



# Black, White, male, and female concentrated employment: The effect of spatial and aspatial labor factors



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## ABSTRACT

We empirically investigated the influence of site attributes, proximity to labor, specific industries, and labor force characteristics on the location of employment concentrations. The study focuses on two dimensions of labor force including race and gender. We examined racial and gender disparity by studying concentrated Black, White, male, and female employment. While job opportunities are expanding, education and health care-related industries support substantial female concentrations, while manufacturing, transportation and warehousing, health care and social assistance increase the likelihood for the concentrated Black employment. Although the study found little evidence of spatial mismatch with employment clusters by race tending to occur close to their own concentration of labor, another finding indicates that a significant part of Black employees might have employment outside the identified employment areas. The study contributes to the body of research analyzing locational and labor attributes of employment concentrations.

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## Introduction

Clustering or concentration of economic activities can be observed across all sectors of the capitalist economies (Coe, Kelly, & Yeung, 2013). Economic activities are shaped by gender (e.g., more males are employed in construction, while there are many more females in health and education), while race and ethnicity shape urban landscapes in a significant way with Black employment more concentrated in the central area (Coleman, 2002), making gender and race/ethnicity the key variables in the job market analysis (Coe et al., 2013). We analyzed concentrated employment as a function of geographic site-specific (spatial) and labor (aspatial) factors in a medium-sized Memphis metropolitan area in western Tennessee centered on the city of Memphis which has earned a unique reputation as America's Aerotropolis.

Although recent decades have witnessed intense changes in the composition of the labor force (Elsby, Hobijn, & Sahin, 2010), we focus here on two dimensions including race and gender. First, building on previous work, we identify concentrated employment by race and gender within the five-county study area. Second, the study examines how site and labor characteristics *combined* impact employment concentration by race and gender.

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The remaining paper is structured as follows: the subsequent section provides the framework for the above questions to be empirically examined in a five-county setting. Then we present the study area and report labor force characteristics. In the methodology section we explain the method and data used to conduct the study, the findings of the descriptive analysis including the demographic composition of employment concentrations and distribution of economic activity, as well as the spatial and aspatial variables used for the logistic regression model examining the relationship between employment concentration by race and gender and the *combined* site and labor characteristics. It is followed by the section presenting the results of the model. Lastly, the final remarks on the major findings, limitations, and suggestions for future investigations are provided in the discussion and conclusion section.

## Site and labor attributes and the location of economic activities

Location of economic activities depends to a large degree on both spatial and aspatial characteristics including the micro-geographical attributes of the site (Rodrigue, Comtois, & Slack, 2009), with industrial employment relying on access to labor market, services, other like employment, and land; and services employment having similar requirements and also depending on access to consumers including households and organizations (Wilson, 1974). Aspatial characteristics describe resident labor

and comprise race, gender, earning level, and experience of the employees; all impact job locations with empirical evidence of the different employment patterns by racial groups and gender (Sanchez, Shen, & Peng, 2004).

Labor availability can be measured both in terms of a distance to the central point of workers' residence (termed "a weighted mean center") (how proximate is labor to jobs) and in terms of the percentage of labor available in a given geographic area (what is the magnitude of the available labor). Worker skills and qualification are important factors as high-skilled workers not only increase productivity of existing businesses (Kok, 2013) but also attract new high-tech companies (Pratt, 2007). Therefore, employers seek employees with better qualifications. Workers' qualification can be proxied by age, since it serves as an indication of their experience: older workers are more likely to be employed than younger workers who are less skilled and experienced (Ong & Blumenberg, 1998; Sanchez et al., 2004). At the same time, younger workers might be at an advantage and compete more successfully with older workers as they are more willing to hold low-wage jobs. Younger, less educated workers tend to find employment closer to their homes (Antipova, Wang, & Wilmot, 2011), so lower-paying jobs might be located closer to younger workers.

Urban scholars explore the effect of decentralization on Black workers. Urban centers which had concentrated Black employment are experiencing a lower percentage of Black employment resulting in a Black–White employment and wage inequality ("spatial mismatch") (Coleman, 2002). The spatial mismatch theory was originally introduced by Kain in 1968; it hypothesizes that Black workers can improve their job situation by being hired in relocated suburban firms (Coleman, 2002). A recent study located

the potential mismatch between Black resident workers who demonstrably outnumber White workers in the Aerotropolis, the economic hub located around the Memphis International Airport; female workers are especially affected by having less jobs at their residence. Prior research emphasized a complex relationship between gender, race, employment, and local labor market (Hanson & Pratt, 1995; Huffman, 2004; Johnston-Anumonwo, 1995, 1997; McLafferty & Preston, 1992).

Similarly employment is shaped by gender: since women have smaller space ranges, their jobs are closer to home locations and commutes are shorter due to childcare and other home-related duties (Blumen, 1994; Gilbert, 1997; Hanson & Johnston, 1985; McLafferty & Preston, 1997; Mitchell, 2000). This is especially true for women of the lower- and middle-class (Hanson & Pratt, 1994). For the same reason working women tend to take part-time jobs (Antipova & Wang, 2010; Waldfogel & Mayer, 2000). Males generally have greater employment opportunities as they generally have less childcare responsibilities (Sanchez et al., 2004).

**Study area**

The study area consists of Shelby and the adjacent counties: Tipton, Fayette, Crittenden, and DeSoto within the Memphis metropolitan statistical area (Fig. 1). The majority of centrally located Shelby County is occupied by the city of Memphis located in southwestern Tennessee. Historically, Memphis is a young city; its government formally began in 1827 with Memphis serving the region as the principal port city and important cotton exporter (Harkins, 1982).

Currently, the area has the second-largest inland port on the Mississippi River, and the world's second-busiest cargo airport.

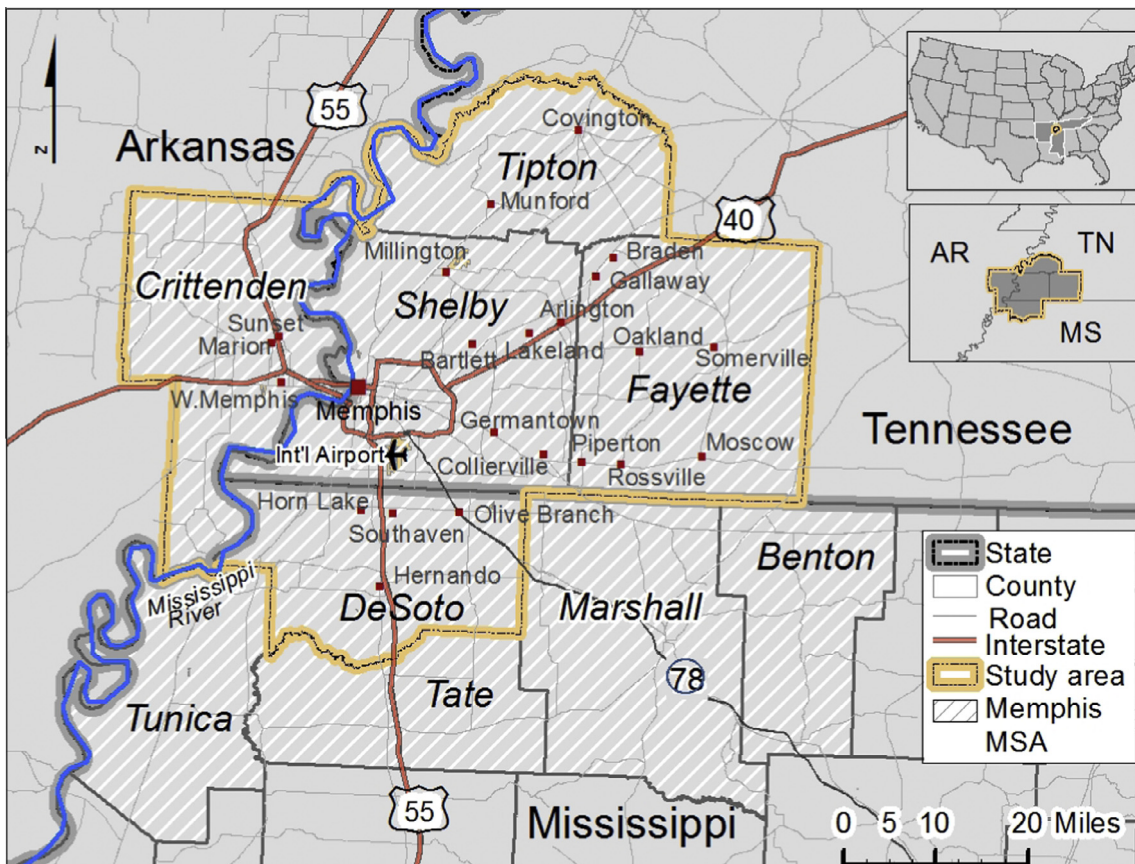


Fig. 1. The five-county study area.

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