Racial Disparities in Women's Mobility out of Retail and Service Occupations

Liana Christin Landivar, U.S. Census Bureau Special Sworn Status
Julia Beckhusen, U.S. Census Bureau[1,2]

**Abstract**

Nearly 40 million workers are employed in retail and service occupations. While the average age and educational attainment of workers in these occupations has increased significantly since the 1970s, many of these occupations offer low wages, along with limited fringe benefits and opportunities for advancement. These occupations also employ a disproportionate share of Black and Hispanic women. Using longitudinal data from the 2004 and 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation which provide occupational data over a four year timespan, we evaluate the prevalence of occupational mobility by sex, race, and ethnicity. This research shows there are racial disparities in occupational mobility, with Black and Hispanic women less likely to exit retail and service occupations than White, non-Hispanic women. Educational attainment increased the likelihood of occupational mobility. Hispanic women's lower levels of educational attainment depressed their occupational mobility, while longer job tenure increased the likelihood they would be occupationally mobile. Differences in human capital and job tenure did not explain mobility disparities between Black and White, non-Hispanic women. However, unionization reduced occupational mobility and partly accounts for Black women's lower rates of mobility. Black women were more likely to be unionized and unionization was associated with decreased occupational mobility among women. Workers in unionized retail and service occupations earned higher wages, reducing the incentive to leave and lowering their occupational mobility rate.

Key words: occupational mobility; race and ethnicity; women's employment; retail and service

**Introduction**

Occupations are a major system of stratification in the United States. Blau and Duncan (1967) identify occupations as the foundational "backbone" of the stratification system, and occupations continue to serve as powerful indicators of life chances, skills, and socioeconomic status (Jonsson et al. 2011). Researchers evaluate intergenerational mobility to understand the extent to which children become better off economically than their parents (Chetty et al. 2014), as well as occupational mobility

---

to evaluate career progress starting from an individual's first job (Blau and Duncan 1967; Spilerman 1977). Research shows that upward mobility is enhanced or constrained depending on family socioeconomic origin (Chetty et al. 2014), educational attainment (Blau and Duncan 1967; Hachen 1990), sex (Tomaskovic-Devey 1993; Kronberg 2013), and race and ethnicity (Wilson et al. 1999), among other factors. With economic restructuring in the 1970s reflected in the rapid growth in professional services and shrinking share of employees working in manufacturing, educational attainment became an increasingly important prerequisite to obtaining desirable jobs and improving socioeconomic rewards (Hachen 1990; Kalleberg 2011), though economic mobility may be declining even among the more highly educated (Carr and Wiemers 2016). Extensive gender and racial occupational segregation also creates inequality of opportunity in occupational mobility, with White men overrepresented in the most desirable jobs (Tomaskovic-Devey 1993).

While research has evaluated differences in men's occupational mobility or Black-White disparities in mobility (Wilson et al. 1999; Johnson and Corcoran 2003; Kambourov and Manovskii 2009), fewer studies assess occupational mobility among Black, Hispanic, and White women. This study expands prior research by looking at differences in occupational mobility among women by race and Hispanic origin. We focus our study on occupational mobility among workers in retail and service occupations. We define occupational mobility as having experienced a transition from a retail or service occupation to a non-retail or service occupation. Retail and service workers make up about a quarter of the civilian labor force. Since the 1970s, there has been a significant shift in employment to the service sector as a result of economic restructuring, the expansion of consumerism, and the growth in dual-earner couples with greater outsourcing of personal services (Kalleberg 2011; Gabe et al. 2018). Although these occupations have grown as a share of the economy, retail and personal services occupations generally offer low wages, few fringe benefits, and limited job mobility prospects (Kalleberg 2011; Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018a). Women, Black, and Hispanic workers are especially likely to be

concentrated in these jobs. To the extent that mobility out of these occupations is limited, women and

Black and Hispanic workers may have poorer economic outcomes than White, non-Hispanic men.

This study uses longitudinal data from the 2004 and 2008 Survey of Income and Program

Participation (SIPP) to evaluate occupational mobility by sex and race and ethnicity within a four-year

period.[3,4] We ask three questions. First, given initial employment in a retail or service occupation, what

proportion of women leave these occupations after four years? Second, are women less occupationally

mobile than men and does this differ by race? Finally, do educational attainment, job tenure, and

unionization status predict occupational mobility? We show that there are racial disparities in

occupational mobility, with Black and Hispanic women less likely to exit retail and service occupations

than White, non-Hispanic women. Black women are also less likely to experience occupational mobility

than Black men. Hispanic men have lower levels of occupational mobility than other men, comparable to

the mobility rates of Black and Hispanic women. Lower levels of human capital depress Hispanic

women's occupational mobility, while job tenure increases the likelihood they will experience mobility.

Differences in human capital and job tenure do not explain mobility disparities between Black and

White, non-Hispanic women. However, unionization reduces employment mobility and partly accounts

for racial and ethnic disparities in mobility. Perhaps by offering higher wages and improved employment

conditions reducing the incentive to leave, workers in unionized retail and service jobs were less mobile.

**Occupational Disparities in Job Quality**

---

[3] Federal surveys now give respondents the option of reporting more than one race. These data can be shown in two ways: (1) as mutually exclusive from other race groups, which may be denoted by "alone" or (2) not mutually exclusive with other race groups, denoted by "alone or in combination with other race groups." The body of this paper (text and figures) shows data using the first approach (race alone). Use of the single-race population does not imply that it is the preferred method of presenting or analyzing data. The Census Bureau uses a variety of approaches. In the analyses presented here, "White" refers to the non-Hispanic White population. The term "non-Hispanic White" refers to people who are not Hispanic and who reported White and no other race. The Census Bureau uses non-Hispanic Whites as the comparison group for other race groups and Hispanics. Because of sample size limitations, we are only able to present estimates for Black, Hispanic, and White, non-Hispanic women and men.

[4] Hispanics may be any race. Data in this paper for Hispanics overlap with data for racial groups. For example, Black, Hispanic women were denoted by both "Black," and "Hispanic."

Occupations differ in their offerings of high wages, fringe benefits, job stability, and opportunities for upward mobility. Many of the lower-paying jobs with few benefits are concentrated in food service, personal services, and retail. Kalleberg (2011) describes these occupations as "bad jobs." Bad jobs, in general, pay low wages with minimal growth over time, do not offer fringe benefits, do not offer worker control over scheduling, lack flexibility to respond to non-work issues, and lack worker control over the termination of the job. In contrast, "good jobs" pay relatively high earnings, provide adequate fringe benefits, are more autonomous, provide schedule flexibility, and provide some level of worker control over job termination. Workers in bad jobs experience greater instability and are more likely to move between jobs and spells of unemployment and non-employment (Wachter 1974).

Data from the American Community Survey show that service occupations garner the lowest wages across major occupational groups. Furthermore, women in service occupations are the lowest-paid group of workers, earning less than workers in other occupations and than men in service occupations (Figure 1). Fringe benefits are also less common in service and retail jobs. Data from the National Compensation Survey from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that service occupations have the lowest levels of access to retirement benefits, healthcare benefits, paid vacation, paid sick leave, and paid family leave (Figure 2). These jobs are less desirable on multiple dimensions, therefore remaining in these jobs for extended periods of time may limit current and future economic prospects.

To the extent that low-wage service and retail jobs serve as a point of entry to the labor force and individuals are able to transition to higher-paying jobs, this may mitigate the long-term economic effects of retail and service work. However, not all workers may be able to transition out of these low-wage jobs and research indicates that mobility is low (Gabe et al. 2018). In 2017, the median age of the retail sector was 38, while the median age in personal services was 41, with a majority of workers aged 25 or older (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018b), indicating that these are not primarily entry-level jobs for young workers. The supply of young workers has declined as teenagers and college students working

during summer break have become much less likely to be working than in the past (DeSilver 2016). Increasing college enrollment, summer school, and unpaid internships, along with fewer entry-level jobs have made employment among workers under age 25 more challenging.  With greater outsourcing of these jobs, training and other employer investments in this sector have also declined, further restricting opportunities for occupational mobility through increased human capital accumulation as workers age (Kalleberg 2011). Employers are more likely to make training investments among high-wage workers who they seek to retain and are more difficult to replace because of their accumulated experience or job-specific skills (Hachen 1992).

Workers are not equally distributed across occupations, but rather, remain significantly segregated by sex and race. This segregation is linked to inequality in employment outcomes and job rewards (Tomaskovic-Devey 1993). White, non-Hispanic men are overrepresented in good jobs with more extensive career ladders and training opportunities (Tomaskovic-Devey 1993). Black and Hispanic women remain significantly overrepresented in the low-wage service sector and in these jobs they are less likely to receive training or investments in human capital (Kalleberg 2011) or to receive job flexibility and benefits, contributing to higher levels of job turnover and temporary exit (Landivar 2013). Black and Hispanic women may face more challenges moving out of low-wage employment and their occupational mobility may be more limited over their life course.

**Occupational Mobility Pathways**

Workers may experience upward mobility in several ways. Workers may accumulate tenure within a job, receiving upgrades in pay, benefits, and job title. They may also change employers to get a better job (Johnson and Corcoran 2003). Among low-wage workers, returns to tenure are typically low and they are more likely to experience wage gains through a transition to a higher-paying firm (Holzer 2004). Among workers in retail and service, in particular, movement out of this sector is strongly associated with improved earnings (Holzer et al. 2004). Nevertheless, mobility among low-wage workers

is limited. Examining employment transitions over the course of one year using the Current Population Survey, Gabe and his colleagues (2018) find that only 5 percent of low-wage workers transitioned to a better job, a lower share than those who became unemployed or left the labor force. Of those who did transition to a better job, improvements in job quality were marginal. Overall, low-wage workers experience difficulty moving up.

Occupational mobility is more prevalent among more highly educated workers (Gabe et al. 2018). Jobs requiring greater investments in human capital are also more likely to have job ladders and promotion opportunities, offering greater occupational mobility over time (Kalleberg 2011). The association between mobility and education is more disadvantageous to Black and Hispanic workers whom are less likely to have attended college or completed a degree. About 53 percent of Blacks and 37 percent of Hispanics had completed some college education, compared with 64 percent of White, non-Hispanics (Ryan and Bauman 2016). Although women have increased investments in human capital with educational attainment levels that now surpass men's, their work experience still lags behind (Goldin 2006; Percheski 2008). White and Hispanic women are more likely to curtail their employment while their children are young, though there is no significant effect of having a child on Black women's employment (Boushey 2008; Landivar 2017). More limited investments in human capital, though either education or work experience, may create greater barriers to upward occupational mobility for women, Black, and Hispanic workers.

**Theoretical Framework and Research Questions**

Theorists have proposed three models of mobility: the limited opportunity model, the reward-resource model, and the vacancy competition model (Hachen 1990). The limited opportunity model considers social restrictions (e.g., gender, race) that may limit job availability and mobility. Women, Black, and Hispanic workers may experience lower mobility rates as a result of more constrained opportunities. Managers may reinforce exclusion, workers may have unequal access to higher-paying

firms, and may have segregated job networks limiting their knowledge of available jobs (Wilson et al. 1999; Holzer 2004). The reward-resource model posits that job seekers want to maximize their job rewards given their individual resources (e.g., education, job experience) by moving into better jobs. As their time in the labor force increases, the rewards come into greater alignment with their resources and job transitions decline. The vacancy competition model argues that mobility is a function of the organizational or industrial labor market and the extent to which there is a presence of internal labor markets or labor monopolies which insulate firms or sectors from outside competition. Internal labor markets often offer an initial point of entry but then create a protected career ladder for incumbents, excluding outside applicants (Rosenfeld 1992).

We evaluate the likelihood that workers will experience occupational mobility, here defined as a transition from a retail and service occupation to another occupation group. We expect that women will have lower occupational mobility than men, and Black and Hispanic workers will have lower mobility than White, non-Hispanic workers, based on the limited opportunity model that indicates that women and Black and Hispanic workers may have more constrained mobility.

*Hypothesis 1: Women will have lower occupational mobility than men. Black and Hispanic women will have lower occupational mobility than White, non-Hispanic women and men, and Black and Hispanic men.*

Based on the reward-resource model, we expect that women with more resources, as reflected in higher levels of educational attainment, job tenure, and unionization, will be more likely to exit retail and service occupations. Accumulated human capital and better employment conditions should facilitate upward occupational mobility, whereas workers with low levels of educational attainment and poor employment conditions may be stuck in dead-end jobs.

*Hypothesis 2: Women with higher levels of educational attainment, job tenure, and unionization will be more occupationally mobile.*

Because we are examining occupational mobility out of a uniform set of occupations (retail and service) with no significant industrial employment monopoly (e.g., workers are able to switch jobs to other firms offering similar job opportunities) and limited internal labor markets (e.g., short career ladders with limited exclusion or promotion potential), we do not examine the vacancy competition model.

**Data and Methods**

The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) is a nationally representative, longitudinal survey that provides comprehensive information on demographic and labor force characteristics. We pool data from the 2004 and 2008 SIPP panels to maximize the sample size. The 2004 SIPP panel began interviews in February 2004 and the 2008 SIPP panels began interviews in September 2008. The total sample size for each panel was 51,363 and 52,301, respectively.[5] The interviews occurred in waves where each household responded to questions regarding the past four months. As a result, each household was interviewed every four months for the duration of the panel. The SIPP collected detailed employment data for persons 16 years and over, including start and end dates for each job, as well as detailed characteristics of the job.

We compared respondents' data from the first month of wave 1 to data from a later wave to measure respondents' occupational mobility. We define occupational mobility as having experienced a transition from a retail or service occupation to a non-retail or service occupation in the respondent's primary job between the first and final wave of the panel. The 2004 panel included 12 waves and the 2008 panel included 16 waves. The end waves were chosen so that the reference months matched those in wave 1. For the 2004 panel, wave 1 (October 2003 to January 2004) was compared with wave 10 (October 2006 to January 2007). For the 2008 panel, wave 1 (May 2008 to August 2008) was

---

[5] More information on the SIPP can be found at the following Web sites: <www.census.gov/sipp/> (main SIPP Web site) and <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/guidance/users-guide.html> (SIPP User's Guide)—see chapter 2 of the user's guide for more information on the sample size of each panel.

compared with wave 13 (May 2012 to August 2012). While wave 1 occurred during the beginning of the

Great Recession (December 2007 to June 2009), the largest impacts to the labor market occurred later.

The unemployment rate rose from 6.1 percent in September 2008 to 10.0 percent in October 2009

(Bureau of Labor Statistics 2018c). We chose a longer time span for the 2008 panel to avoid a panel end

date that would be closer in time to the more significant labor market effects of the Great Recession.

The four-year time span allowed for the unemployment rate to begin its decline toward pre-recession

levels. Among service workers, unemployment reached a high of 11.4 percent in January 2010 and had

declined to 8.5 percent in August 2012, our final wave reference period (Bureau of Labor Statistics

2018d). Similarly, in the final wave of our 2008 sample, the unemployment rate remained higher than

pre-recessionary periods, but had declined to 8.2 percent.

In our sample, we included all employed men and women working for wages in wave 1 and

present in both waves of interest. We omit persons enrolled in school and actively serving in the

military. With these restrictions, the final weighted sample size was 213,100,000. All descriptive

statistics and model estimates are obtained using SIPP replicate panel weights. To test our hypotheses

on occupational mobility, we compared first- and end-wave employment status and occupations. We

were interested in occupational mobility out of retail and service occupations. We designated workers

as occupationally mobile if they were employed in retail and service in wave 1 but switched employment

to any other occupation in the final wave, measured using a respondent's primary job. SIPP collects

information on multiple jobs during a reference period. We use the information reported for the first job

which is the primary job based on hours and weeks worked. Respondents were considered

occupationally mobile if they completed an occupational transition even if the new occupation did not

represent an increase in earnings. However, we evaluate destination occupations of the occupationally

mobile and end-wave earnings to determine whether the occupation change represented a move into

managerial and professional occupations or an increase in earnings. Because retail and service

occupations are among the lowest paid occupations and offer few benefits, we expect that those who

exit these occupations will fare better economically. Research also shows that workers increase their

earnings when they leave retail and service jobs (Holzer et al. 2004).

Our occupation categories are consistent with the classification of service and retail workers in

the 2000 Standard Occupational Classification (SOC). Occupations included in retail and service

occupations are healthcare support, food preparation and serving, building grounds and cleaning and

maintenance, and personal care and service occupations. Cashiers, counter and rental clerks, parts and

retail salespersons were included as retail workers. As an exception to the SOC classification, we exclude

protective service occupations from our categorization of retail and service occupations. Protective

service occupations are unlike other service occupations in that they are more likely to be unionized,

provide higher wages and benefits, are more likely to be in the government sector, and are more likely

to employ men.

We included demographic and socioeconomic variables in our presentation of descriptive

statistics and in our models. The demographic variables were age (age squared was initially included but

was not significant), married (1=married), presence of children (1=family with children), and race and

Hispanic origin (White, non-Hispanic; Black; and Hispanic). Other racial groups were excluded because

the sample size was too small to yield robust estimates. Descriptive statistics based on the first

reference month of the wave are presented in Table 1. Compared with men, women were slightly older

and more likely to have children. Nearly half of both women and men were married. Women were more

likely than men to be White, non-Hispanic. In addition to demographic variables, we included

socioeconomic variables: education (1=some college or higher), job hours (usual hours worked per

week), monthly household income, tenure (in years), and unionization status (1=member of a union).

Among these characteristics, women were more likely to have some college or higher level of education,

worked fewer hours per week, and lived in households with less income compared with men. Both men

and women had worked, on average, about 8 years at their job. Finally, one-tenth of women were members of a union. Union membership among men was 12 percent.

We used a series of binomial logistic regression models to estimate the probability of mobility out of retail service occupations among workers within a four-year period. For model estimation, we omitted those who became unemployed in the final wave. Our hypotheses were tested through a variety of model specifications which controlled for a range of demographic and socioeconomic factors. In the first model, we evaluate the association between race and ethnicity and occupational mobility while controlling for demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. Following the initial model are a series of models that introduce educational attainment, job tenure, and unionization status. We then interact educational attainment, job tenure, and unionization status by race and Hispanic origin. The final model presents estimates for men as a comparison. The final weighted sample size for our models which focus only retail and service workers was 23,717,000 (14,440,000 women and 9,277,000 men).

**Results**

Among all employed women, about 21 percent were employed in retail and service occupations. Black and Hispanic women were significantly more likely to be employed in these occupations than White, non-Hispanic women (Figure 3). About 30 percent of Black women and 31 percent of Hispanic women were employed in retail and service compared with 18 percent of White, non-Hispanic women. Men were less likely to be employed in retail and service than women (11 percent compared with 21 percent), and White, non-Hispanic men had the lowest level of employment in these occupations (9 percent). About 18 percent of Black men and 17 percent of Hispanic men were employed in retail and service occupations. Women became slightly more likely to be employed in retail and service occupations over the course of the observation period of 4 years, with a more pronounced increase among Hispanic women (Figure 4). Men did not similarly increase their employment in retail and service, with the exception of Hispanic men (Table 2).

Among workers who were initially employed in retail and service occupations during wave 1 of the survey, 37 percent of women were occupationally mobile, leaving retail and service occupations (Table 3). About 38 percent of men similarly left retail and service occupations. Black and Hispanic women were significantly less likely to leave retail and service occupations (30 percent and 31 percent, respectively) than White, non-Hispanic women (39 percent) (Figure 5). Black and Hispanic women were also significantly less likely to be mobile than White, non-Hispanic men (41 percent mobile) and Black men (42 percent mobile). Hispanic men, on the other hand, exhibited mobility rates comparable to Black and Hispanic women (30 percent mobile). Among women who were occupationally mobile, women were more likely to enter management, business, science, and arts occupations than were women of other racial and ethnic groups (Table 4). About 35 percent of occupationally mobile White, non-Hispanic women entered management, business, science, and arts occupations. The most common move was to a sales and office occupation, 55 percent, representing more of a lateral move with only slight gain in occupational status. Among all other women, 29 percent entered management, business, science, and arts and 48 percent entered sales and office occupations.[6] A larger share of Black, Other Race, and Hispanic women entered production, transportation, and material moving occupations (18 percent) compared with 9 percent among White, non-Hispanic workers. Because of a small sample size, we are unable to determine whether women entered higher-paying or lower-paying occupations within these broad occupation groups. For example, lower-paying teaching occupations such as teacher assistants are classified within the broad occupation group management, business, science, and arts, but do not represent an increase in earnings compared with many service occupations.

To examine what accounts for gender and racial differences in occupational mobility, we turn to our logistic regression model results shown in Table 5. Controlling for age, marital status, presence of

---

[6] Differences by race and ethnicity in management, business, science, and arts and sales and office occupations are not statistically significant.

children, hours worked, and household income, we show that Black and Hispanic women were

significantly less likely to be mobile than White, non-Hispanic women. Black women were 38 percent

less likely to exit and Hispanic women were 34 percent less likely to exit retail and service occupations.

In model 2, the addition of educational attainment accounts for the Hispanic-White, non-Hispanic

difference in mobility. However, the coefficient for Black women remained significant, indicating that

human capital differences do not fully explain the Black-White, non-Hispanic gap in mobility. Results

remained unchanged with the addition of job tenure in model 3. Model 4 included unionization status

and it was highly significant, though in the opposite direction of what we initially expected. Union

members were significantly less likely to exit retail and service occupations, and racial and ethnic

disparities in mobility were no longer significant.

We included interaction effects for educational attainment, job tenure, and unionization status

in model 5 to explore whether human capital and employment effects varied by racial group. Only job

tenure had a significant interaction for Hispanic women. Hispanic women became more mobile after

longer tenure with an employer. We conclude that educational attainment increases occupational

mobility among all women, whereas unionization decreases mobility among women (Figure 6). In

contrast, educational attainment was not a significant predictor of mobility for men (Table 5, model 6),

and unionization had a positive effect on mobility among Black men.

To explore why unionization was negatively correlated with occupational mobility among

women and positively correlated with mobility among men, we evaluated initial- and end-wave earnings

for men and women by unionization status. Earnings among non-mobile union members were higher

than the wages of non-union members in both the initial and final survey waves (Table 6). Among men,

mobile union workers have higher earnings than non-mobile union workers and non-union workers at

the initial wave. The higher earnings among mobile unionized men may explain the positive correlation

between unionization and mobility. Among women, mobile union workers start out with lower earnings

than non-mobile union workers. The smaller share of union workers who do move end up with final wave earnings that catch up to the earnings of non-mobile union members. Among non-union members, occupational mobility does result in increased earnings of about 14 percent. Therefore, rather than unionization being a resource for mobility among women, women in unionized jobs have already attained higher earnings than non-union members, reducing their incentive to change occupations.

Our initial hypotheses were partially supported. In hypothesis 1, we posited that women would have lower occupational mobility than men, and that Black and Hispanic women would have the lowest mobility rates. We show that women were significantly more likely to be employed in retail and service occupations than men. But given employment in retail and service, women and men's occupational mobility was not statistically different (37 percent and 38 percent, respectively). Black and Hispanic women had lower mobility rates than all other groups with the exception of Hispanic men. In hypothesis 2, we stated that more highly educated women with longer job tenure and higher unionization rates would be more likely to experience occupational mobility. We show that more educated women did experience significantly higher mobility rates (54 percent more mobile). However, job tenure only improved mobility odds among Hispanic women. Unionization, in contrast to our original prediction that it would increase mobility, was associated with decreased mobility for all women.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

In this research, we expand the discussion on mobility by focusing on occupational mobility among women by race and Hispanic origin. We look at women's ability to move out of low-paying retail and service occupations and use the reward-resource and limited opportunity model (Hachen 1990) to understand gender and racial disparities in their mobility. We show that women are more likely to be concentrated in retail and service occupations, but were no more likely than men to experience occupational mobility. However, Black and Hispanic women did experience lower occupational mobility than all other groups with the exception of Hispanic men.

14

Differences in human capital partly account for Hispanic women's lower levels of mobility compared with White, non-Hispanic women. In our models, more highly educated women were more likely to be mobile. Prior research has shown that those with more education are able to attain higher mobility through a greater variety of paths, including within- and between-employer changes and promotions in authority status (Hachen 1990). Kahn and Whittington (1996) show that Hispanic women also receive lower returns to their human capital. Recent migrants, in particular, may be at a disadvantage if they have more limited English-language proficiency and lower U.S.-specific work experience, resulting in lower employment rates and occupational mobility (Kahn and Whittington 1996; Landivar 2013). Yet, as immigrants increase levels of U.S.-based education and on-the-job training, their labor market opportunities improve, and in our models we show that Hispanic women were more likely to be mobile with longer job tenure.

Although Hispanic women were more likely to become occupationally mobile with longer job tenure, and Wilson and his colleagues (1999) found that job tenure increased mobility for Black men, we do not find a similar effect for Black women for whom job tenure was not a significant predictor of mobility out of low-wage retail and service occupations. There are two possible explanations, perhaps operating jointly. Prior research has shown that changing employers is associated with higher earnings among workers in good jobs, but employer changes are penalized in bad jobs (Kronberg 2013). To the extent that Black women working in retail and service jobs are unable to secure employment in a higher-paying firm or occupational group, they may not economically benefit from changing jobs. Another explanation is that unionization increases Black women's representation (Kaufman 2010), thus, the incentive to change occupations may be lower in unionized retail and service occupations with improved working conditions and this may depress their overall mobility rate.

Although we began with the assumption that mobility out of retail and service occupations would increase women's economic opportunities because earnings in these occupations are lower than

in other occupations (see Figures 1 and 3), this was not the case in unionized retail and service

occupations. Our results show that union membership decreased the probability of exiting retail and

service occupations. Among women, unionized workers have higher wages, thus women who are in

unionized service occupations may have a lower incentive to move to other occupations that would not

offer an increase in earnings.  Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018a) shows that union

workers have higher wages than non-union workers, and women experience a greater wage premium

from union membership than men. Women in unions earn about 31 percent more than women in

nonunion jobs, whereas unionized men earn 21 percent more than their non-unionized counterparts

(Anderson et al. 2015). Furthermore, Black and Hispanic women experience a larger earnings premium

associated with union membership than White, non-Hispanic women (Anderson et al. 2015). As unions

are more likely to emphasize seniority-based rewards, there is an incentive to remain employed in the

same job for more extended periods of time (Rosenfeld 1992). In addition to higher earnings, union

members have better employment conditions, further reducing the incentive to leave these jobs.

Therefore, the depressed occupational mobility among unionized retail and service working women may

not reflect a lack of opportunity for improved employment but rather may reflect the attainment of

improved economic conditions within that employment sector. Nevertheless, only 10 percent of women

are unionized (Table 1), thus only a minority of retail and service workers are likely to have attained

these improved economic conditions.

Using the 2004 and 2008 SIPP panels, we track occupational mobility for Black, Hispanic, and

White, non-Hispanic women over a three- to four-year period. We show that Black and Hispanic women

experienced lower levels of occupational mobility during this timeframe. Although workers become less

mobile over time, it would be beneficial to show occupational mobility over a longer period of time,

ideally tracking women's full careers. We also would have liked to show, among women who were

mobile, which detailed occupations they transitioned into. Unfortunately, the limitations of a small

sample prevented us from being able to present robust estimation of more detailed destination

occupations. Future research should consider combining survey data with administrative records, as this

may provide sufficient sample to evaluate women's transitions in and out of occupations over time.

**References**

Anderson, Julie, Ariane Hegewisch, and Jeff Hayes. 2015. "The Union Advantage for Women."

Institute for Women's Policy Research Briefing Paper #R409. Issued August 26.

Blau, Peter M. and Otis Dudley Duncan. 1967. *The American Occupational Structure*. New York: John

Wiley and Sons.

Boushey, Heather. 2008. "'Opting Out?' The Effect of Children on Women's Employment in the United

States." *Feminist Economics* 14(1): 1-36.

Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2018a. "Union Members Summary." Economic News Release, January 19.

Retrieved online June 28, 2018: https://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.nr0.htm.

-----. 2018b. "Employed Persons by Detailed Industry and Age." Labor Force Statistics from the

Current Population Survey. January 19. Retrieved online June 28, 2018:

https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat18b.htm.

-----. 2018c. Civilian Unemployment Rate (UNRATE). Federal Reserve Bank of

St. Louis. Retrieved online July 10, 2018: https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/UNRATE.

-----. 2018d. Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey: (Unadj) Unemployment Rate –

Service Occupations. Retrieved online July 24, 2018:

https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LNU04032218.

Carr, Michael D. and Emily E. Wiemers. 2016. "The Decline in Lifetime Earnings Mobility in the U.S.:

Evidence from Survey-Linked Administrative Data." *Washington Center for Equitable Growth*

*Working Paper Series*. Retrieved online June 29, 2018: https://equitablegrowth.org/working-

papers/the-decline-in-lifetime-earnings-mobility-in-the-u-s-evidence-from-survey-linked-

administrative-data/.

Chetty, Raj, Nathaniel Hendren, Patrick Kline, and Emmanuel Saez. 2014. "Where is the Land of

Opportunity? The Geography of Intergenerational Mobility in the United States." *Quarterly*

*Journal of Economics* 129(4): 1553-1623.

DeSilver, Drew. 2016. "10 Facts About American Workers." Pew Research Center, September 1.

Retrieved online June 28:

http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/01/8-facts-about-american-workers/.

Gabe, Todd, Jaison R. Abel, and Richard Florida. 2018. "Can Low-Wage Workers Find Better Jobs?"

*Federal Reserve Bank of New York Staff Reports* #846. Issued April. Retrieved online

June 28, 2018:

https://www.newyorkfed.org/medialibrary/media/research/staff_reports/sr846.pdf.

Goldin, Claudia. 2006. "The Quiet Revolution That Transformed Women's Employment, Education, and

Family." *The American Economic Review* 96(2): 1-21.

Hachen, David S. Jr. 1990. "Three Models of Job Mobility in Labor Markets." *Work and Occupations*

17(3): 320-354.

-----. 1992. "Industrial Characteristics and Job Mobility Rates." *American Sociological Review* 57(1): 39-

55.

Holzer, Harry J., Julia L. Lane, and Lars Vilhuber. 2004. "Escaping Low Earnings: The Role of Employer

Characteristics and Changes." *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 57(4): 560-578.

Holzer, Harry J. 2004. "Encouraging Job Advancement Among Low-Wage Workers: A New Approach."

The Brookings Institution Policy Brief, Welfare Reform & Beyond #30. Issued May. Washington

D.C.: Brookings.

Johnson, Rucker C. and Mary E. Corcoran. 2003. "The Road to Economic Self-Sufficiency: Job Quality

and Job Transition Patterns After Welfare Reform." *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*

22(4): 615-639.

Jonsson, Jan O., David B. Grusky, Reinhard Pollak, Matthew Di Carlo, and Carina Wood. 2011.

"Occupations and Social Mobility: Gradational, Big-Class, and Micro-Class Reproduction in

Comparative Perspective." Pp.138-171 in *Persistence, Privilege, & Parenting: The Comparative

Study of Intergenerational Mobility*, edited by Timothy M. Smeeding, Robert Erikson, and

Markus Jäntii. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Kahn, Joan R. and Leslie A. Whittington. 1996. "The Labor Supply of Latinas in the USA: Comparing

Labor Force Participation, Wages, and Hours Worked with Anglo and Black Women."

*Population Research and Policy Review* 15: 45-73.

Kalleberg, Arne L. 2011. *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs: The Rise of Polarized and Precarious Employment*

*Systems in the United States, 1970s to 2000s.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Kambourov, Gueorgui and Iourii Manovskii. 2009. "Occupational Mobility and Wage Inequality."

*The Review of Economic Studies* 76(2): 731-759.

Kaufman, Robert L. 2010. *Race, Gender, and the Labor Market: Inequalities at Work*. Boulder, CO:

Lynne Rienner.

Kronberg, Anne-Kathrin. 2013. "Stay or Leave? Externalization of Job Mobility and the Effect on the

U.S. Gender Earnings Gap, 1979-2009." *Social Forces* 91(4): 1117-1146.

Landivar, Liana Christin. 2013. "Labor Force Participation Among Asian, Black, Hispanic, and White

Mothers in 20 Occupations." Pp. 265-288 in *Notions of Family: Intersectional Perspectives* edited

by Marla H. Kohlman, Bette Dickerson, and Dana Balsink Krieg. Bingley, UK: Emerald Group.

-----. 2017. *Mothers at Work: Who Opts Out?* Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

Percheski, Christine. 2008. "Opting Out? Cohort Differences in Professional Women's Employment

Rates from 1960 to 2005." *American Sociological Review* 73(3): 497-517.

Rosenfeld, Rachel A. 1992. "Job Mobility and Career Processes." *Annual Review of Sociology* 18: 39-

61.

Ryan, Camille L. and Kurt Bauman. 2016. "Educational Attainment in the United States: 2015." Current

Population Reports P20-578. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau.

Spilerman, Seymour. 1977. "Careers, Labor Market Structure, and Socioeconomic Advancement."

*American Journal of Sociology* 83(3): 551-593.

Tomaskovic-Devey, Donald. 1993. *Gender and Racial Inequality at Work: The Sources and Consequences*

*of Job Segregation*. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press.

Wachter, Michael L. 1974. "Primary and Secondary Labor Markets: A Critique of the Dual Approach."

*Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Wilson, George, Ian Sakura-Lemessy, and Jonathan P. West. 1994. "Reaching the Top: Racial Differences

in Mobility Paths to Upper-Tier Occupations." *Work and Occupations* 26(2): 165-186.

**Tables**

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Employed Women and Men Ages 16 and Over

| Variable | Women Mean | Standard Error | Men Mean | Standard Error |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | 45.0 | 0.29 | 43.3 | 0.47 |
| Married | 0.49 | 0.01 | 0.49 | 0.01 |
| Has children* | 0.45 | 0.01 | 0.38 | 0.01 |
| Race or Ethnicity | | | | |
| White, not Hispanic* | 0.61 | 0.01 | 0.56 | 0.01 |
| Black | 0.17 | 0.01 | 0.16 | 0.01 |
| Other races | 0.07 | 0.01 | 0.07 | 0.01 |
| Hispanic* | 0.16 | 0.01 | 0.22 | 0.01 |
| Education | | | | |
| High school or lower* | 0.53 | 0.01 | 0.56 | 0.02 |
| Some college or higher* | 0.47 | 0.01 | 0.44 | 0.02 |
| Hours worked (weekly)* | 33.3 | 0.23 | 37.9 | 0.34 |
| Household income (monthly)* | 4,231 | 81 | 4,758 | 121 |
| Job tenure (in years) | 8.1 | 0.15 | 8.3 | 0.22 |
| Unionization* | 0.10 | 0.01 | 0.12 | 0.01 |

*Sources:* U.S. Census Bureau, 2004 and 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) Panels.
*Notes:* *Differences between men and women are statistically significant. Summary statistics are for the first reference month of the wave. Excludes individuals who are enrolled in school during the reference month. All data are subject to error arising from a variety of sources, including sampling error, non-sampling error, modeling error, and any other sources of error. For further information on SIPP statistical standards and accuracy, see https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/tech-documentation/source-accuracy-statements.html.

Table 2. Percent Employed in Retail and Service Jobs During the Initial and Final Survey Waves

| Variable | Wave 1 Percent employed | Standard Error | Wave 10/13 Percent Employed | Standard Error |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Women** | | | | |
| Total | | | | |
|   Service or retail* | 20.7 | 0.4 | 22.7 | 0.4 |
|   Not service or retail* | 79.3 | 0.4 | 77.3 | 0.4 |
| White, non-Hispanic | | | | |
|   Service or retail | 17.6 | 0.4 | 19.1 | 0.4 |
|   Not service or retail | 82.4 | 0.4 | 81.0 | 0.4 |
| Black | | | | |
|   Service or retail | 29.8 | 1.3 | 32.5 | 1.4 |
|   Not service or retail | 70.3 | 1.3 | 67.5 | 1.4 |
| Hispanic | | | | |
|   Service or retail* | 30.8 | 1.3 | 35.1 | 1.5 |
|   Not service or retail* | 69.2 | 1.3 | 64.9 | 1.5 |
| **Men** | | | | |
| Total | | | | |
|   Service or retail | 11.3 | 0.3 | 11.8 | 0.3 |
|   Not service or retail | 88.7 | 0.3 | 88.2 | 0.3 |
| White, non-Hispanic | | | | |
|   Service or retail | 9.0 | 0.3 | 9.2 | 0.3 |
|   Not service or retail | 91.0 | 0.3 | 90.8 | 0.3 |
| Black | | | | |
|   Service or retail | 18.4 | 1.5 | 17.8 | 1.5 |
|   Not service or retail | 81.6 | 1.5 | 82.2 | 1.5 |
| Hispanic | | | | |
|   Service or retail | 17.1 | 1.1 | 18.9 | 1.1 |
|   Not service or retail | 82.9 | 1.1 | 81.1 | 1.1 |

*Sources:* U.S. Census Bureau, 2004 and 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) Panels.
*Notes:* *Differences between wave 1 and wave 10/13 are statistically significant. The final wave in SIPP 2004 is wave 10 and the final wave in SIPP 2008 is wave 13. Data provided are for the main or first reported job (job line 1).

Table 3. Occupational Mobility Between the Initial and Final Survey Waves

| Variable | Percent mobile: left retail and service | Standard Error | Percent non-mobile: remained in retail or service | Standard Error |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Women** | **36.5** | **1.0** | **63.5** | **1.0** |
| White, non-Hispanic | 38.8 | 1.3 | 61.2 | 1.3 |
| Black* | 30.4 | 2.6 | 69.6 | 2.6 |
| Hispanic | 31.4 | 2.4 | 68.6 | 2.4 |
| **Men** | **37.8** | **1.5** | **62.2** | **1.5** |
| White, non-Hispanic | 40.9 | 2.0 | 59.2 | 2.0 |
| Black* | 41.6 | 4.3 | 58.4 | 4.3 |
| Hispanic | 29.8 | 3.1 | 70.3 | 3.1 |

*Sources:* U.S. Census Bureau, 2004 and 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) Panels.
*Notes:* *Differences between men and women are statistically significant. The final wave in SIPP 2004 is wave 10 and the final wave in SIPP 2008 is wave 13. Data provided are for the main or first reported job (job line 1).

Table 4. Destination Occupations of Occupationally Mobile Women

| Variable | White, non-Hispanic | Standard Error | Black, Other Race, or Hispanic | Standard Error |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total mobile employed women** | **2,406,000** | **162,700** | **1,327,000** | **115,900** |
| Management, business, science, and arts occupations | 35.1 | 3.0 | 28.9 | 4.7 |
| Sales, office, and other service occupations | 55.2 | 3.1 | 48.4 | 5.3 |
| Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations | 0.9 | 0.5 | 2.7 | 1.6 |
| Production, transportation, and material moving occupations | 8.9 | 1.9 | 18.4 | 3.5 |

*Sources:* U.S. Census Bureau, 2004 and 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) Panels.

*Notes:* The final wave in SIPP 2004 is wave 10 and the final wave in SIPP 2008 is wave 13. Data provided are for the main or first reported job (job line 1). Estimates for Black, Other Race, and Hispanic workers are combined due to small sample size.

Table 5: Probability of Women Experiencing Mobility Out of Retail and Service Occupations Between the Initial and Final Survey Waves: Binomial Logistic Regression Model Estimates

| Variable | Model 1 Race + control variables | Model 2 + education | Model 3 + tenure | Model 4 + union | Model 5 + interaction effects | Model 6 Men |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Intercept (ref. = non-mobile) | 0.70(0.04)** | 0.34(0.38) | 0.33(0.38) | 0.29(0.38) | 0.40(0.39) | 0.81(0.50) |
| Age | -0.04(0.01)*** | -0.04(0.01)*** | -0.04(0.01)*** | -0.04(0.01)*** | -0.04(0.01)*** | -0.03(0.01)*** |
| Married | 0.09(0.15) | 0.11(0.15) | 0.11(0.15) | 0.10(0.15) | 0.09(0.16) | 0.18(0.21) |
| Has children | -0.13(0.14) | -0.12(0.14) | -0.12(0.14) | -0.09(0.14) | -0.07(0.14) | 0.29(0.20) |
| Race or Ethnicity (ref: White, not Hispanic) | | | | | | |
|    Black | -0.38(0.22)* | -0.36(0.21)* | -0.36(0.21)* | -0.35(0.21) | -0.49(0.44) | -0.01(0.43) |
|    Hispanic | -0.34(0.19)* | -0.26(0.19) | -0.26(0.19) | -0.25(0.19) | -0.97(0.38)** | -0.08(0.30) |
| Hours worked | -0.01(0.01) | -0.01(0.01) | -0.01(0.01) | -0.01(0.01) | -0.01(0.01) | -0.02(0.01)** |
| Household income | 0.11(0.20) | 0.01(0.21) | 0.01(0.21) | 0.03(0.21) | 0.02(0.21) | 0.56(0.27)** |
| Some college or higher | | 0.54(0.15)*** | 0.54(0.15)*** | 0.54(0.15)*** | 0.45(0.18)** | 0.33(0.23) |
| Job tenure (in years) | | | -0.01(0.01) | -0.01(0.01) | -0.01(0.01) | -0.01(0.02) |
| Unionized | | | | -0.69(0.27)** | -0.79(0.34)** | -1.44(0.45)*** |
| *Interaction effects* | | | | | | |
| Education*race | | | | | | |
|    Some college*Black | | | | | 0.12(0.42) | 0.70(0.52) |
|    Some college*Hispanic | | | | | 0.48(0.38) | -0.25(0.51) |
| Tenure*race | | | | | | |
|    Tenure*Black | | | | | 0.01(0.03) | -0.03(0.04) |
|    Tenure*Hispanic | | | | | 0.06(0.03)* | -0.02(0.03) |
| Unionized*race | | | | | | |
|    Union*Black | | | | | -0.16(0.83) | 1.18(0.71)* |
|    Union*Hispanic | | | | | 0.46(0.79) | 1.20(0.79) |
| N | 14,440,000 | 14,440,000 | 14,440,000 | 14,440,000 | 14,440,000 | 9,277,000 |
| Likelihood ratio chi-square | 12.83*** | 13.65*** | 11.93*** | 11.84*** | 7.70*** | 5.31*** |

*Sources*: U.S. Census Bureau, 2004 and 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) Panels.

*Notes:* *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001 (two-tailed tests). Standard errors are in parentheses.

Table 6. Wages of Mobile and Non-Mobile Workers by Union Membership Between the Initial and Final Survey Waves

| | Women | | | | | Men | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Initial Wave | | Final wave | | | Initial Wave | | Final Wave | | |
| | Earnings | Standard error | Earnings | Standard error | Percent change | Earnings | Standard error | Earnings | Standard error | Percent change |
| **Mobile workers** | | | | | | | | | | |
| Union members | 1,646 | 230 | 2,120 | 512 | 28.8 | 3,644 | 441 | 3,308 | 718 | -9.2 |
| Non-union members | 1,574 | 66 | 1,801 | 138 | 14.4 | 2,233 | 146 | 2,425 | 181 | 8.6 |
| **Non-mobile workers** | | | | | | | | | | |
| Union members | 2,220 | 92 | 2,150 | 89 | -3.2 | 2,801 | 170 | 2,790 | 170 | -0.4 |
| Non-union members | 1,643 | 35 | 1,716 | 37 | 4.4 | 2,355 | 110 | 2,245 | 73 | -4.7 |

*Sources:* U.S. Census Bureau, 2004 and 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) Panels.
*Notes:* The final wave in SIPP 2004 is wave 10 and the final wave in SIPP 2008 is wave 13.

**Figures**

Figure 1. Median Earnings for Full-Time, Year-Round Employed Workers Ages 16 and Over by Major Occupation Group
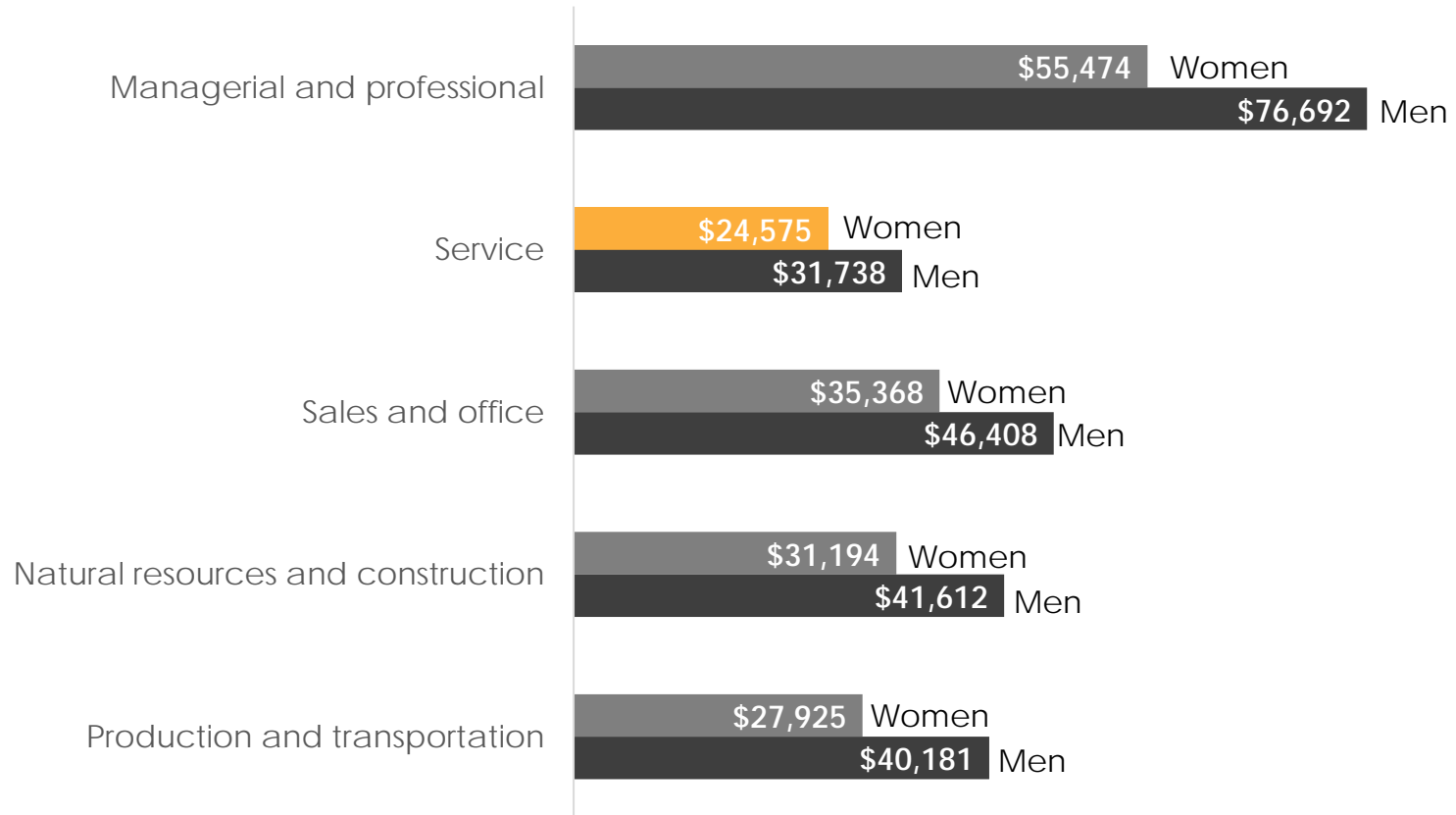


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016 American Community Survey.
Notes: Data based on sample. For information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, and definitions, see www.census.gov/acs/www.
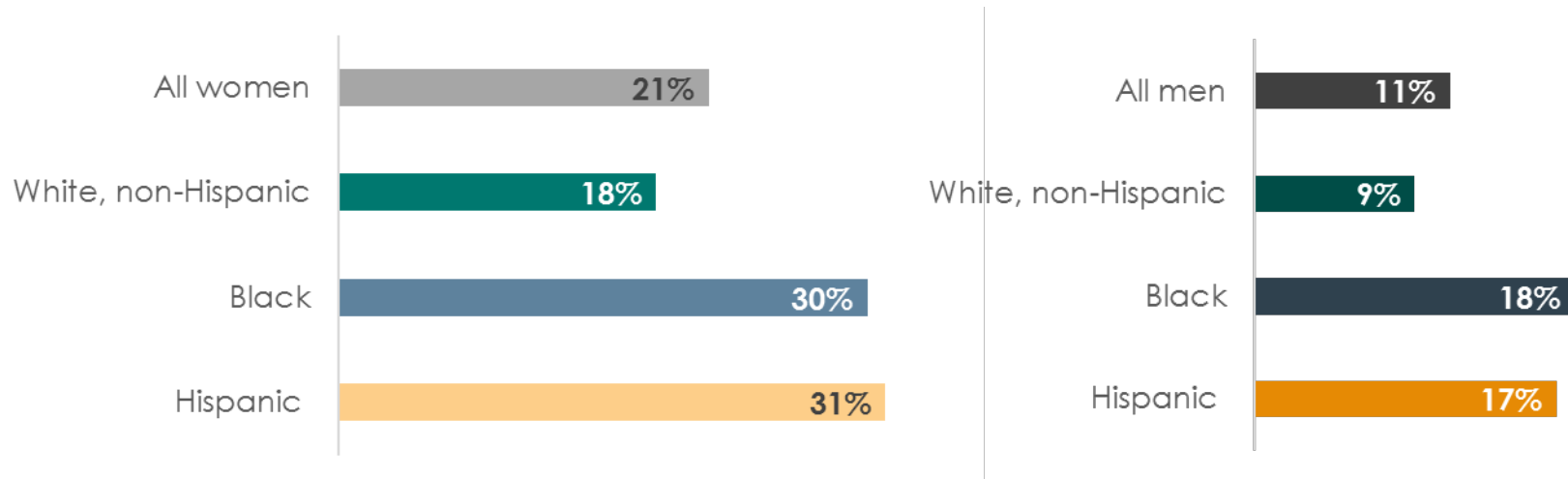
Figure 2. Access to Retirement, Healthcare, and Paid Leave Benefits by Major Occupation Group



**Retirement benefits**

| | |
|---|---|
| Managerial and professional | 85% |
| Service | 47% |
| Sales and office | 72% |
| Natural resources and construction | 66% |
| Production and transportation | 71% |

**Healthcare benefits**

| | |
|---|---|
| Managerial and professional | 88% |
| Service | 44% |
| Sales and office | 68% |
| Natural resources and construction | 74% |
| Production and transportation | 76% |

**Paid vacation**

| | |
|---|---|
| Managerial and professional | 77% |
| Service | 55% |
| Sales and office | 80% |
| Natural resources and construction | 80% |
| Production and transportation | 81% |

**Paid family leave**

| | |
|---|---|
| Managerial and professional | 25% |
| Service | 9% |
| Sales and office | 14% |
| Natural resources and construction | 10% |
| Production and transportation | 7% |

**Paid sick leave**

| | |
|---|---|
| Managerial and professional | 89% |
| Service | 51% |
| Sales and office | 75% |
| Natural resources and construction | 63% |
| Production and transportation | 63% |

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017 National Compensation Survey.
Notes: For information on sampling and imputation, see National Compensation Measures, BLS Handbook of Methods at
www.bls.gov/opub/hom/ncs/home.htm.

Figure 3. Percent Employed in Retail and Service Occupations



All women — 21%
White, non-Hispanic — 18%
Black — 30%
Hispanic — 31%

All men — 11%
White, non-Hispanic — 9%
Black — 18%
Hispanic — 17%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2004 and 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) Panels.
Notes: Data provided are for the main or first reported job (job line 1).

Figure 4. Percent of Women Employed in Retail and Service Occupations During the Initial and Final Survey Waves[1]
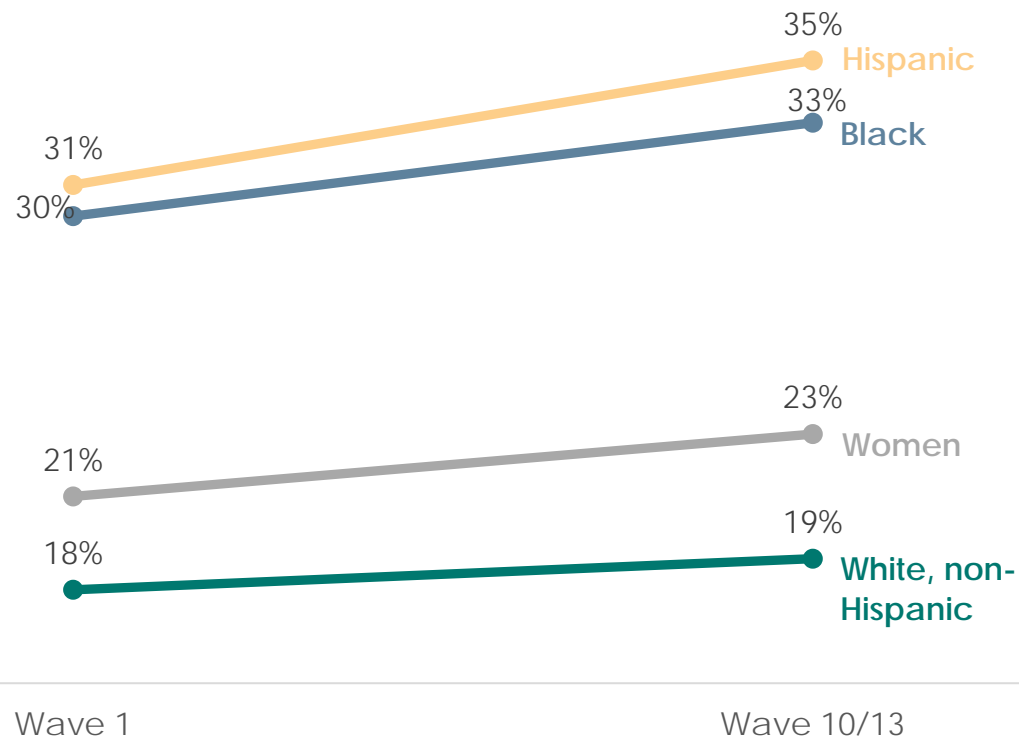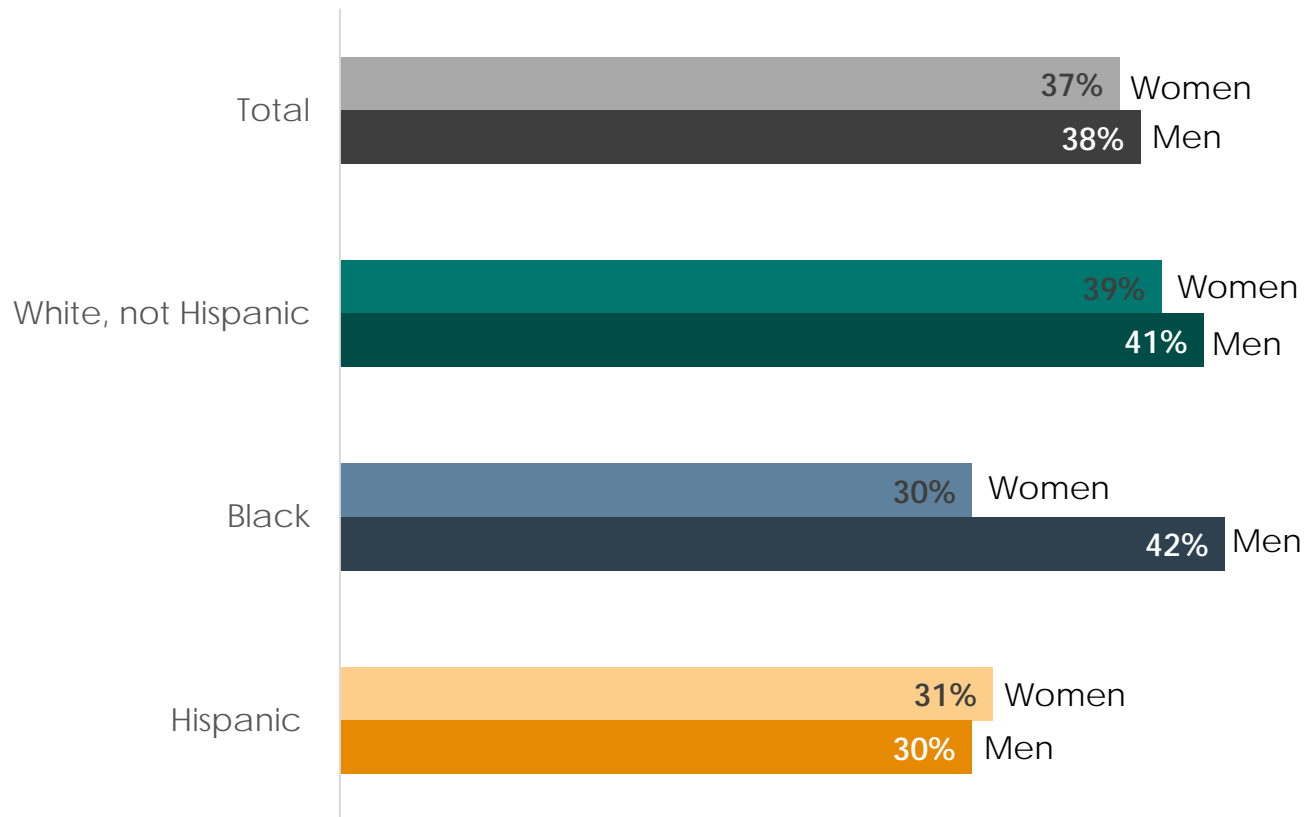


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2004 and 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) Panels.
Notes: The final wave in SIPP 2004 is wave 10 and the final wave in SIPP 2008 is wave 13. Data provided are for the main or first reported job (job line 1).
[1] The difference between the percent employed in retail and service in wave 1 and wave 2 is not statistically significant for Black women.

Figure 5. Percent of Women and Men Who Left Retail and Service Occupations Between the Initial and Final Survey Waves



**Total**
- 37% Women
- 38% Men

**White, not Hispanic**
- 39% Women
- 41% Men

**Black**
- 30% Women
- 42% Men

**Hispanic**
- 31% Women
- 30% Men

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2004 and 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) Panels.
Notes: The final wave in SIPP 2004 is wave 10 and the final wave in SIPP 2008 is wave 13. Data provided are for the main or first reported job (job line 1).

Figure 6. Estimated Effect of Educational Attainment, Job Tenure, and Unionization on the Likelihood of Exiting Retail and Service Occupations and Interaction Effects by Race and Ethnicity
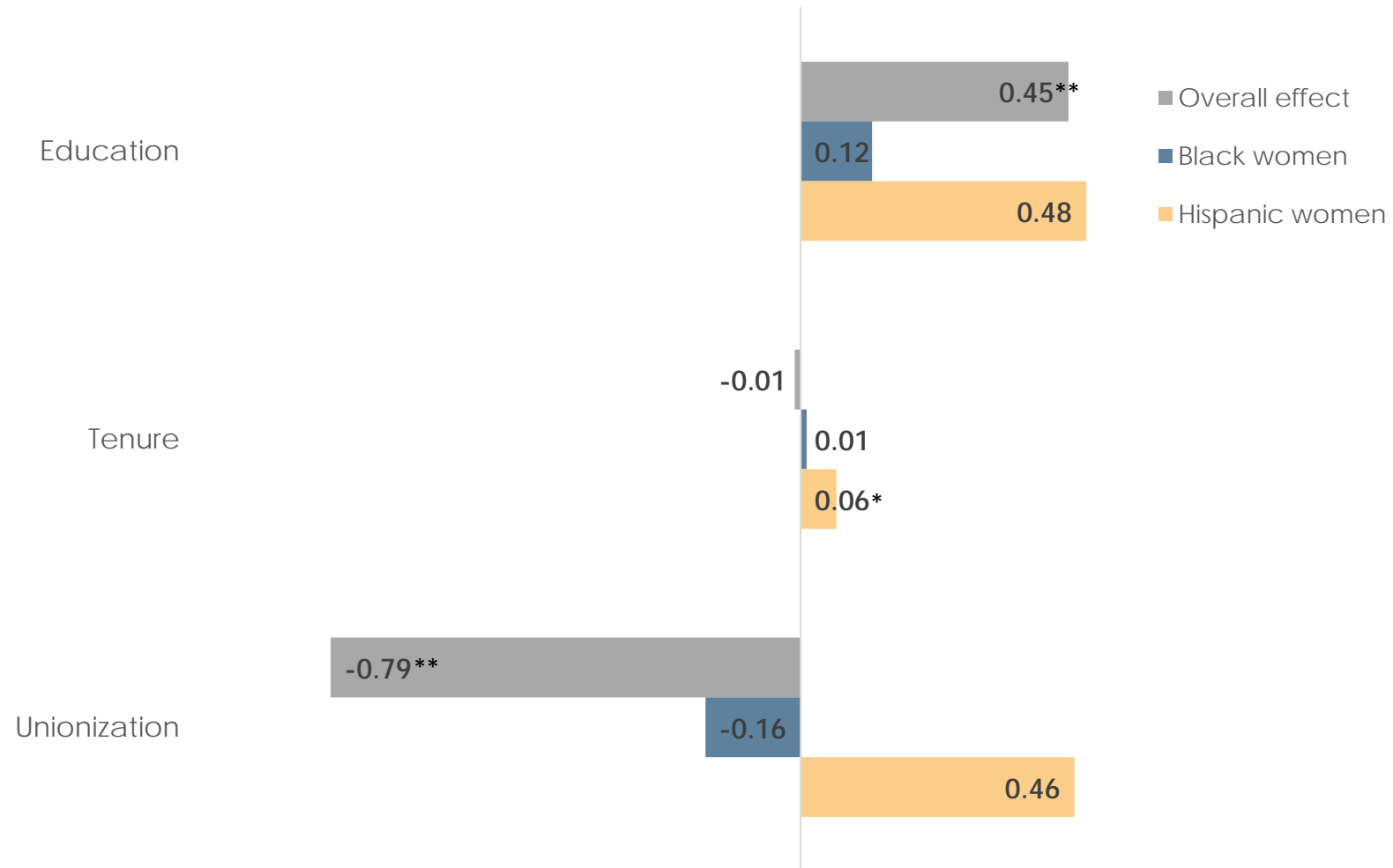
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2004 and 2008 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) Panels.
Notes: *p<.05 **p<.01 (two-tailed tests).