

Commuting Behavior and Gender Norms by Sexual Orientation



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Abstract

We assess the role of gender-conforming social norms in household decision-making and gender inequalities in the labor market with a parsimonious household model that endogenizes commuting time. Using the American Community Survey 2008-2019, we test the model predictions and find that **women in same-sex couples have a longer commute to work than working women in different-sex couples**, whereas the commute to work of men in same-sex couples is shorter than the one of working men in different-sex couples, even after controlling for demographic characteristics, partner's characteristics, location, fertility, and marital status. These differences among men and women amount to 50%, and 100%, respectively, of the gender commuting gap estimated in the literature, and are particularly stark among married couples with children. **Within-couple gaps in commuting time** are also significantly smaller in same-sex couples, and **labor supply disparities** mimic the commuting ones. According to our model, these differences are interpreted as **gender-conforming social norms** leading women in different-sex couples into jobs with a shorter commute and fewer hours worked while their male partners/spouses hold jobs with a longer commute and more hours worked, thus reinforcing gender inequalities.

Introduction

- Large literature and interest from policymaker on **gender commuting gap** and broader **gender inequality in labor market outcomes**
 - Women choose jobs with **shorter commute**
 - Women move to **lower-paying jobs closer to home** after having children
 - Married women exhibit **lower labor force participation** in metropolitan areas with **longer commutes**
 - Child penalty** and specialization among **same-sex couples** lower than for different-sex couples
- Research goal:** to better understand the existing gender commuting gap and labor market inequalities
- How?
 - Household model** with endogenous commuting choice and gender norms
 - Test model predictions by comparing same-sex and different-sex couples in the American Community Survey

Model Insights

- Gender-conforming social norms affect trade-off between utility from **household public good** and utility from **career**
- In different-sex couples, these norms lead women to believe that utility from public good is relatively higher for them
 - Women settle for closer-to-home less-rewarding jobs in order to take up heavier responsibilities in the household, while their male partners settle for farther, more-rewarding jobs
- Gender-conforming social norms **less binding** among **same-sex couples**
- Different commuting behavior and labor supply choices may arise even when men and women are **equally productive**, and among **childless couples**

Data

- American Community Survey 2008-2019**
- Annual survey containing demographic, economic, social, and housing information on random 1% sample of U.S. population
- Same-sex couples (SSC):** household head and same-sex married spouse or unmarried partner
 - Roommates excluded
- Sample: working adults aged 18-64
- Key variable:** total amount of time, in minutes, that it usually took the respondent to get from home to work

Descriptive Statistics

- Figure 1 on commuting time:
 - Gender gap:** men commute more than women
 - Women in same-sex couples have **longer commutes** than women in different-sex couples
 - Men in same-sex couples have **shorter commutes** than men in different-sex couples
- Figure 2 on within-couple commuting time gap:
 - Smaller commuting time gaps** in same-sex couples
 - Consistent with idea that same-sex couples are more **egalitarian**

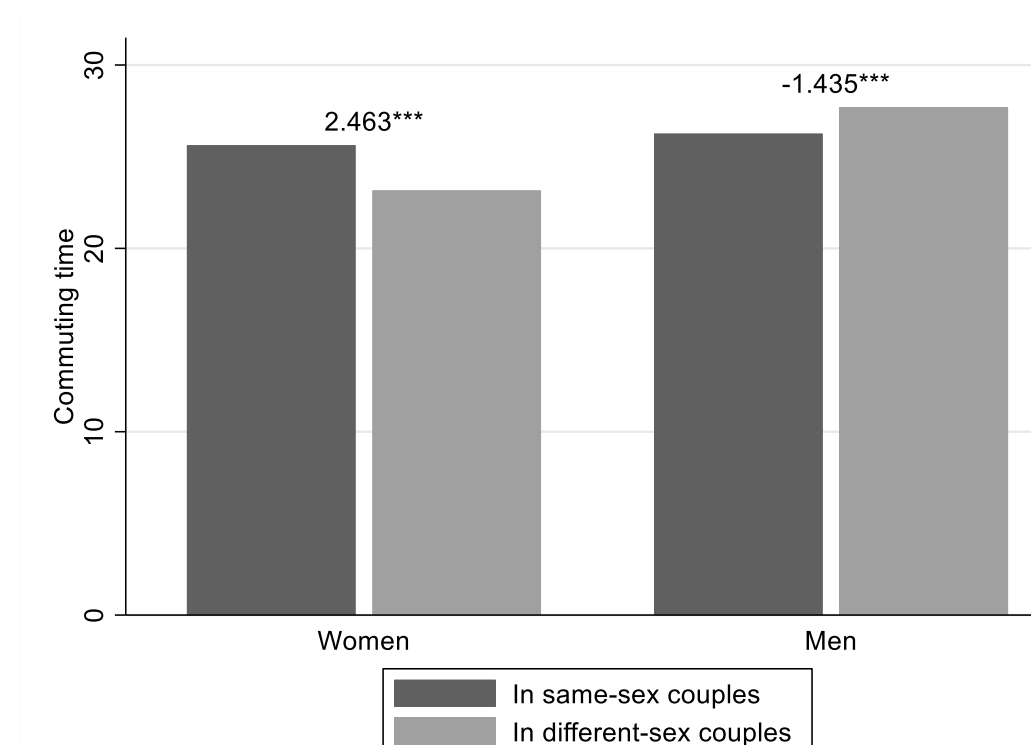


Figure 1: Commuting time

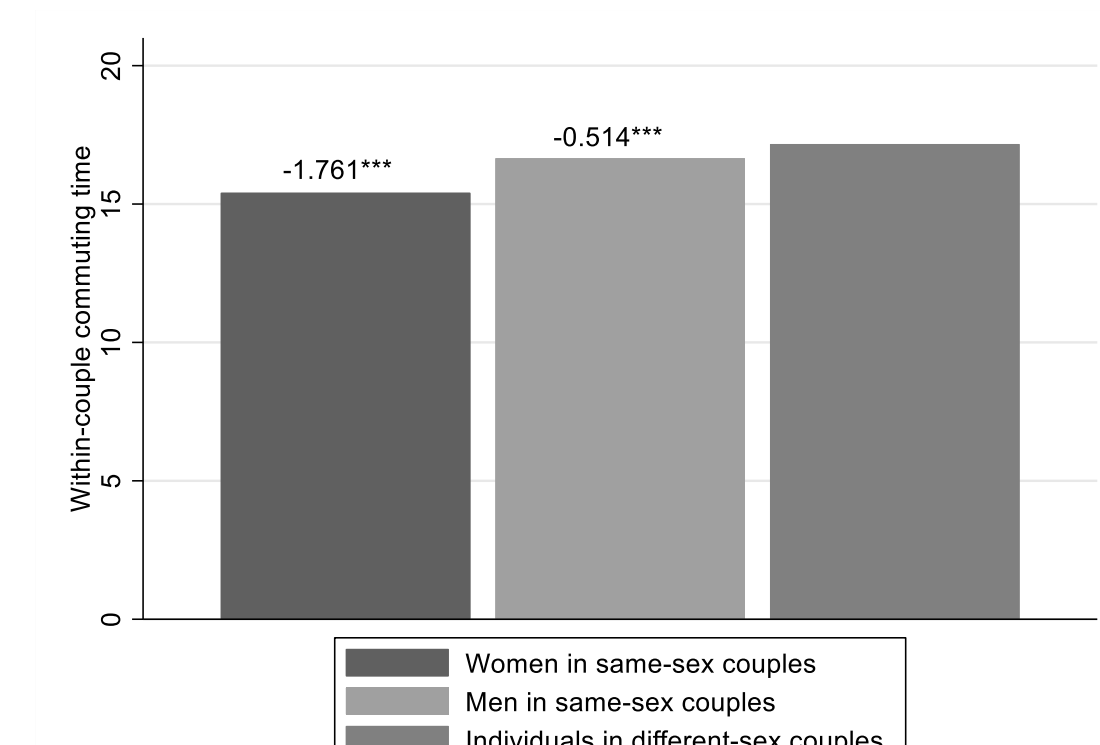


Figure 2: Within-couple commute gap

Multivariate Analysis

- Table 1 on commute time by sex and couple type:
 - Women in same-sex couples have **longer commutes** than women in different-sex couples (as in Figure 1). **Opposite gap for men**
 - Estimated magnitude similar to **gender gap** in commuting time
 - Women in same-sex vs different-sex couples: 2.5 minutes => **25 minutes/week**
- Table 2 differentiates by marital status and fertility:
 - Largest commute gap among **married women with children**
 - Gender-conforming social norm reinforced by parenthood

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<i>Panel A: Women in SSC and DSC</i>					
In a same-sex couple	2.463*** (0.115)	2.108*** (0.111)	2.046*** (0.111)	2.145*** (0.111)	1.761*** (0.114)
Observations	4,411,409	4,411,409	4,411,409	4,411,409	4,411,409
Mean of dependent variable	23.201	23.201	23.201	23.201	23.201
R ²	0.000	0.020	0.025	0.026	0.027
<i>Panel B: Men in SSC and DSC</i>					
In a same-sex couple	-1.435*** (0.122)	-2.131*** (0.120)	-1.974*** (0.120)	-2.059*** (0.120)	-1.021*** (0.123)
Observations	5,210,836	5,210,836	5,210,836	5,210,836	5,210,836
Mean of dependent variable	27.675	27.675	27.675	27.675	27.675
R ²	0.000	0.019	0.019	0.019	0.020

Table 1: Commuting time

	Married w/ children (1)	Married w/o children (2)	Unmarried w/ children (3)	Unmarried w/o children (4)
<i>Panel A: Women in SSC and DSC</i>				
In a same-sex couple	2.765*** (0.250)	1.771*** (0.245)	1.133*** (0.365)	0.553*** (0.217)
Observations	1,518,968	1,049,278	144,190	227,662
Mean of dependent variable	23.406	23.560	23.738	24.319
R ²	0.029	0.026	0.027	0.032
<i>Panel B: Men in SSC and DSC</i>				
In a same-sex couple	-1.662*** (0.498)	-1.284*** (0.246)	-2.020*** (0.767)	-0.933*** (0.199)
Observations	1,972,381	1,092,622	166,510	235,897
Mean of dependent variable	28.683	27.156	27.570	25.945
R ²	0.022	0.018	0.015	0.020

Table 2: Commuting time by married/children

Additional Outcomes

- Gaps still present when focusing on people living in **city centers**
- Smaller within-couple commute gaps** in same-sex couples (Table 3): they conform less to gender norms
- Table 4: **labor supply disparities** mimic the commuting ones

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<i>Panel A: Women in SSC and DSC</i>					
In a same-sex couple	-1.761*** (0.143)	-2.028*** (0.142)	-2.103*** (0.142)	-2.102*** (0.142)	-1.537*** (0.145)
Observations	3,613,685	3,613,685	3,613,685	3,613,685	3,613,685
Mean of dependent variable	17.157	17.157	17.157	17.157	17.157
R ²	0.000	0.011	0.011	0.011	0.012
<i>Panel B: Men in SSC and DSC</i>					
In a same-sex couple	-0.514*** (0.157)	-1.000*** (0.156)	-1.125*** (0.156)	-1.078*** (0.156)	-0.375*** (0.158)
Observations	3,612,771	3,612,771	3,612,771	3,612,771	3,612,771
Mean of dependent variable	17.166	17.166	17.166	17.166	17.166
R ²	0.000	0.011	0.011	0.011	0.012

Table 3: Within-couple commuting time gap

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<i>Panel A: Women in SSC and DSC</i>						
In a same-sex couple	3.979*** (0.053)	2.941*** (0.053)	2.863*** (0.053)	2.144*** (0.054)	2.068*** (0.054)	3.448*** (0.048)
Commuting time			0.039*** (0.000)		0.038*** (0.000)	0.035*** (0.000)
Observations	4,411,409	4,411,409	4,411,409	4,411,409	4,411,409	4,411,409
Mean of dependent variable	37.766	37.766	37.766	37.766	37.766	37.766
R ²	0.001	0.035	0.037	0.040	0.045	0.130
<i>Panel B: Men in SSC and DSC</i>						
In a same-sex couple	-1.831*** (0.056)	-2.082*** (0.055)	-2.050*** (0.055)	-0.955*** (0.057)	-0.936*** (0.057)	-1.332*** (0.057)
Commuting time			0.017*** (0.000)		0.016*** (0.000)	0.018*** (0.000)
Observations	5,210,836	5,210,836	5,210,836	5,210,836	5,210,836	5,210,836
Mean of dependent variable	44.199	44.199	44.199	44.199	44.199	44.199
R ²	0.000	0.019	0.020	0.022	0.024	0.112

Table 4: Hours worked

Key Takeaways

- Gender-conforming social norms** leading women in different-sex couples into jobs with shorter commute and fewer hours worked
- Estimated commuting differences not consistent with **biological differences** because they hold across household types within same gender

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