

# SEX AND RACE IN THE LABOUR MARKET

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On average white men earn substantially more than black men, whereas there is little difference in the case of women (Brown, 1984: 167).

We know from our everyday experience that black women have some of the worst jobs. Yet this is not quite what published statistics suggest. Official data certainly show marked differences between men's and women's jobs and between the jobs that black and white men hold, but racial differences *between* women appear slight in national survey results.

This article attempts to unravel the reasons for the apparent conflict between the evidence of our eyes and those of surveys such as Colin Brown's. One critical difference is the fact that black women are more often full-time workers; they are also concentrated in the London area and in jobs where redundancies have been particularly high. To uncover the true scale of race inequalities these points have to be considered as well as the qualifications of black women and the inadequacies of standard socio-economic/occupational classification systems. This paper also draws out the key effects of the recession on black and white women's working lives using the evidence of the Greater London Council's (GLC) London Living Standards Survey (LLSS) between 1981 and 1986. This survey shows that black women are not only at the bottom of the pile, but that their position has got worse relative both to black men and white women over the last few years.<sup>1</sup>

## Black women in labour market surveys

The first comprehensive national survey to distinguish adequately by both race and sex in Britain was Colin Brown's survey for the Policy

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Studies Institute (PSI) (Brown, 1984). Previous PSI surveys of race in Britain focused on differences between black and white men. The national Department of Employment/Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) survey of women at work (Martin and Roberts, 1984) included black women in its sample but in insufficient numbers to make reliable comparisons. The EEC Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the OPCS General Household Survey do collect ethnic group information, but the sample numbers of different ethnic groups are usually too small to provide reliable estimates by ethnic group and sex. In analyzing the position of black women in Britain's labour force, the Department of Employment was therefore forced to amalgamate information from three consecutive Labour Force Surveys 1984/5/6 (*Employment Gazette*, March 1988); even so there are doubts as to how accurate a picture is presented.

Outside London and the major conurbations, the 'problem' is that there are too few black women for a ½ per cent sample survey to pick up sufficient numbers for reliable analysis. As a result, most studies of the position of black women are surveys of small areas or studies of particular workplaces and/or types of work (see for example Hoel, 1982; Stone, 1983; Westwood and Bhachu, 1988; Dex, 1983) and even these studies are relatively rare. Such studies cannot be generalized to portray the national position and are not usually able to demonstrate changes in the position of particular groups over time. It is for such reasons that the PSI deliberately 'over-sampled' the black population, using smaller sampling fractions for them than for the white population. Once the Census of Population includes ethnic group information this particular problem should be overcome, but the earliest such information from the 1991 Census is likely to be available is 1993/4; nor will it overcome the deficiency of information on race and income. Moreover, the form in which 'ethnic' information is collected by the Census and the LFS will still make it impossible to analyze the position of 'white' ethnic minorities. The effects of colour as against ethnic group discrimination cannot therefore be discerned from official statistics. (See Yuval-Davis, 1988, for a discussion of this issue).

The PSI survey reported in Brown (1984) made strenuous efforts to achieve a good response from black women, employing interviewers matched with respondents by ethnic group and sex and seeking help from community leaders to get the survey accepted. As a result, their sample is more representative than earlier ones, with response rates for Asian men and women which are as high as for white adults. However the survey still estimated that only 18 per cent of Muslim women were in the labour market (and only 10 per cent were employed). Although this figure accords with that of the Labour Force Survey for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, there are good grounds for suspecting that in both cases the surveys missed many women's involvement in homeworking, in family employment in shops and elsewhere, and in paid childcare. Certainly OPCS are known to be concerned with the representativeness of their sample of ethnic minorities in the LFS and the General

Household Survey (GHS). The Labour Force Survey has been shown to under-record the number of black- and female-headed households in the population (Morris, 1987) and is most likely to miss the poorer black households. Taking these points together, it is likely that the PSI survey also under-records homeworking and family employment and that therefore pay and job levels of black women are likely to have been overestimated in the survey.<sup>2</sup> Since Muslim women were almost half the PSI sample of Asian women, Brown's picture of the job levels and pay of Asian women could be seriously distorted.

### Pay differentials

Colin Brown's apparently perverse findings on pay are partly due to such biases in response rates and under-reporting of low-paid work. His figures (Table 1) give the impression that black women earn more in a week than white women. They also suggest that wage differences are greater between white men and women than between black men and women.

Table 1 Gross Earnings of Full-Time Women Employees Great Britain 1983

	White	Black
Median weekly earnings	£77.50	£78.50
(as a proportion of male)	60%	71%

Source: PSI (1984).

It is interesting that Brown's results on pay differentials by sex and race appear to mirror those identified in the USA. US Census data, quoted by Wallace (1980), appear to confirm Oaxaca's historical interpretation that between 1955 and 1971 'black women gained access to traditionally white female jobs faster than black males entered white male jobs' (Oaxaca, 1977). Wallace's figures<sup>3</sup> suggest that between 1939 and 1976 black women closed their earnings gap with white women far more than black men did in relation to white men. By 1976 race appeared to add nothing to the disadvantages faced by black *women* over and above their sex. However, Malveaux (1987), argues that the 'convergence' theory makes selective use of statistics, using raw data to avoid comparing like with like.

A similar argument is being advanced in this paper. Before we can accept Brown's 'convergent' thesis as a true picture of the situation in Britain, his figures require further scrutiny. Aside from the possibility of sample bias, discussed above, Brown's results, reproduced in Table 1, provide only a partial, and to some extent inaccurate, account of racial divisions between women in the labour market.

There are three critical differences between white and black women in Britain which qualify Colin Brown's findings. Firstly black women work longer hours, in both full-time and part-time work; secondly black women are concentrated in London; thirdly they have a younger and hence better qualified age profile. Once these points are allowed for, the

relative earnings position of black women in the British labour market begins to look very different.

The effect of allowing for the longer hours worked by black full-time workers is shown in Table 2. On an hourly comparison, black women full-time workers in Brown's sample earned 3p *less* per hour on average, as against 26 per cent *more* in weekly rates.

Table 2 Relative Value of Full-Time Women's Earnings by Race

Black women: White women			
Weekly pay		Hourly pay	
(Brown, 1984)	126 : 100	(Brown, 1984)	97 : 100
Weekly pay (aged 25–54)		Hourly pay (London)	
(Brown, 1984)	88 : 100	(LLSS, 1986)	77 : 100
Weekly pay (London)			
(Graduates)	71 : 100		
(LLSS, 1986)			

Sources: Brown (1984) and London Living Standards Survey, LLSS (1986).

Considering the real value or buying power of their earnings, the discrepancy may be even greater. Part of the reason why Colin Brown finds little difference between women in wage rates is that black women are concentrated in London where women's pay is higher than average. As many as 51 per cent of economically active black women live in London (Department of Employment, 1988). But higher prices in London reduce the overall spending power of black women compared to that of white women workers. Evidence of pay differences in London by sex and race for those in employment show that once regional differences and working-hour differences are allowed for, white women earn 23 per cent more per hour than black.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, black women in London earn only 63 per cent of the average black man's weekly earnings, less than the equivalent proportion for whites (72 per cent); emphasizing that disadvantages of race do not cancel out disadvantages of sex for black women.

For a variety of reasons black women with jobs are much more likely to be in the 25–54 age group,<sup>5</sup> at the hump of the age/earnings profile. If comparisons are restricted to women in that age group, the race gap in weekly rates becomes clearer. Similarly, if differences in qualifications levels are abstracted, the gap also widens. Table 2 shows that black women graduates in London earn on average only 71 per cent as much a week as white women graduates.

Black women are also more likely to work shifts. On Brown's evidence 16 per cent of black women do, compared to 11 per cent of white. West Indian women indeed work night shifts much more frequently than white men. Our evidence from London also shows that black women are less likely to have fringe benefits<sup>6</sup> and more likely to work in poorer physical conditions. So in terms of the 'total employment package', black women can be seen to be considerably worse off than white women.

### Differences in occupational status

At first sight the occupational profile of black women as compared to white looks promising (Table 3 from the *Employment Gazette*, March 1988). But a similar 'deconstruction' can be carried out, for these figures are subject to all the distortions considered above, and to two further major problems.

Table 3 Women's Employment by Occupation and Ethnic Origin

	White %	Black %
All non-manual	65	59
Managerial & professional	25	27
Clerical, etc.	30	25
Other non-manual	10	7
Manual		
Craft, etc.	4	9
Other manual	31	31

Source: LFS 1984/5/6.

Firstly, these figures, unlike the pay data considered above, are for full- and part-time workers together. For reasons we shall discuss below, black women with jobs are generally more likely to work full time. However, amongst white women poor employment is heavily concentrated in part-time jobs. Ninety per cent of white women in manual and personal service work in London are part time. Amongst black women, however, poor jobs are very often full-time jobs – 38 per cent of full-time black women workers in London are in manual and personal service work (Table 4).

Secondly, socio-economic categories used in these types of analysis can obscure large differences in the actual employment position of women. This problem is a legacy of the sexist bias in socio-economic and occupational categories which differentiate finely between levels of male work but which bunch together widely different types of work for women because they were never designed to measure class differentiation between women (see Hunt, 1981; Thomas, 1986).

Over half the female labour force in this country (56.7 per cent) are classified into just eight of the 100+ occupational units which form the basis of socio-economic group classification. Some of these units – for example 46.3 Other clerks and cashiers, 49 Receptionists, typists, secretaries, 16 Nurse administrators and nurses, cover a very wide range of jobs and have rather ambiguous class or SEG status. If, as is likely, black women are particularly concentrated in the poorer types of jobs *within* these occupational units, much of the class status difference between them and white women will have been obscured by the classification process. Data from the London Survey reinforce this supposition. The average pay for black women within non-manual jobs in London was only £137 a week, £31 less than 'non-manual' white women.

Nurses are one example of the obscuring of status differentials. Black nurses tend to be State Enrolled, rather than State Registered Nurses or RGNs (Hicks, 1982), though even this is difficult to establish from the official statistics which differentiate only by place of birth, not race. As SENs their pay and prospects are considerably worse, but they are classed in the same occupation and socio-economic group as predominantly white RGNs/SRNs.

Similarly, observation of clerical and secretarial work shows a distinct differentiation between the routine, boring keyboarding jobs often held by black women, and the true secretaries and personal assistants, the majority of whom are white (GLC, 1985). Yet the classification system lumps them all together, again obscuring real differences.

If the socio-economic group and social-class categories better reflected the differences *within* women's work, then official statistics would show up greater race differences between women than they do. In this instance, sexism in social categorizations serves also to obscure racial divisions in real life. Some of the effects of bias in response can be seen from comparing the results Brown obtained to those of the 1985 LFS. For example, Brown's survey identifies 44 per cent of Asian women as semi-skilled and 6 per cent as skilled, whereas the small LFS 1985 sample found 34 per cent semi-skilled and 12 per cent skilled.

The comparison between London and Great Britain as a whole suggests that the relatively high proportion of black women in non-manual jobs is very much an outcome of their concentration in the London labour market. Outside London only about 40 per cent of black women appear to be non-manual workers (and only 6 per cent professionals). For white women outside London the proportions are around 57 per cent non-manual and 20 per cent professional.

The effect of standardizing for differences in the amount of part time work once regional differences are excluded are shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Socio-Economic Group of Women by Race and Hours, London 1986 London Living Standards Survey

	All women		Full-time workers		Part-time workers	
	black	white	black	white	black	white
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Prof, Employers + Managers	4	18	5	24	[0]	4
Intermediate Non Manual	30	25	28	29	[40]	6
Junior Non Manual	26	35	25	33	[40]	32
Skilled Manual	6	4	8	4	[0]	3
Personal Service	13	11	13	5	[10]	23
Semi Skilled Manual	15	4	15	4	[10]	4
Unskilled	5	4	2	0	[15]	11
White collar	42	68	58	86	[80]	44
Manual	33	19	30	9	[35]	41
Total Sample	80	590	60	392	20	198

Table 4 shows that race differences are much starker, if part-time women workers are separated off. Amongst full-time workers, a black woman is three times more likely to be a manual worker than a white woman, though for the female workforce as a whole, the ratio of black to white manual workers is just over 3 : 2.

While black women part-time workers are disadvantaged relative to black women full-timers, data from the LLSS (Table 4) suggest that differences are small, though sample sizes make this difficult to establish conclusively. More important is the observation that white women who work full time are to some extent able to avoid the lowest paid areas of work, and that this is much less true of black women full-timers. Avoiding part-time work does not bring black women the same gains. Statistically speaking, black women as a group do benefit from their tendency to work full time – that is, their socio-economic group profile is partly a reflection of this tendency – but the degree of discrimination they face may be underestimated if comparisons are not made separately for full-time and part-time work. Further evidence on this point comes from a more detailed look at fringe benefits in relation to race and part-time status.<sup>8</sup>

In what follows we consider how the picture of racial differences between women in Britain is affected by the pattern of part-time and full-time working and differences in age and qualifications. We then go on to consider the importance of unemployment as a critical factor differentiating the experiences of women of different racial backgrounds in the London labour market and what the effects of economic crisis have been on women of different races in London.

The size of the London sample precludes any detailed differentiation *between* black women by ethnic group and, as with all other surveys which do not distinguish white women by ethnic group, our sample of *white* women includes women from ethnic minority groups suffering from racial disadvantage, such as the Cypriots and Chinese (See Yuval-Davis, 1988 and Westwood & Bhachu, 1988). In some degree, then, our information underestimates the effects of racial disadvantage amongst women in the London labour market, but it is impossible to gauge the degree, given the lack of information on non-black ethnic minorities in employment.

### **Race and part-time work**

The emphasis white feminists have placed on part-time work as a determinant of the sexual division of labour and of differential rewards between men and women's paid work can be seen as ethnocentric (Amos and Parma, 1984; Barrett and McIntosh, 1985). For white women, rewards, prospects and the quality of work vary greatly between those who work full-time and those who work part time (Table 4; Martin and Roberts, 1984; Bruegel, 1983; GLC, 1986). Occupation by occupation, part-timers earn less per hour than full-timers, but part-time working is

not a major factor in keeping black women's pay and prospects so far below those of white men.

White women who work full time tend to be free of immediate childcare responsibilities and those with childcare responsibilities tend to work part-time, but that standard picture of the way women have negotiated their 'double burden' does not apply to black women and suggests that we need to rethink the 'domestic responsibilities' model of women's position in the labour market. Interestingly, the strength of the link between childcare responsibilities and part-time work seems to have declined nationally over the last ten years; our figures for London suggest also that it is much less pronounced in London than elsewhere.

In the light of this, it may be time to revise the generalized view of part-time work reflecting constrained choices. The low pay associated with it might better be seen as a price part-timers have to pay for the relative freedom of having some (unpaid) time for housework and childcare. In comparison, black women – especially West Indian women – appear to be constrained to working full time.

It is increasingly clear that in Britain today black women are more likely to be 'economically active' and much less likely to work part time than white women (Stone, 1983). This is true irrespective of age, childcare responsibilities and area, though there are important differences between ethnic minority groups, according to both the LFS (Table 5) and Brown (1984)<sup>9</sup>. Black women are also more likely to be unemployed than white women, a point which will be considered in more detail below.

Table 5 Proportion of Economically Active Women Working Full or Part Time

Ethnic group	% Full time employees	% Part time	% Self-employed
White	52	40	6
West Indian	71	24	2
Indian	66	21	8
Pakistani/Bangladeshi	[55]	[27]	[18]
All black	65	25	7

Source: LFS 1984/5/6.

Table 6 Women in Employment: Proportion Working Part Time by Race and Childcare Responsibilities, London 1986.

Age and childcare	White	Black
	%	%
With pre-school children	61	29
With school children	57	38
No children		
Age under 30	3	0
Age 30–50	20	4
Age over 50	54	49

Source: GLC LLSS.



One reason for the greater participation of black women in the labour market might be considered to be the higher rate of single parenthood amongst West Indian women (Colin Brown's figures for the country as a whole suggest that nearly one West Indian household in three with children are single parents, compared to 10 per cent of white and 5 per cent of Asian households with children). However, this is not a satisfactory explanation for two reasons: Colin Brown's figures show that West Indian lone parents are *less* likely to have a job and are *more* dependent on supplementary benefit/unemployment benefit than white single parents.<sup>10</sup> Secondly, he finds that Asian women are unlikely to work part time and yet single parenthood is rare amongst them.

Our London sample is too small to distinguish between West Indian and Asian women but it does show part-time working to be much commoner amongst white mothers than amongst black mothers, even when single parents are excluded (Table 6). On this basis, it is clear that high levels of single parenthood cannot explain the greater propensity of black women to work full time.

Nevertheless, the evidence is that high rates of full-time employment amongst black women is to be explained by the economic situation of black households. Colin Brown tends to a 'culturist' explanation, rather than a material one, following other writers on the position of black women in Britain (Stone, 1983, Haynes, 1983).

While it is clear that cultural background does affect whether women seek employment, and to some extent the type of employment they seek, this explanation is always in danger of falling into outdated stereotypes, sometimes with tinges of almost racist essentialism. As Wallace points out in relation to the USA, much of the research on black women undertaken by white economists and sociologists suffers from 'unwarranted inferences; for example the tendency to speculate about the psychosociological characteristics of individuals, the inheritance of economic status, or the structure of black families' (Wallace, 1980: 2). It is interesting to note, with this in mind, that Cain (1966) sought to explain the high rates of labour-force participation of black women in the USA between 1940 and 1960 by the *greater* prevalence of part-time work amongst them.

In the British context, in particular, there is a need to take account of the wide diversity of origins of the black population. While cultural norms clearly influence the desire and ability of women to seek paid work, once that decision has been made, the choice between part-time and full-time work hardly varies between black women. Part-time working is as uncommon amongst employed women from the Hindu, Sikh and Moslem communities as amongst West Indian women (Table 5), even though Hindu, Muslim and Sikh women have at least as many childcare responsibilities. If a cultural explanation for differences in the part-time/full-time divide were sufficient, it would have to be one which noted the 'deviance' of white women in working part time, rather than that of black women seeking full-time work. The pattern of full-time working amongst women from ethnic minority communities

with widely varying rates of participation in the labour market, is perhaps another example of the need for a much more *dynamic* approach to the understanding of cultural constraints, a position argued by Westwood and Bhachu (1988) and Warriar (1988).

The racism faced by black people in employment means, possibly paradoxically, that black households rely much more heavily on the income that women can bring in, irrespective of cultural traditions (Cook and Watt 1987). Again the US experience (which has generated a much richer data source on race and economic welfare) is instructive (Malveaux, 1987). In 1976, 34 per cent of black US household income was earned by women, compared to 26 per cent of white household income, even ignoring single adult households (Wallace 1980).

In Britain in each type of household (apart from lone parents) income per head is lower for black households than white, even after women's incomes are included.<sup>11</sup>

The London Survey shows also that there is a great gulf in the assets available to black households;<sup>12</sup> quite simply they are poorer and more in need of women's earnings. Where supplementary benefit is available, as in the case of single mothers, it makes less sense for black women to seek employment, especially if childcare is costly. Where supplementary benefit is not available, as with most married or cohabiting couples, black women are more likely to seek full-time work, despite their poorer prospects. An analysis which focuses on the effects of racism on men's earnings is probably the best way of reconciling these differences.

The propensity for white women to work part time suggests that, in a sense, they can afford to, or at least it is often not worth their while to seek full-time work. Of course where a woman has access to reasonably well-paid work, these constraints are much less binding and what we find is that women with qualifications are much more likely to work full-time, even when they have children, than women without recognized skills. In London both part-time women workers and full-time housewives were much less well qualified than women in full-time work.<sup>13</sup>

White women without qualifications seem to get 'stuck' in part-time jobs. In particular, it is possible to identify a group of older women whose children have grown up who nevertheless continue to work part time. This draws us to the conclusion that earnings potential and earning needs are much more important in explaining the pattern of women's employment than many writers allow. The pattern does vary with domestic responsibilities and ethnic background, but by less than the accepted stereotypes.

### **Racial exclusion in the market for 'women's work'**

Sexual discrimination is an important issue for black women as well as white. Other things being equal, sex differences in pay may be *greater* in

the black communities, despite the fact that black men's pay is lower than white men's. We have already established, contrary to some observers, that racial discrimination between women is also important for black women. This is particularly evident if we look more closely at women with some qualifications.

Black women in the British labour market today are not especially badly qualified, despite the stereotype. The LFS found no difference in the proportion of black and white women with higher qualifications (12 per cent) (Dept of Employment, 1988). Nationally, both the LFS and Colin Brown (1984) show West Indian women to be better qualified than white women. In London, black women hold fewer higher qualifications than white women, but they are more likely to have gained some qualifications at school.<sup>14</sup> In each age group black women are less qualified, but their younger age profile compensates; older women – black and white – lack formal qualifications on a massive scale.

What is clear, however, is that, for the most part, black women earn less relative to their qualifications than white women (see Table 7).

Table 7 Weekly Pay by Qualifications, Sex and Race: London 1986.

Highest Qualification	Men		Women	
	White	Black	White	Black
Degree	£293	£298	£224	£159
Other Post-Sch.	£224	£191	£152	£144
School Quals	£200	£173	£150	£114
No Quals	£195	£165	£133	£109

Source: LLSS.

The reasons why pay rates should be so much lower for black women than white, once qualifications are taken into account, are not immediately obvious. We examine below how far it might stem from the greater exclusion of black women with qualifications from higher-level work, and from higher-paying industries, finance and banking in particular. The figures suggest that it is not the result of any concentration in small non-unionized workplaces, since the evidence available to us is that black women are not more likely to work in small establishments. As discussed earlier, there may be some undercounting of black women working in small workplaces, but they would also be excluded from the qualifications figures, so the argument is not affected.

Although black women are less likely to be in a workplace where the union is recognized, when they are, they are more likely to join than white women (66 per cent to 62 per cent; the same is true of black men in comparison to white men: 84 per cent to 76 per cent). Two thirds of black women workers in London are union members, compared to 64 per cent of white men, 76 per cent of black men and 70 per cent of white women). So much for the stereotype of the typical trade unionist: over 40 per cent of London trade union members are not white men.

Table 8 shows the proportion of the London Living Standards

sample who had school and/or post-school qualifications who were in unskilled, semi-skilled and personal service jobs at the time of interview. The greater degree of 'overqualification' identified amongst black people is likely to arise from racial exclusion and discrimination.

Table 8 Comparison of 'Overqualification' by Sex and Race

People in unskilled/semi-skilled & personal service jobs as a % of those:	Men		Women	
	White	Black	White	Black
with post-school quals	.6%	20.0%	10.7%	20.0%
with school quals	11.8%	40.0%	8.9%	13.5%
with any qualification	9.5%	31.6%	9.6%	15.2%

As many as one in five of black men and women with qualifications beyond A level (including apprenticeships as well as degrees) are working in jobs which in the main do not demand such qualifications, compared to less than 1 per cent of white men and 10 per cent of white women (including part-time workers). In this respect racial discrimination is at least, if not more, important than sex discrimination in determining the opportunities open to black women.

Black women are much more likely to work in manufacturing, especially in food processing and clothing, and in transport, and much less likely to work in banking, insurance and finance than white women.<sup>15</sup> A higher proportion of black women do work in the public sector (35 per cent to 30 per cent for white women) when the nationalized industries and recently privatized concerns like British Telecom are included, but the proportion in public sector *services* like education, health, local government – taken as a whole – is similar to that for white women (28 per cent to 26 per cent).

Brown found, on the other hand, that a higher proportion of black women work in the public services. Whether this is because they are less discriminatory or because job for job they offer poorer pay is not clear.

Our evidence is, then, that a substantial part of the racial discrimination experienced by black women in the labour market is concealed when researchers fail to allow for the relative youth of the black female workforce and when part-time work is not distinguished from full-time. In London, at any rate, the concentration of black women in the manufacturing sector, and their relative exclusion from banking and finance, contributes to an under-utilization of their skills and qualifications and hence to their lower pay.

### **Unemployment and its impact on black women**

Since manufacturing is the sector most in decline and finance and banking is the fastest growing sector, it is not surprising to find that black women have experienced far more unemployment than white (see

Table 9). This is probably why we found also that over the years 1981–6, black women experienced the greatest decline in living standards.

Table 9 Women's Unemployment by Age and Race  
Unemployed + as a Proportion of Economically Active

	London (LLSS 1986)		GB(LFS 1984–6)	
	all ages	under 30*	all ages	16–24
white	3	7	10	15
black	13	33	19	31
West Indian	–	–	18	29
Indian	–	–	18	28
Pakistani/Bangladeshi	–	–	38	–

+ self defined \* excluding those with children

Sources: LLSS and LFS.

Racial differences in unemployment rates between women seem to be particularly pronounced in London, possibly because of the industrial and occupational divisions of women by race. Differences again are particularly marked for the younger age group, despite the fact, noted above, that qualification differences between younger black and white women are not large. The LFS shows that unemployment rates for black women with qualifications are over twice the rate for qualified white women for every age group.

There can be no real mystery as to why this is so, but it is interesting to observe the differences in long-term effects of unemployment. The long-term effects of unemployment on men's incomes and prospects have been increasingly recognized, but for women, and specifically white women, such effects are overshadowed by the 'deskilling' effects of childcare breaks. Our earlier discussions of activity rates suggested that breaks for childcare are less important for black women, but our evidence is that black women find their longer-term prospects and relative incomes reduced following experiences of unemployment.

The London Living Standards Survey collected information from  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the survey members on their jobs and pay in 1981, five years before the survey.<sup>16</sup> Recall information of this type is never as reliable as recent data, nevertheless the results shown in Table 10 are indicative.

Table 10 Increase in Earnings 1981–6

all individuals	49%		
all men	53%	all women	45%
white men	57%	white women	15%
black men	22%	black women	5%

Source: LLSS.

The whole sample, excluding only those not employed in 1981, were asked about their subjective judgements of the change in the value of their (own) take-home pay. Again black women came out considerably

worse than any other group, despite the high increase in unemployment levels in the period for both white and black men.

The evidence from the London Living Standards Survey is of increasing polarization in income and living standards between households and individuals in London since 1980/1. This is in line with, and indeed greater than, the experience over the country as a whole (Townsend *et al.*, 1987). The London Survey also shows that polarization of income *between* women has been greater than that between men. Some women, on the London evidence, have done relatively well in recent years and some women have done particularly badly. Race would appear to be one important distinguishing factor. For black women direct discrimination appears to be conflated by their concentration in manual work and their consequent greater risk of unemployment.

In general, unemployment was the greatest source of income loss amongst the sample who were in work in 1981. The incomes of those unemployed at the time of the survey declined on average by 52 per cent, compared to an increase in income amongst those in work of 75 per cent over the same period. As many as a tenth of all black women who had jobs in 1981 found that they were much worse off in 1986, compared to 8 per cent of white women and 7 per cent of all men. This may well be explained by their much higher vulnerability to unemployment.

Even amongst those who had jobs in 1986 (many of whom had had some experience of unemployment) only 6 per cent of black women found that their incomes went 'much further', compared to 19 per cent of white men and 11 per cent of white women. At the other end of the scale, 39 per cent of black women in work judged themselves to be worse off, compared to 32 per cent of white men and 37 per cent of white women.

For both men and women the differences in the experiences of manual and non-manual workers were marked. Amongst those in non-manual work in 1981, average income (for both men and women) increased by 40 per cent; against this manual workers – a much higher proportion of whom had experienced unemployment – increased their average incomes by no more than 21 per cent. So the concentration of black women in manual work has contributed in at least two ways to a deterioration in earning power relative to many white women, both directly as non-manual incomes grew faster (by 65 per cent, as compared to 51 per cent on NES figures) and as redundancies and unemployment hit manual workers harder.

## **Conclusions**

Many black women have rightly criticized the ethocentrism of much of the feminist literature on women's position in Britain (Amos and Parmar, 1984). This criticism holds particularly for the emphasis that has been placed on the importance of the part-time/full-time divide in characterizing the position of women in the labour market and the

associated importance attached to domestic responsibilities as the prime determinant of that position. As I hope this article has shown, where black women are concerned other factors, primarily racism as it affects unemployment and the earning levels of both black men and women, are at least as important in determining women's place in the labour market. The existing literature structured as it is by standard categorizations of occupations and by standard approaches to gathering information, especially through household surveys, presents a false picture of the position of black women in relation to white. Both groups of women are affected by sexual discrimination in labour markets, but black women are also subject to racial discrimination, much of which remains hidden by conventional approaches to the gathering and analysis of labour market information.

It does not follow that better research methods will help to improve the position of black women, and many black people are, understandably, wary of the inclusion of racial information in the Population Census. It is an open question as to whether the extensive monitoring of the position of black people in individual workplaces has done very much over the last few years to radically improve their position. However, without an adequate base line to measure differences, it is difficult to see where and how improvements can be identified. For this reason alone it is important to demystify existing analyses and to show how, and in what ways, they serve to obscure the real experience of black women.

## Notes

- 1 Definitions of 'black' in the LLSS rely on self-assessment. The overall sample of black women in the London Living Standards Survey was 173. Of these 77 described themselves as Asian, 45 as Afro-Caribbean, 35 as 'Black British' and 16 were from other black groups.
- 2 Allen and Wolkowitz (1987) summarize the 'numbers debate' in relation to homeworkers, showing the limitations of official statistics, but they guard against the all too prevalent assumption that this only affects ethnic minority women. It is also important not to underestimate the economic power that working in the small family business may give some ethnic minority women *vis-à-vis* their relatives. See Westwood and Bhachu (1988) for a discussion of the problems of assessing levels of exploitation of women engaged in ethnic minority businesses.
- 3 Wallace quotes the following figures:

Relative Earnings by Race: USA 1939 & 1976, Men and Women

	1939	1976
Black Men: White Men	45%	74%
Black Women: White Women	30%	97%

Source: Wallace (1980: 59).

4 The figures from the London Living Standards Survey are as follows:

Full-Time Women Workers: Earnings by Race, London 1986

	weekly earnings	hourly earnings	% of male	
			weekly pay	hourly pay
White	£160.1	£4.3	72	78
Black	£124.5	£3.3	63	72

Source: LLSS (1986).

The London Living Standards Survey only identified 20 women homeworkers in all, it may therefore be that, as with Brown's survey and the LFS, there has been some under-recording of homeworking, and therefore of poorly paid work amongst our black respondents. The survey may also underestimate black women nurses and teachers in London; it did not trace any professional workers amongst the black female sample.

- 5 Information from the LFS in the *Employment Gazette*, March 1988, shows that 46% of white women in employment were aged 25–44, compared to 53% of black women in employment.
- 6 The proportion of full-time women workers with 'fringe' benefits in London in 1986, according to LLSS was as follows:

% with	Full-time Women Workers	
	black	white
Training	36	44
Paid holiday	80	84
2 weeks notice	70	76
Sick pay	64	73
Union coverage	45	50

- 7 Differences in socio-economic group are affected by the concentration of black women in London, as the following comparison shows:

Socio-Economic Group by Ethnic Origin

National: London Comparisons: All Employed Women

	GB Labour Force Survey 1985		London LLSS 1986	
	White	Black +	White	Black
Prof, Employers & Managers	9	5	18	4
Other Non-Manual	54	46	40	56
Skilled Manual	8	9	4	6
Semi-Skilled Manual	21	32	15	28
Unskilled	8	5	4	5
Total Sample	9,318	205	590	80

+ West Indian/Guyanese/Indian/Pakistani & Bangladeshi only



## 8 Fringe Benefits for Women Workers by Race and Hours, London 1986

	White Women		Black Women	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
% with:				
Training	52	28	34	[39]
Holiday	92	68	82	[75]
1 weeks notice	84	59	73	[63]
Meal subsidy	46	31	45	[25]
Company pension	63	12	55	[16]
Car	7	2	8	[0]
Sick pay	85	49	68	[50]
TU Coverage	53	46	47	[35]
Total Sample	388	60	196	20

Source: LLSS (1986).

## 9 Brown gives the following figures:

## Women's Part-Time Work as a Proportion of Employment by Ethnic Group, 1983

	White	West Indian	Asian		
			Hindu	Sikh	Muslim
% part time	45	29	18	14	[14]

Source: PSI (1984).

## 10 Brown gives the following figures:

## Lone Parents by Employment Status and Benefit by Race, GB 1983

	White	West Indian	Asian	
			with children	w/o children
% with earners in household	53	49	39	
% unemployment benefit	7	11	10	
% supp. ben.	45	50	45	
Total Sample	85	203	71	

Source: PSI (1984).

## 11 Brown gives the following figures:

## Earnings Per Household Member by Family Type and Race, GB 1983

Race	Extended	Family Type		
		Lone parent	Other	
			with children	w/o children
White	£46	£20	£37	£59
West Indian	£37	£24	£32	£51
Asian	£27	£21	£27	£50

Source: PSI (1984).

- 12 The average value of assets (other than houses) owned by black women in the survey was £1330, compared to £3519 for white women.  
 13 Analysis of the London Survey gives the following picture:

Educational Experience by Economic Activity, London 1986

Current economic activity	Left school at 17+ %	No qualifications %
Full-time work	54	22
Part-time work	33	49
Housewife	26	60
Unemployed	31	50
All women N=1,457		

Source: GLC LLSS (1986).

- 14 The London Survey figures for highest qualifications are as follows:

Highest Qualifications (at School and College) of Women by Race and Economic Activity

% with	All women		Full-time workers	
	White	Black	White	Black
Degree	8	5	15	5
Other post-sch.	13	10	14	14
A Levels	8	7	15	7
O Levels	17	22	26	32
CSE	6	9	9	14
None	49	45	21	29
Total Sample	1,224	163	387	60

- 15 The figures from the London Living Standards Survey broadly reflect those found elsewhere:

Industrial Distribution of Women Workers by Race

Industry	White %	Black %
Energy, water		
Metal manu & Chem	1	1
Engineering etc.	3	4
Other manufacture+	5	14
Construction	2	0
Distribution	13	10
Transport & communications	2	10
Finance and banking	21	10
Other services	44	41
<hr/>		
Private	70	65
Public	30	35

+ includes clothing, food, plastics, toys as sizable employers of women

16 Those not questioned were those who had stayed in the same job throughout the period.

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