) for Women by Race and Family Status

Family Status	All Women	White	Black	Latina
<i>Marital status</i>		<i>All workers</i>		
Married	25.0	22.4	29.0	24.7
Single	29.3	24.3	33.1	26.1
No other adults in household	30.3	26.0	34.0	25.4
Partner in household	25.2	19.7	27.2	27.5
Kin adult in household	28.4	21.2	31.1	27.8
Non-kin/partner adult in household	24.3	20.6	30.6	24.6
<i>Parental status</i>				
Youngest kid < 6-years-old	27.9	20.8	34.6	25.0
Youngest kid 7–12-years-old	27.8	28.9	30.6	25.5
Youngest kid 13–18 years-old	28.6	17.7	35.2	28.3
No kids under 18-years-old	27.8	24.5	31.0	25.7
<i>Family structure</i>				
Married with kid < 18-years-old	24.8	21.9	27.2	26.0
Married without kid < 18-years-old	25.3	23.0	31.4	20.0
Single with kid < 18-years-old	30.2	22.7	35.6	25.1
Single without kid < 18-years-old	29.2	25.7	31.3	28.3
<i>N</i>	2,171	614	954	603
<i>Marital status</i>		<i>Full-time workers only</i>		
Married	25.9	23.7	29.4	24.9
Single	29.2	24.6	32.6	26.4
No other adults in household	29.9	26.0	33.3	25.4
Partner in household	25.2	19.1	24.9	30.6
Kin adult in household	29.3	21.7	32.4	28.8
Non-kin/partner adult in household	24.7	22.8	30.6	22.4
<i>Parental Status</i>				
Youngest kid < 6-years-old	28.2	21.9	34.3	25.0
Youngest kid 7–12-years-old	28.6	28.7	30.4	25.8
Youngest kid 13–18-years-old	29.1	18.5	34.7	28.8
No kids under 18-years-old	27.9	24.8	30.7	26.2
<i>Family Structure</i>				
Married with kid < 18-years-old	25.6	23.0	27.6	25.8
Married without kid < 18-years-old	26.5	24.4	31.9	21.5
Single with kid < 18-years-old	30.4	25.0	35.3	25.1
Single without kid < 18-years-old	28.8	25.3	30.9	27.9
<i>N</i>	1,702	458	781	463

Table 3
 OLS Regression Coefficients Predicting One-Way Commute
 Times among Women

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Family structure</i>				
Married (0 : 1)	-2.97**	-2.53*	-.82	-2.56
No kids < 18-years-old (ref.)	—	—	—	—
Youngest kid < 6-years-old	.68	.54	.37	-1.39
Youngest kid 6–12-years-old	.06	-.02	.36	1.98
Youngest kid 13–18-years-old	.73	.73	.59	-6.28*
<i>Household Structure</i>				
Partner present (0 : 1)	-.352	-3.31	-3.68*	-3.67*
Adult kin present (0 : 1)	-1.49	-1.46	-2.53*	-2.45*
Adult non-kin present (0 : 1)	-3.83	-3.36	-2.77	-2.92
<i>Race and Ethnicity</i>				
White (ref.)		—	—	—
Black (0 : 1)		5.19**	2.87	.69
Hispanic (0 : 1)		1.14	.39	-1.51
<i>Mode of Transit</i>				
Car (ref.)			—	—
Walk			-5.08*	-5.11*
Carpool			4.15*	4.01*
Public Transit			23.13***	23.05***
<i>Race × Family Interactions</i>				
Black × Married				2.27
Hispanic × Married				2.72
Black × Youngest < 6				3.37
Hispanic × Youngest < 6				1.47
Black × Youngest 6–12				-1.89
Hispanic × Youngest 6–12				-1.74
Black × Youngest 13–18				9.85**
Hispanic × Youngest 13–18				8.53*
<i>Controls</i>				
Education (years)	-.22	-.31	.12	.10
Family income (\$000)	-.02	-.02	.02	.03

Table 3
(continued)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Work experience (years)	-.03	-.03	.02	.02
Tenure at current job (years)	.001	-.02	.02	.02
Hours worked per week	.01	.01	.04	.04
Los Angeles (ref.)	—	—	—	—
Atlanta	2.86*	3.15*	2.13	2.27
Boston	-.54	.028	-2.96**	-2.83
% Black in census tract	8.97***	4.17*	-.28	-.36
% Hispanic in census tract	.80	-.15	-2.23	-2.19
Constant	28.32***	28.50***	18.44***	20.17***
Adjusted R ²	.04	.05	.23	.24
Valid N	2,132	2,132	2,132	2,132

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Hanson and Johnston 1985; Johnston-Anumonwo 1992).² However, once we control for mode of transit in Model 3, the “marriage effect” declines 68 percent (2.53–82/2.53) and becomes statistically insignificant. Further investigation reveals that this change occurs because married women are more likely to drive to work than single women (75 percent compared with 53 percent), whereas single women are more likely than married women to rely on public transit (30 percent compared with 12 percent), which increases average commute time from roughly 18 minutes one-way to over 41 minutes one-way, net of other factors. Thus, the main reason married women have shorter commutes than do single women is because they are less likely to rely on public transit to get to work. While this finding does not deny the salience of patriarchal relations for understanding women’s employment decisions, it does suggest that the pooled resources that marriage provides helps to shorten women’s commute times by providing them with private transit options.

Does Race Mediate the Influence of Family Structure?

In Model 2 of Table 3 we add indicators of race and ethnicity to our baseline model. Results point to two main conclusions. First, net of other

factors, results confirm that black women have significantly longer commutes than do white women—about five minutes longer one-way, all else equal. Second, this difference, like the “marriage effect” above, is explained largely by mode of transit. Specifically, black women tend to have significantly longer commute times than white women in part because they are more likely to rely on public transit to get to work—a finding consistent with prior research (Blumenberg and Ong 2001; Ong and Blumenberg 1998; Taylor and Ong 1995).

To affirm that these findings are not a function of underlying racial and commuting differences in our three metro areas, we reestimated all models using a locally “normalized” measure of commute time as our dependent variable. We constructed this measure by dividing each respondent’s commute time by the average commute time for women in the local metro area. Results (not shown) coincide with those in Table 3, affirming the statistical robustness of our reported findings. Furthermore, we reestimated Models 1 and 2 in Table 3 for women who reported *not* using public transit to get to work. Our rationale was that if public transit is indeed a key factor linking race and marriage to commuting differentials, then statistically significant marriage and race “effects” evident in Models 1 and 2 should become statistically insignificant among women who do not use public transit to get to work. Results of this supplemental analysis (not shown), confirm this expectation: Among women who use private transit to get to work, there is no significant marital, parental, or racial difference in average commute times, net of background factors.

Next we wished to determine if marriage and parenthood have *different* effects on white, black, and Latina women’s commute times. To examine this possibility, we added respective race-marriage and race-parenthood interaction terms to Model 4 in Table 3. Results for these interaction terms are statistically insignificant with one exception. Consistent with findings in Table 2, results indicate that white women respond very differently than do black and Latina women to the presence of teenage children in the household. Appropriate calculations indicate that, net of other factors, white mothers of teens have commute times that are roughly a third shorter than those of white childless women.³ By contrast, black and Latina mothers of teenagers exhibit some of the longest commute times, net of mode of transit and other background factors. For example, black single-mothers of teens have one-way commutes that are 4 minutes *longer* than do black single-childless women, and black married-mothers of teens have one-way commutes that are 10 minutes *longer* than do black married-childless women.

These findings are noteworthy for a couple of reasons. First, they suggest that one reason prior research has uncovered inconsistent findings for the effect of children on women’s commute times is because the effect varies by race and ethnicity. Failure to take this variability into account can lead to model

misspecification. Second, these findings help to pinpoint when, exactly, the effect of motherhood diverges for working white and minority women, namely as the youngest child in the household reaches his or her teens. One interpretation of this finding is that as children age they increase household demands on white women, encouraging them to work closer to home; among black and Latina mothers, the opposite appears to be true. To explore this finding further, we computed the average commute times that women said that they would be *willing* to commute—a question also in the MCSUI dataset. Results (not shown) point to the same basic pattern: As the youngest child in the household ages, white women say that they are willing to spend less time commuting, whereas black and Latina women say that they are willing to spend more time commuting.

Finally, a couple of patterns involving our “control” variables merit attention. First, if anything, the presence of other adults in the household reduces women’s average commute times, even after controlling for mode of transit. Separate estimations for single and married women (not shown) indicate that this pattern holds across marital statuses, which suggests that while extended households might help working women distribute financial and household responsibilities over a greater number of adults, this type of assistance does not “free up” women to pursue longer commutes.

Second, with regard to contextual factors, results show that women living in predominantly black block groups, or neighborhoods, tend to have longer commutes, all else equal, because women in these types of neighborhoods are more likely to rely on public transit to get to work. Once this fact is statistically “controlled,” the relative importance of racial neighborhood composition for women’s commute times becomes statistically insignificant. This finding suggests that an important element of the “spatial mismatch” between “black” neighborhoods and skill-appropriate jobs lies, first, in the extent to which public transit connects the two and, second, in the extent to which it does so in a timely manner. The second “contextual” finding indicates that the latter issue is locally variable. In Boston, with its relatively compact urban transportation system, public transit commutes are only about 40 minutes one-way, on average, whereas in Los Angeles they are 46 minutes, and in Atlanta, 52 minutes. This pattern implies that a key factor influencing women’s commute times is not just family circumstances that promote use of public transit but also how efficiently public transit operates within the local labor market.

Do Family Structure and Race Influence the Use of Neighborhood Job Contacts?

In Table 4 we use logistic regression to predict the likelihood of using a neighbor to obtain employment (1 = yes; 0 = no). The sample size for this analysis decreases to 1,566 women because only respondents who acquired their jobs

Table 4
 Logit Coefficients Predicting Use of Neighbor to
 Acquire a Job among Women

	All Recent Jobseekers			Recent Jobseekers Who Used a Contact
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Family Structure</i>				
Married (0 : 1)	.169	.193	.391	.174
No kids < 18-years-old (ref.)	—	—	—	—
Youngest kid < 6-years-old	-.049	-.087	-.009	-.271
Youngest kid 6–12-years-old	-.328	-.384	-1.298	-.125
Youngest kid 13–18-years-old	-.235	-.280	-.956	-.291
<i>Household Structure</i>				
Partner present (0 : 1)	.094	.112	.146	-.245
Adult kin present (0 : 1)	.253	.187	.209	.144
Adult non-kin present (0 : 1)	.374	.440	.430	.424
<i>Race and Ethnicity</i>				
White (ref.)		—	—	—
Black (0 : 1)		.590*	.553	1.043**
Hispanic (0 : 1)		.763**	.730*	.776**
<i>Race × Family Interactions</i>				
Black × Married			-.153	
Hispanic × Married			-.280	
Black × Youngest < 6			-.130	
Hispanic × Youngest < 6			-.043	
Black × Youngest 6–12			.855	
Hispanic × Youngest 6–12			1.177	
Black × Youngest 13–18			1.187	
Hispanic × Youngest 13–18			.348	
<i>Controls</i>				
Education (years)	-.101***	-.087***	-.086***	-.079*
Family income (\$000)	-.006	-.005	-.005	-.002
Work experience (years)	-.017*	-.016*	-.016*	-.014
Tenure at current job (years)	.011	.011*	.011	.043

Table 4
(continued)

	All Recent Jobseekers			Recent Jobseekers Who Used a Contact
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Hours worked per week	-.018**	-.020**	-.020**	-.015*
Los Angeles (ref.)	—	—	—	—
Atlanta	.220	.261	.258	.159
Boston	.198	.195	.188	.174
% Black in census tract	.065	-.311	-.315	-.962*
% Hispanic in census tract	.765*	.290	.281	-.190
Constant	.420	.049	.083	1.018
Model χ^2 (degrees of freedom)	82.3 (16)	93.5 (18)	101.7 (26)	41.0 (18)
Valid <i>N</i>	1,566	1,566	1,566	660

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

within five years of the survey were asked questions about their employment search—a common practice in job-matching research (for a review see Granovetter 1995). Our baseline assumption is that marriage and parenthood are likely to correlate positively with the use of neighborhood job contacts. Results lend *no* support to this hypothesis. Instead, they show that race is a strong and consistent predictor of using a neighborhood contact to find work. Specifically, results in Model 2 indicate that, net of other factors, black women are [exp(.590)] 1.80 times more likely than white women to use neighbors to acquire employment, and Latina women are [exp(.763)] 2.14 times more likely.

Other factors that significantly predict the use of neighborhood job contacts are education, work experience, and hours worked per week, all of which correlate negatively with using a neighborhood job contact. These patterns are consistent with prior research by Elliott (1999) and Henly (1999) and suggest that employers tend to fill the least-skilled and most-marginalized positions in the labor market through neighborhood-based job networks. The corollary interpretation is that women jobseekers tend to use neighbors more often as a

strategy of last resort than as a means of increasing the quality and quantity of available job options.

Because these findings might reflect racial and ethnic differences in the use of job contacts generally, not the disproportionate use of neighbors in particular, we reestimated Model 2 only for respondents who reported using personal contacts to acquire employment ($N = 660$). This supplemental analysis appears in the rightmost column of Table 4 and affirms the basic findings elaborated above: The use of neighborhood job contacts varies significantly by race and ethnicity but not family structure. Thus, it is not simply that black and Latina women are more likely than white women to rely on personal contacts to gain employment; specifically, they are more likely to rely on neighborhood contacts.

Finally, the rightmost column of Table 4 indicates that there is a strong negative effect of living in a “black” block group, which implies that employers who use personal contacts to fill jobs are reluctant to use localized job networks embedded in predominantly black neighborhoods. For example, appropriate calculations indicate that, all else equal, a black woman from a block group that is 80 percent black is only half as likely as an equally qualified black woman from a block group that is 20 percent black to gain employment through a job contact in her own neighborhood. Recent research by Elliott and Sims (2001) suggests that this pattern is not the result of “social isolation” from informal job networks in black neighborhoods, but rather the result of employers’ reluctance to tap localized job networks in these types of residential environments—a finding echoed by Kasinitz and Rosenberg’s (1996) research in the Redhook area of Brooklyn (see also Cohn and Fossett 1996). As a result of this reluctance, black women in predominantly black neighborhoods must cultivate job contacts beyond their immediate residential community to find employment. This situation contrasts with that of Latinas, whom employers often recruit through neighborhood, or “barrio,” networks.

Do Shorter Commutes and Localized Job Networks Lead to Lower Wages?

As the final step in our analysis, we use OLS regression to examine if shorter commutes and use of neighborhood job contacts correlate with lower wages. Results appear in Table 5 and point to several general conclusions. First, Model 1 indicates that neither marriage nor motherhood correlates significantly with women’s hourly wages, net of race/ethnicity and other control variables. The presence of adult family members in the household, however, correlates negatively and significantly with wages. This finding suggests that, as we might expect, low-wage earners are more likely than high-wage earners to live in extended-family households, often but not exclusively with the aim of sharing economic resources to make ends meet.

Table 5
 OLS Regression Coefficients Predicting Logged Hourly Wages among Women

	All Recent Jobseekers		Private	Public
	Model 1	Model 2	Transit Users	Transit Users
<hr/>				
<i>Family Structure</i>				
Married (0 : 1)	.023	.024	-.009	.007
No kids < 18-years-old (ref.)	—	—	—	—
Youngest kid < 6-years-old	-.042	-.040	-.006	-.080
Youngest kid 6–12-years-old	-.024	-.033	-.038	-.010
Youngest kid 13–18-years-old	-.016	-.022	.005	-.089
<i>Household Structure</i>				
Partner present (0 : 1)	-.032	-.015	-.076	.105
Adult kin present (0 : 1)	-.060*	-.056*	-.100**	.004
Adult non-kin present (0 : 1)	-.040	-.031	-.092	.146
<i>Race and Ethnicity</i>				
White (ref.)	—	—	—	—
Black (0 : 1)	-.149***	-.143***	-.118***	.056
Hispanic (0 : 1)	-.141***	-.136***	-.097**	-.131
<i>Spatial Relationship to Job</i>				
Commute time (minutes logged)		-.006	.050**	.005
Used neighborhood job contact (0 : 1)		-.104***	-.130***	-.032
<i>Controls</i>				
Education (years)	.071***	.070***	.073***	.037***
Work experience (years)	.023***	.023***	.023***	.014**
Work experience squared	-.001***	-.001***	-.001***	-.0003*
Tenure at current job (years)	.028***	.027***	.025***	.027***
Hours worked per week	-.00001	.0004	.001	-.002
Los Angeles (ref.)	—	—	—	—
Atlanta	-.113***	-.122***	-.116*	-.087
Boston	-.002	-.002	-.037	191***
Constant	1.108***	1.148***	.959***	1.379***
<hr/>				
Adjusted R ²	.34	.36	.37	.29
Valid N	1,566	1,566	1,106	460

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

To assess the influence of commuting on wages, we performed two sets of analyses. First, we logged respondents' one-way commute times and added them as an independent variable in Model 2. Second, we reestimated Model 2 separately for women who use private transit (Model 3) and women who use public transit (Model 4), with the former including walking and carpooling in addition to driving. We took this second step because results from Table 3 suggest that longer commute times are more a function of public transit than expanding spatial opportunity structures. Thus, comparisons are perhaps better made within modes of transit rather than across them. Results of these analyses confirm the expectation that longer commute times correlate with higher-paying jobs, all else equal (see Model 3). However, they also indicate that this correlation is statistically significant only for women who commute via private transit. Among women who use public transit, longer commute times offer no net benefit (see Model 4). Results for the use of neighborhood job contacts in Models 2 through 4 reveal much the same pattern: Use of a neighbor to find work correlates negatively with hourly wages but only among women who use private transit to get to work.

To make sense of these results, it is instructive to consider two additional findings across the respective wage models. First, like shorter commutes and the use of neighborhood job contacts, the negative effects of being black or Latina are statistically significant only among women who use private transit to get to work. Second, returns to education and work experience are much smaller among public transit users than private transit users. To us, these findings suggest the following interpretation: Women with access to private transit have more job options available to them than do women who rely on public transit. This wider opportunity structure, in turn, implies that limitations will be more costly among private transit users than public transit users. The corollary is that among public transit users, a major limitation has already been imposed, namely, restricted job access and heightened competition as a result of this restricted job access. This restricted access and heightened competition, in turn, might lead to devaluation of human capital, especially toward the bottom of the labor market.

Findings for city-level variation can be interpreted indirectly as providing some support for this line of explanation. Specifically, results in Model 4 indicate that, net of other factors, public transit users earn significantly higher wages in Boston than in Atlanta and Los Angeles, net of individual human capital—a finding which does not occur among private transit users. Our interpretation suggests that this pattern occurs because Boston's public transit system is better developed and more geographically comprehensive than either Atlanta's or Los Angeles' public transit system and, as a consequence, public transit users in Boston are better able to avail themselves of a wider array of job opportunities, thereby relieving competition and improving returns to human capital.

Conclusion

This study examined the intersection of race, family structure, and women's spatial relationships to the labor market. Results suggest several general conclusions. First, without denying that marriage increases women's domestic responsibilities, we find that it exerts little direct effect on women's commute times or propensity to use neighborhood-based job networks. To the extent that marriage "matters" in our analysis, it does so largely by reducing women's reliance on public transit, which in turn reduces average commute time. One interpretation of this finding is that marriage increases resources available to working women, which in turn makes it easier for them to procure their own reliable transportation. Another interpretation is that married couples decide to allocate their collective resources in this manner to help ensure that wives spend less time commuting and more time tending house.

Turning to parenthood, our results indicate somewhat surprisingly, that older, not younger, kids exert the greatest effect on commute times and that this effect is racially and ethnically variable. Specifically, our results show that as children enter their teens, white mothers tend to shorten their commutes while black and Latina mothers tend to extend them, perhaps using the opportunity to search for better-paying jobs farther from home. Racial and ethnic variation is also strongly evident in the propensity to use neighborhood contacts to find employment. Specifically, black and Latina women are much more likely than white women to use neighbors to find work. Moreover, this strategy appears to be one more of "job capture" than "job mobility," with neighbors tending to lead women to jobs that pay significantly less than jobs obtained through other channels.

Overall, then, we conclude that women's spatial relationships to the labor market are influenced more strongly by race and ethnic relations than by family structure and attendant "gendered" expectations. Furthermore, we interpret these race "effects" as indications not that black and Latina women have fewer household responsibilities than do white women, but that minority women have poorer access than white women to private transportation and job connections beyond their residential neighborhoods. If one wanted to intervene and eliminate these racial differences, one solution might be to encourage minority women, particularly those without college degrees, to enter "work-first" programs aimed at increasing formal job-search skills and networking opportunities. While these initiatives could be integrated with existing "welfare-to-work" programs, recent research by Chapple (2001) suggests that such programs rarely lead to jobs paying above the minimum wage and, while they might increase the *size* of women's job networks, they do not diversify them—they merely introduce low-wage jobseekers to other low-wage jobseekers in the community.

Perhaps a more effective long-term intervention would be to improve the spatial coverage and temporal efficiency of mass transit so that working women without access to private transportation could cover more ground and avail themselves of wider arrays of job opportunities without sacrificing time at home. Here, the recently passed Transportation Equity Act and various Reverse Commute programs could prove useful. The former allocates \$750 million for Job Access projects that provide or enhance transportation assistance to low-wage workers, while Reverse Commute programs are intended to alleviate the strains of commuting by arranging to transport urban workers to suburban job sites.

As we await results of these programmatic initiatives, we should not expect them to eliminate racial wage inequality among women. Our results indicate that such inequality is robust over and above racial differences in commute times and use of neighborhood job networks. Thus, even if black and Latina women were to get to work quicker and cultivate more spatially extensive job networks, results suggest that they would still receive significantly lower wages than white women of equal education and work experience. A task for future research is to continue to explore why this is the case and how race and gender intersect in other dimensions of labor market participation. We look forward to this research.

ENDNOTES

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¹The adjusted R-squared statistic remains low in these regression results relative to prior research on commuting distance. We suspect that this fact derives from our reliance on dummy indicators and the likelihood that commute times pooled across our three sample metro areas have a larger random component than prior research that has focused largely on commuting differences within a single urban area.

²To confirm the robustness of our “non-finding” for children, we reestimated all models in Table 3 using a simple dichotomous variable (1 = children; 0 = no children) in the place of the more detailed age-specific indicators. The results were substantively identical to those reported in Table 3, not only with respect to children, but also with respect to the relative importance of marriage.

³For example, to estimate the average, net commute time of white married mothers of teenagers from Model 4, we sum the following coefficients: $-2.56 - 6.28 + 20.17 = 11.33$. We then compare this sum to the average, net commute time of white married-childless women: $-2.56 + 20.17 = 17.61$. The resulting ratio ($11.33/17.61 = .64$) indicates that white married mothers of teenagers have one-way commute times that are roughly one-third shorter than those of white married-childless women.

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