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Gender, Ethnicity and Space: The Case of Racial Ethnic Minority Women Telecommuters in Omaha, NE

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Gender, Ethnicity and Space:
The Case of Racial Ethnic Minority Women
Telecommuters in Omaha, NE

A Thesis
Presented to the
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of the Requirements for the Degree
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University of Nebraska at Omaha

by
Hope Kawabata
December, 1997
THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree (Masters of Arts in Geography), University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Committee

[Signatures]

Chairperson: [Signature]
Date: 12/3/97
ABSTRACT

Telecommuting is a labor process in which employees work from home on a regular basis, but maintain contact with the office through telecommunications technology such as computer networks, facsimile machines, voice messaging systems, and so on. Telecommuting has become very popular in recent years; however, little is known about its social and spatial impacts. Preliminary research on gender and telecommuting has shown that telecommuting tends to reinforce a traditional division of domestic labor and identification of women with the home; however, whether this is the case for ethnic minority women is unknown. This thesis research used in-depth, semi-structured interviews to investigate interactions among gender, race, ethnicity, telecommuting, and geography. Interviews with four racial and/or ethnic minority women in Omaha, Nebraska provided data for an examination of their lived experiences as telecommuters.
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This thesis would not have been completed without the encouragement, help, and prayers of many people. I dedicate this work to all the people below.

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Finally, I praise God for what He has done in my life and return all the glory to Him.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

North American society in the 1990s is experiencing very rapid change. The development of computer technology has been influencing our daily lives, as it has been many workplaces. Companies have been in the process of downsizing to reduce their overhead costs (Levayxm 1995; More n.d.; Pratt 1997; Olszewski and Mokhtarian 1994; Tomaskovic-Devey and Risman 1993, 238), in order to survive the globalization of the economy (Christensen 1989; Ritter and Thompson 1994). Technologies such as computer modems, facsimile machines, and voice messaging systems enable employees to communicate electronically (Critchfield 1996) and thus to work from home for part of their workweek or even to work at home full time rather than physically commute (Duxbury, Higgings, and Mills 1992; Mokhtarian and Salomon 1994; Ritter and Thompson 1994). This labor process is called telecommuting (Nilles 1976), and has gained popularity especially on the West and the East Coasts (Ritter and Thompson 1994). Current estimates of the telecommuting population range between 6 and 12 million (Byrd 1995; Critchfield 1996; More n.d.; Pratt 1997; Shaw 1996). Around 200 companies in the U.S have been experimenting with telecommuting (More n.d.) which enables employee to work from "a virtual office" (Levaux 1995, A3); that is, workers can work wherever and whenever they want to, as they have access to the same information available were they at “the office.” As a result, employers have succeeded in increasing productivity and have been able to save both leased and owned space costs with their
telecommuting programs (Levaux 1995; Pratt 1996). The affordability of telecommuting technologies has improved year by year. For instance, in 1995, it only cost $70 to have video conferences from New York City to Washington, D.C; whereas it was $300 in 1993 (Zelinsky 1995). Since telecommuting removes a worker from the traditional workplace for at least part of the normal work-week, and places her / him in the home, telecommuting has potentially dramatic implications for workplaces, homes, commuting patterns, and perhaps even the physical form of cities (Mokhtarian and Salomon 1994).

Either employers (including supervisors) or employees may initiate telecommuting. For employers, telecommuting has advantages that include saving costs and increasing the quantity of work. Employers often find telecommuting attractive because it increases productivity (Kraut 1989; Olson 1989; Olszewski and Mokhtarian 1994; Ritter and Thompson 1994; Tomaskovic-Devey and Risman 1993), saves overhead costs, and saves on real estate investments (Tomaskovic-Devey and Risman 1993). At the same time, it is not easy for some administrators to manage someone who is not at the work site (Olson 1989). The Sunday edition of The Omaha World Herald (1 June 1997) reports that “despite underlying resistance, telecommuting has carved a niche in the work force.”

Employees may be interested in telecommuting for various reasons. It enables them to meet family and household commitments (Costello 1989; Mokhtarian and Salomon 1994; Duxbury, Higgins, and Mills 1992) and increases flexibility (Levaux 1995). It reduces commuting time and gas consumption (Costello 1989), and may facilitate monetary saving on "work" clothes (Mokhtarian and Salomon 1994). Further,
household duties continue to fall disproportionately on women despite their engagement in paid work. Thus, the desire to telecommute is more frequently motivated by such concerns for women than men (Kraut 1989).

One reason for the lack of change in the gender division of domestic labor is that gender identity is closely tied to work, both paid and unpaid (Bondi 1994). That is, the work people do and the work thought appropriate for men and for women helps to define who they are and their "place" in society (Duncan 1991). The division of household labor, subordination of women, and social status are understood through system of gender (Amott and Matthaei 1991).

Like other labor processes, telecommuting is fundamentally gendered (Falconer Al-Hindi 1996). For example, one reason why women start telecommuting is work-family conflict (Duxbury, Higgins, and Mills. 1992); that is, women who have jobs in the labor market also have to face the demands of household work and childcare. In a similar manner, race is socially constructed through social and spatial relations (Amott and Matthaei 1991; Jackson 1989; Smith 1995). Women for example, exercise socially constructed gender and ethnic identity in Mexican households by doing household work and childcare (Segura 1994); both gender and ethnicity are central to social relations at work and at home. Therefore one expects that both of these dimensions will affect the decision whether or not to telecommute and the impact of telecommuting on home and family life, and on work life.

While considerable attention has been brought to bear upon gender issues in telecommuting, issues of race / ethnicity have been ignored. Many geography studies
have treated women as homogeneous and did not recognize race and/or ethnicity
472), "Black women's experiences are relevant not only to other Black women but to
understanding the situation of white women, and indeed of Black and white men."
Therefore, difference among women telecommuters must also be studied.

While no research has been done on race/ethnicity in telecommuting, this is an
important and worthwhile research topic. The numbers of ethnic minority workers,
including women, are increasing. At the same time, telecommunications technology
makes it possible for “work” and “life” to be more and more connected. The link between
this new technology and work and life must be understood in order to understand
society’s changing geography of work.

The empirical analysis of telecommuters in Omaha in this study addresses four
main questions: (1) are there any ethnic differences in the experiences of telecommuting
among female Omaha telecommuters? (2) how is the division of domestic work in
telecommuters' households affected by racial and/or ethnic background? (3) how does
telecommuting reinforce or contest telecommuters ideas of themselves as members of
specific ethnic groups? (4) does telecommuting help women feel that they are fulfilling a
feminine role?

This chapter consists of three sections. The first section provides the purpose of
this study in the geographic discipline, with a theoretical and empirical background. The
second part explains the research context of the study including the process of participant
recruitment. The third section provides an overview of the rest of the thesis.
Purpose of Study

As a discipline, geography was not immune to the influence of Empire and played a significant role in the development of racist attitudes in Britain. The professional origins of geography as a 19th century 'European science' (Stoddart 1986) ensured that it was thoroughly immersed in the intellectual and political currents of the day including both social Darwinism and imperialism. As Harvey has written: 'Geographical practices were deeply affected by participation in the management of Empire, colonial administration, and exploration of commercial opportunities. The exploitation of nature under capitalism evidently often went hand in hand with the exploitation of peoples.'
(Harvey 1984, 3 in Jackson 1989, 138)

As Susan Smith (1990, 606) suggested "the historical persistence, continuity, and flexibility of racism on a global scale is a common theme as the 1990s dawn." Although Lavender and Forsyth (1976) stated the importance of studying ethnicity over twenty years ago, to date there are an insignificant number of studies on non-white people.

Further, Smith (1989, 593) has argued for "an anti-racist urban geography," that is, the race issue needs to be redefined as racism. In addition, the traditional definition of race as natural or God-given must be understood as a complex social and spatial formation. For instance, Anderson (1987, 583) points to "an arbitrary classification of space" Americans do not use the “Anglo town,” whereas the word “Chinatown” is often used. That means there is a concept of boundary, 'our' place and 'their' place. Also, Jackson (1992) indicates the word “Orient” in the relation to “Occident,” which distinguishes the unfamiliarity of the East, and familiarity of the West.

Although geographers have recognized the importance of studying gender since the 1970s (Bowlby et al. 1989; Mackenzie 1989; Mattingly and Falconer Al-Hindi 1995), attention to race and ethnicity has lagged behind. Geographers have recently begun to
recognize gender, race, and class as "mutually transformative, and intersecting" (Ruddick 1996, 138). For instance, although there are a number of studies on white women telecommuters, there has been none on racial ethnic minority women telecommuters. Considering the minority population in this country (12% are Blacks) and other small numbers of racial and ethnic minorities, race and ethnicity related research has not been paid enough attention. Most research on women home workers has treated women as homogeneous and has not recognized race and / or ethnicity differences in their studies (Cox 1990). For instance, women's motivation to work from home is usually related to work-family conflict and / or a need to enhance flexibility (Duxbury Higgins, and Mills 1992). In their study, in comparison to men, women ended up over-working. The same study did not analyze the differences among women at all.

The study by Duxbury et al. (1992) did not look into the differentiation among women. Yet, ethnicity is socially constructed through social and spatial relations. For instance, another study found an ethnic division of workers both at work place of meatpacking and at living place: "...class, ethnicity, and gender seem to have meshed together for city residents within and between the primary spaces of everyday interaction in the 1920s and 1930s-homes, workplaces, social halls, churches, doorsteps, local shops" (Cope 1996, 182). This shows how ethnicity matters and that it makes a big difference in peoples daily lives. In the study by Jackson (1989, 176), he points out the problem of the stereotype of "Black people as a Problem." Also, he mentions the myth of Asian people in Britain that “Asian” there parallels the meanings of crafty, sneaky, and mean, but also includes the positive stereotype of Asian diligence in work. When it comes to describing
Asian women, passivity, dexterity, and docility are the words of British stereotypes. In his study *Language of racism*, Jackson (1992, 151) points to a dominant ideology, "...not just a matter of individual prejudice and personal discrimination. ...The problem concerns how best to deal with the multiple ways in which questions of class intersect with those of 'race' in the competition for scarce resources such as housing, education, and employment." Accordingly paying attention to race-ethnicity in geography is necessary in addition to gender.

Different groups of women might define feminism in very different ways (Gilbert, 1994). That is because "there is no common experience of gender oppression among women" (Amott and Matthaei 1991, 113). Non-Anglo women have had different cultural, class, and racialized boundaries than those Anglo women (Ruddick 1996). As a result, the lives of ethnic minority women tend to be different from the lives of Anglo women. For instance, Black women's commuting time is much longer than that of White women. This is because of different spatial patterns of living; White women tend to live in suburbs where women's jobs are available, but Black women on the other hand tend to live in the inner city (Preston, McLafferty, and Hamilton 1993). In this way along with gender, race and ethnicity have implications with geography and must be given attention in geographic analysis.

According to Sanders (1990, 228), the status of women in geography research has been improved but feminists "fall short" when it comes to race and ethnicity. "It is necessary to move beyond a homogeneous treatment of women to address how minority women's social and spatial contexts influence spatial behavior" (McLafferty and Preston
1991, 12). Paying attention to race and ethnicity is indispensable for this country's future. That is because the non-Anglo population is increasing and is estimated to be almost half of the total in the near future (Martin and Midgley 1994, 9).

In order to know others, an interviewer needs to be immersed in interviewees' everyday world rather than holding back (Rowles 1978): "...we must allow our findings to 'emerge from the data.' ...Race and ethnicity will be readily apparent, if they are relevant in a research situation" (DeVault 1995, 613). Also, "it [interviewing] necessitates permeating barriers of class, race, education, personality, sex..." (Rowles 1978, 184). In depth interviews where respondents can stress individual feelings (Kraut 1989) enable the researcher “...to learn from the participants about those aspects of telecommuting they found problematic or interesting, rather than limiting discussion to a narrow range of questions determined a priori" (Falconer Al-Hindi 1993, 80). Christensen (1989) used an interview methodology in order to get women home workers' insights about the limitations of homework for women, motivations for starting home-based employment, the situation of being between homework and family, et cetera. Oakley (1981) points out that to interview women is to document women's lives.

**Research Context**

The central questions addressed in this thesis concern the gender division of household labor and childcare, and the concept of identity among racial ethnic minority women telecommuters in Omaha, Nebraska. First, I chose this topic because I was under
a big telecommuting project, started since May of 1996. Second, it was convenient for me to conduct interviews where I live rather than going somewhere else.

Omaha’s geographic situation on the western side of the Missouri River and its importance as a railroad hub have made the city an important commerce center since its beginning (Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce 1990). Omaha’s population has grown steadily. In 1995, the population of Omaha was approximately 349,012, which makes it Nebraska’s biggest city and the nation’s 48th largest city. The ethnic diversity of Omaha is as follows: White 89.8%, Black 8.4%, Asians and Pacific islander 1.3 %, American Indian, Eskimo and Aleut 0.5 %, and Hispanic origin 3.4 % (Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce 1989). In sum, Omaha’s racial ethnic minority population is 10.2%; male and female population split evenly (Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce 1990); and subtracting the population under age 18 (around 28 %) (Bureau of the Census 1990), 3.67 % of the population (12,808 people) would be the percentage of racial / ethnic minority women.

The Omaha Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) is approximately 2,467 square miles and includes five counties—Douglas, Sarpy, Cass and Washington counties in Nebraska—Pottawattamie County in Iowa (Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce 1990). In 1995, the Omaha MSA population was estimated at 670,322, having grow 5.0 percent since the 1990 figure of 639,580. The Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) (Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce 1990) predicts the Omaha MSA population will be 702,000 by the year 2000 and 730,000 in the year 2005. This would make a 9.8% growth between 1990 and 2000 and a 4.0 % expansion between the year 2000 to 2005.
The economy in Omaha is diverse. Around one in five people engage in administrative or clerical types of work. Professional work such as engineers, teachers and doctors are found in the second largest occupational classification for the metro area (Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce 1990). Omaha is considered the 13th-most average city in the U.S. (The Economist 1992). Thus, Omaha, Nebraska, is an appropriate site for this study because it is an ordinary city in the U.S.

Methodology

The central questions addressed in this thesis proposal concern ethnic and gender differences among women who telecommute in Omaha, Nebraska. The thesis concerns the gender division of household labor and childcare, and the concept of identity among Omaha female telecommuters. Specifically, the working hypotheses for this part of the study are: (1) that telecommuting reinforces a traditional gender identity and division of labor among ethnic minority women (although these will be different for women of different ethnic groups); and (2) that this is both reflected in and contributes to the spatial organization of their work lives at different geographic scales.

The main methodology to be used in this study is the semi-structured, in-depth interview. In order to produce useful data from an interview, both interviewer and interviewee must actively participate in the process of research. Also, the interviewer must have a warm personality (Goode and Hatt 1952 in Oakley 1981). With the permission of participants, interviews were tape recorded to avoid the need for note taking and to facilitate later analysis. This enabled me to review the data tapes many
times "...both in their entirety and topically. Reviewing whole tapes permitted themes to emerge from the data, while topical reviews facilitate comparison of different participants' comments on similar themes" (Falconer Al-Hindi 1994, 6). Also, DeVault (1995) mentions that "hearing" race and ethnicity requires active attention and analysis rather than passive listening and recording. This approach is consistent with an interactionist perspective influenced by ethnomethodological studies (Dyck 1990, 1993).

After the interview, I used narrative analysis to uncover women’s experiences and perspectives. "Narrative analysis is an approach to qualitative interviews (Mishler 1986) that can be applied to women’s life stories. ...Narratives link our experience of the world and our efforts to describe that experience, or make meaning of it. ...It is through narratives that we ‘translate knowing into telling’" (Riessman 1987, 172). In this way, interviewing women gave me access to women's lived experiences (Bowlby et al. 1989). I have written this thesis in the first person because this makes me, the researcher, "visible" as an active contributor to the production of knowledge in this research. This is also consistent with current practice in feminist geography.

**Overview of Chapters**

This master's thesis is organized as follows. Chapter II provides a literature review consisting of three sections. The first section is an introduction to the chapter. The second section concerns information technology and work and discusses the role of computer technology at work. The third section points out the importance of gender, race and work which are central to understanding both the reproduction of home and the
production of work environments. The fourth section brings together telecommuting and family and raises questions about unknown areas of racial ethnic minority women telecommuters' lives. Chapter III will present the research design and methodology. The first part is an introduction to the chapter. The second part discusses methods in geographic research. The third part introduces the research participants. The fourth section describes the design and methodology of the present study. The fifth part concludes the chapter. Chapter IV provides analysis and interpretation. The first section is an introduction. The second part distinguishes racial ethnic minority women telecommuters from Anglo women telecommuters. The third section goes into social reproduction and production in racial ethnic minority women telecommuters’ work lives. The fourth section sub-titled race matters! discusses the importance of race and ethnicity. Finally, Chapter V concludes the entire study. The first part summarizes the process and results of the study; the second discusses the contributions of this study. The third part points to future research directions in this field.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent geographical research that emphasizes how spatial relations of production and reproduction influence the social construction of gender relations complements feminist analysis. Race has emerged as a fundamental determinant of women's experience, contributing to major disadvantages in work and home life for minority women. (Preston, McLafferty, and Hamilton 1993, 229)

Since the 1970s, geographers have come to understand the importance of studying gender (Bowlby et al. 1989; Falconer Al-Hindi 1993; Mackenzie 1989) because study results based on men’s lives alone rarely hold true for women. Thus, geographic studies that neglect gender inadequately represent reality. Geographical topics such as journey to work patterns, urban development, and micro-geographies such as the sharing of household duties and spaces requires analysis of women's roles. In order to analyze women's work and activities, gender research should place emphasis on the women's lived experiences (Bowlby et al. 1989; Preston 1993; Sapiro 1994). Examining women's conflicting positions in the structure of domination and the institutionalized subordination of women to privileged men represent key factors shaping women's experience (Women and Geography Study Group of the IBG 1984; Young and Dickerson 1994).

In describing women's lives, race and / or ethnicity aspects have an important role. That is because of the historically and geographically differentiated social construction of racial and / or ethnic backgrounds (Jackson 1989, 1992). For instance, discrimination at work plays an important role in reinforcing gender and / or racial-ethnic
boundaries in organizations (Segura 1994). Ethnicity and gender have real consequences for work, and may affect (and be affected by) telecommuting.

In this thesis, differences among women telecommuters and the relation to their racial and / or ethnic backgrounds are addressed. Differences among groups may highlight aspects of the social construction of race and gender, and how these are affected by telecommuting. Historically, paid work sites and homes have been separated. Gender roles of men were performed away from home, while women’s were played out at home (Amott and Matthaei 1991). The boundary between work and home is blurred in telecommuting. Therefore, how gender roles have been influenced in telecommuting, especially among racial ethnic minority women, are the main concern in this research. This literature review will discuss the three areas of research that will be brought together in this thesis: (1) information technology and work; (2) gender, race, and work; and (3) telecommuting and family.

Information Technology and Work

...The movement of information [is] now occurring more and more through wireless or cable transmission of digital signals, rather than actual transportation of physical media. Enabled by low-cost information processing and communications technology, the creation, distribution and use of information has become central to the life of modern societies, with more than half of the U.S. workforce [is] now described as "information workers."

(Ritter and Thompson 1994, 236)

As economies restructure, both nationally and internationally, so does space. Economic restructuring brought deconcentration into U.S. cities (Dijst 1991; Jaret 1991; Squires 1990 and 1991; Wacquant 1989; Wilson 1995). Continued suburbanization of
organizations affects commuting time of U.S. workers (Ritter and Thompson 1994). Facilities locations are now dictated by costs of real estate and energy as well as by the location of an adequate work force.

At the same time, the U.S. moved into an advanced technology era (Heck, Owen, and Rowe 1995). Shifting from centers of goods processing to centers of information and service processing, the role of the computer has changed from computation to communication (Squires 1990). Such technologies give opportunities for social interaction. Telephones, fax machines, computer networks, and the like allow people all over the world to interact frequently. Thus, distance no longer has meaning (Hage and Powers 1992). As information technology expands access to knowledge and global competition, this has removed boundaries in organizations and has an impact on office space and facility usage (Squires 1990).

In this situation, some companies, and some employees have started using computer communications to facilitate working from home. A recent study shows the relationship between space and productivity; it may be more efficient to work from home by using technology which provides access to the same resources that are available in the office (Ritter and Thompson 1994). Growth in knowledge and rapidity of technological change are transforming the micro level of social roles via the process of complexification (Hage and Powers 1992). Telecommuting would support a number of trends in the labor supply (Kraut 1989), particularly increasing employment among women who are married with young children.
Gender, Race, and Work

Gender, race and / or ethnic categories are not natural ideas, but socially constructed ones (Amott and Matthaei 1991; Jackson 1989; Kobayashi 1994; Smith 1995). Characteristics of masculinity and femininity such as toughness in men and gentleness in women are also social. Race is also "a social relation" (Jackson 1989, 178). Ethnicity is defined as "shared feeling of peoplehood" (Gordon 1964; Keefe, and Padilla 1987 in Segura 1994, 38) and “social boundaries between sections of a population” (Wallman 1979, viii). Practices of gender and race and / or ethnicity vary spatially by religion, biology, politics, economics, and ideology (Amott and Matthaei 1991; Falconer Al-Hindi 1994). Therefore, there is neither genetic women nor universal gender oppression (Amott and Mattaei 1991; Young and Dickerson 1994), but a historically and geographically constructed social aspect of gender and race and / or race.

There are conflicts between the labor restructuring of the economy and the gender division of household labor. Contemporary husband-wife and father-mother roles are very complex combinations of activities, especially in the family and at the work place. Because of sex roles, married women have unpaid work demands on them that are not shared by men. Overall, women do about seventy percent of all unpaid household work. Unfortunately, recent research indicates that only childcare, which is a non-routine activity offering emotional rewards, is shared more. Mostly women perform routine and / or boring household duties (Hage and Powers 1992). This gender division of household labor creates differences and inequality. Most jobs are simply not suited for women who have full responsibility at home. In this situation, women often face the 'second shift'
bearing primary responsibility for household work. Also, women pay a cost by remaining outside the mainstream of social life (Hochschild 1989). It is not only the family but also the relationship between families and work that is changing. The connections between work and families that produce historically specific and socially structured conflict, adaptation, and resistance—those are all changing. The organization of the twentieth century economy and the demands of particular jobs held by women and men surely shape families differently (Gerstel and Gross 1987).

Gender and race / ethnicity interact in specific contexts to produce different role definitions and conflicts. One example is that Black females respond differently from white females to socioeconomic status. A big difference between Black and White females is expectations of mothers; in other words, gender role identity. Moreover, self-definitions of femininity, and self-evaluations of gender appropriate role behavior are related to race very much (Karrakar 1992).

Geographers are paying attention to the contrasts and contradictions often between the lives of women, assumed to be centered upon the personal or private sphere of home, family and domestic concerns, and the lives of men which are thought to be centered upon the public sphere of work and formal political activity. The identification of these two spheres with women and men respectively generally tends to be interpreted as meaning that men and women are equal but different. These differences in the social and spatial position of men and women systematically work to the advantage of men so that women and men in fact have unequal power. Further, race and / or ethnicity differences are intertwined in complex ways with gendered ones.
Telecommuting and Family

In the West, the separation of home from paid workplace that developed during the Industrial Revolution led to the association of men with paid work outside the home. In the reproductive sphere of home, women took responsibility for household work. Men could devote themselves to their production jobs, knowing their wives were taking care of tasks such as cooking, cleaning, rearing children, and so on (Duncan 1991; Gerstel and Gross 1987; Hunt and Hunt 1987). On the other hand, contemporary husband-wife and father-mother roles are very complex combinations of activities, especially in the family and at the work place. For example, nearly two-thirds of all mothers work for pay, a complete reversal from the situation in the 1950s, when nearly two-thirds stayed home without paid work (Christensen 1988).

As many women continue to bear primary responsibility for domestic work and childcare, this ties them to the home, and is reflected in their commuting time to work. In general, women with young children have a shorter commuting time than do men (McLafferty and Preston 1991). Historical, economic, and cultural differences among minority women and Anglo Americans have resulted in a longer commuting time for minority women (McLattery and Preston 1991). Generally, women’s domestic responsibility and concern for childcare are the major cause of gender differences in commuting time. These domestic responsibilities are based on stereotyped views of women’s family roles and also race and ethnicity, and have real spatial consequences reflecting differences in commuting time (Preston, McLattery, and Hamilton 1993). In this situation, being able to work at home is attractive for some women with small
children. These mothers can stay home with their children and also be able to participate in the production sphere of home. However, telecommuting is not the solution for every woman.

Telecommuting is organized mainly two ways: professional or clerical (Leider 1988; Mokhtarian and Salmon 1994; Olson 1983; Tomaskovic-Devey and Risman 1993). Professional telecommuting is more likely to enhance an employee’s flexibility, productivity, satisfaction, and other employee’s benefits. On the other hand, the clerical labor force tends to be subcontracted with fewer benefits, stricter time constraints, fewer rewards and is “…seen as most consistent with savings in labor costs,” (Tomaskovic-Devey and Risman 1993, 382) and “managerial flexibility” (Costello 1989, 198). Because of these differences, in combination with the work situation (whether full-time or part-time), and working environment (whether having childcare by someone else regardless of paid or unpaid), the reality of telecommuting may be totally different for the two groups. It is easy to have more work-family conflict when the demands of work and the family responsibility come together (Duxbury, Higgins, and Mills 1992; Tomaskovic-Devey and Risman 1993).

Another negative effect of telecommuting is that telecommuters are frequently out of the decision making process. If telecommuters do not accommodate the company’s decision, there is more possibility to lose their jobs (Costello 1989). In fact, some companies change the status of employees as they start working from home. One case study showed that eight women quit their jobs and filed a suit against their company, claiming that the new independent contracting arrangement was a subterfuge to avoid
paying them benefits. They also claimed that the company kept increasing their quotas, sometimes forcing them to work fifteen hours a day, and eliminating any flexibility (Christensen 1989).

To summarize thus far, one can think about the aspects of telecommuting as “push” and “pull” factors. Push factors are reasons why workers leave work places to telecommute. Pull factors are other elements at home that bring especially mothers back to work from home. Negative experiences at work places are push factors. As a pull factor, women might want to stay home with their children, to have domestic work responsibility, and to fulfill their gender identity by exercising a supposed traditional gender role.

Christensen (1989) has found that a high value placed on family rather than on money motivates telecommuters. Avoiding daily traffic (Ritter and Thompson 1994), low mobility and homeownership (Heck, Owen, and Rowe 1995), and flexibility of work over space (Duxbury, Higgins, and Mills 1992) make telecommuters work on their own time without having a supervisor (Costello 1989) which leads to greater productivity (Kraut 1989; Ritter and Thompson 1994; Tomaskovic-Devey and Risman 1993). Fifteen percent productivity increases are typical for both clerical and professional telecommuters. Avoiding stress from commuting can improve a telecommuter’s quality as well as quantity of work (Olson 1989). Telecommuters as well as employers may see the situation as ‘win-win.’

Discrimination against people of color might be another reason for choosing a telecommuting work arrangement. For example, until recently, race and ethnicity have
been fundamental to American labor unions (Van Horne 1985). Further, there is “...ethnographic evidence of the difficulties black business people face in obtaining contracts, supplies, bonding, and sufficient credit to run a successful business, even with collateral comparable to that of whites” (Michale Hodge, and Joe R. Feagin in Smith and Feagin 1995, 16). In general, ethnic / racial minorities have been denied opportunities in business situations, such as in obtaining contracts, credit and so on. Usually, racial inequalities will be smaller in democratically structured, employee-owned firms than within traditionally organized businesses (Squires 1991). Some employers want to reduce conflict in the working place by keeping their workforce ethnically homogeneous. Some businesses refuse to hire a particular group of people because some employers believe that their client does not want to interact with a certain group (Jankowski 1995). One case study shows that “African American and Hispanic women’s administrative career advancement opportunities are limited to school districts with large, minority student populations” (Tallerico 1994). These examples illustrate push factors that may encourage ethnic minorities to work from home. Historically, occupational chances tended to be shaped by color, accent, language skills, and cultural mannerisms. “Racism is the problem rather than race” (Jackson 1989, 177).

Women who are single parents may be motivated to telecommute for another reason. Another case study shows that Anglo American households are more likely to have a male presence (sixty percent versus thirty seven percent) than African American households. Even if African American families have adult males present, fifty percent of them make little or no money in comparison to sixteen percent of Anglo American men
(Peake 1995). Therefore, those who do not have a spouse might have a tendency to work from home. African American women have always worked since their history began. Therefore, the role of paid work in their lives is different from that of Anglo American women. However, Wilson (1995, 9) points out that “their [African American] high degree of social isolation in poor segregated neighborhoods, as reflected in social networks, reduces their employment prospects.”

Telecommuters also have to deal with distractions and conflicts with other household members (Duxbury, Higgins, and Mills 1992; Falconer Al-Hindi 1994; Kraut 1989; Mokhtarian and Salomon 1994). Family members, neighbors, and even the telecommuter herself, may have difficulty seeing telecommuting as a real paid job because home is seen as a reproduction place. Therefore, when production occurs in the reproduction sphere, it easily becomes invisible (Christensen 1988 and 1989; Falconer Al-Hindi 1994; Olson 1989). Also working at home, a woman tends to extend her work day to twenty-four hours. This means there are not work and non-work boundaries for her, especially when she is more constantly available to her children. Actually, telecommuters are always reminded of what they are not doing. If they are working, they are not cleaning the house; if they are with their children, they are not working. Their jobs never go away; work is always there (Christensen 1989).

Moreover, when telecommuters’ children are around or awake, they cannot work. Statistics show that approximately one-sixth (seventeen percent) of clerical women telecommuters with preschool children pay for childcare, and nearly a fifth (nineteen
percent) enlist their husbands or her family members to watch their children. Telecommuters also work when their children are asleep (Costello 1989).

Many home workers leave their jobs before their second year (Costello 1989) because of the discrepancy between the expectations and the reality of homework, the tension between women's wage-earning and family responsibilities, low wages, poor communication with supervisors, erratic work, and conflict with family roles. Thus, women with children, especially younger ones, have exceptional constraints placed on their time and often require increased flexibility to handle dual demands of childcare and paid employment. Not only do they have extra housework, but also the work is often unpredictable: children get sick, schools close or childcare arrangements collapse.

Overall, clerical telecommuters feel homework is better than nothing. However, they miss the office and also become stressed at balancing work and family because of less interaction with their co-workers, the fear of becoming invisible at work, the office environment and so on. Many telecommuters see this working arrangement as temporary and want to work outside once their children get older.

In summary, the perceptions and realities of telecommuting vary greatly and in many cases telecommuting does not appear to be an effective way of coping with work-family conflict. Working at home is associated with too much interference of the work with the family domain, and greater role overload. Falconer Al-Hindi (1994) points out that telecommuting does not free women from constraints of time and space.

The greatest amount of research on gender roles and homebased workers has been focused on white, middle-class, adult women (Christensen 1989; Karraker 1992). Some
reasons why there is less research on ethnic minorities are as follows: (1) scholars who conduct research on minorities have been discouraged not to do such research because of limited audience (Cox 1990); (2) research on minorities tends to be published in second-rate journals (Cox 1990); (3) scholars are afraid of being labeled as “the minority researcher” (Cox 1990); (4) there are anti-racist scholars who only focus on “the male-dominated area of production” (Peake 1995. 415). In this situation, it is worthwhile and very important to include the problem of racism and gender that has never really been resolved in American society generally (Cox 1990; Peake 1995). Therefore, research on the gender division of household labor differences and childcare along racial and/or ethnic differences in telecommuting will contribute new understanding, including the reality of gender roles in minority culture in the U.S. city.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

How is one to contextualize the knowledge obtained about experience, about subjectivity? This epistemological issue is central to the important question of the relationship of feminism to other lenses through which we view and experience the world. There is, notably, increasing discussion about how to arrive at a clearer understanding of the diversity of gendered experiences interested and/or overlain by class, ethnicity and race. (Rose 1994, 58)

Feminist researchers in geography have recently become concerned with subjectivity; that is, how they know what they know in relation to the researcher's own social background. The issue of subjectivity is very important because each researcher has individual values, perceptions, and so on that influence the research process. Also, it is indispensable in my research to examine my subjectivity in relation to that of my participants because my participation in the research process has shaped both the process and the research outcome. Therefore, I want to explain why I used the method I used and how effective it is to use it in this particular research on racial and ethnic minority women telecommuters. First, in order to show where this research is in the geographic discipline, I would like to describe different research epistemologies and methods in geography.

Method in Geographic Research

1. Positivist Research

Positivist epistemology originated to separate science from metaphysics and religion (Johnston 1994). Positivism consists of four main statements: (1) observation
statements are more important than theory; (2) “scientific observations have to be repeated” (Johnston 1994); (3) there are science laws which are “If A, then B” (Johnston 1994); (4) scientific laws are viewed as the system of knowledge and absolute truth. When positivists present their study results, they often use quantitative methods, in other words, they show their study results by counting. Thus, in this traditional approach, objectivity and quantitative method are important. As a result of this method of social science study, research results were to have universal applicability.

Because objectivity is very important in this method, human interaction in the research process is not accounted for. However, it is inevitably impossible to have neutral research results because all research process are influenced by the researcher. Also, we cannot get a gendered point of view, knowledge, differences, and interpretation in positivist research. Mattingly and Falconer Al-Hindi (1995, 428) said that "...within a positivist epistemology, the researchers' interests in problems studied, as well as their personal histories and psychology, are supposedly kept out of the research process, analysis, and conclusions” (Cloke et al. 1991).

2. Humanistic Geography

Some geographers have challenged positivist spatial science since the early 1970s. Although both positivist and humanistic geographers aim for knowledge that is universal and generalizable, a humanistic approach emphasizes knowledge about individual through daily conversation rather than observation (Buttimer 1976; Rowles 1978). "The quest for interpersonal knowing requires immersion in the everyday worlds
of those with whom we study, drawing close to people rather than holding back. It entails developing personal relationships and learning to translate from the 'text' of the experience that results" (Rowles 1978, 176). Humanistic geography treats a person as a decision-maker and tries to understand him. For instance, Rowles (1978) spent time with elderly people in Winchester Street, U.S.A., in order to understand their geographic experiences. He was involved with elderly people's daily lives. He was not only a researcher, but also a friend to them. Through his participants, he could know these elderly people's everyday geographic experiences. In such a situation "the dialog itself becomes data, reflecting an inductive process as two individuals seek consensual expression of their interpersonal knowing" (Rowles, 1978, 187). Thus, the humanistic method relies on interpersonal ways of knowing to reveal everyday geographies.

3. Feminist Methods

What makes some feminist research distinctive from positivist and humanistic research is its opposition to the notion of universal knowledge and its skepticism toward the possibility of objective knowledge, and its focus on gender (Gilbert, 1994; McDowell, 1992). Mattingly and Falconer Al-Hindi (1995) point out that women's knowledge may be different from men's knowledge which is socially structured and contested differently. For instance, a study by Rocheleau (1995, 463) used a different kind of mapping for research in the Dominican Republic. Instead of making a top-down map, which would "...locate study sites with respect to the usual categories and situate the issues to the mainstream environment and development discourse," they made
...from the bottom up that represent a variety of gendered and otherwise differentiated perspectives on land, resources, and the possible futures of people and the ecosystems that they both create and inhabit." In other words, this map includes knowledge which top-down map would not, such as women's information of land use, resources, and products. As a result, information on this map is more complete and includes women's patio gardens, their land use, tree species and so on; thus, Rocheleau discovered women's daily lives through mapping. These maps are quite different from those based on men's lived experiences.

Many feminist researchers prefer qualitative methods (McDowell 1992; Katz 1994; Moss 1993) "...with small samples, narrowly defined in time and space" (McLafferty 1995, 439). Qualitative methods facilitate description of socially constructed gender and its power relations, and then provide better information about those gender relations (Lawson 1995). Readers can grasp and comprehend the cultural, racial, and gender differences in social life which "...challenge what has tended to be a universalistic category [woman] in feminist theory" (Moore 1988; Ramazanoglu 1989; Wendell 1989; Sanders 1990 in Dyck 1993, 56). Methods used with small samples include intensive interviewing, participant observation and women's personal narratives (Lawson 1995) that give women voice (Gorelick 1991).

"The interview is a critical tool for developing new frameworks and theories based on women's lives and women's formulations" (Anderson and Jack 1991, 18), and it is also "... a linguistic, as well as a social and psychological, event" (Gluck and Patai 1991, 42). Women researchers' social and economic positions are often similar to those of
their women subjects (Acker, Barry, and Esseveld 1983; Minister 1991; Riessman 1987). In other words, it is said that women researchers are often 'insiders' in feminist research. For example, when a woman participant says 'you know men snore,' researcher and participant can laugh together as women (Riessmen 1987). Participants may have husbands, children, and clean their own houses, as do female scholars (Acker, Barry, and Esseyeld 1983). Also, feminist scholars can relate to their participants’ fear of sexual assault. Other differences may pale in the commonality of shared femaleness.

However, research on gender issues has become increasingly race-ethnicity and class-sensitive because feminists researchers encountered situations where gender bonds are not enough to overcome the racial and ethnic differences (hooks 1990). Gilbert (1994) also argues against the feminist notion of researcher as 'insider.' Her study concerns low wage women in Worcester, Massachustetts. In this study, gender commonality was not enough between Gilbert and her participants. Whereas as her participants were African Americans, Latino, Vietnamese, and Anglo lower working class women, she is an Anglo scholar (and not lower class).

Sensitivity to culture, race and ethnicity have become very important in feminist research. Further, "culture is not static" (Dennis and Giangreco 1996, 110) because it is affected by social class, education, and geography. In the Mexican family setting for example, "it has been assumed that one's ethnic identity is more important than one's gender identity" (Baca Zinn 1980, 23 in Segura 1994, 38). That's because in the family setting, Spanish is spoken, cultural values are taught and ethnic pride is affirmed. If a researcher does not know the basic cultural expectations and differences, there may be
difficulties and misunderstandings in cross-cultural research. However, there are no firm
guidelines for developing this cultural sensitivity. One can start, however, with careful
listening and personal reflection (Dennis and Giangreco 1996). Riessman (1987, 172-
173) gives us an example of cultural misunderstanding. "The structures of children's
stories vary with their cultural background, so that white classroom teachers have
difficulty 'hearing' narratives of black children. [Because of] …lack of cultural norms for
telling a story, making a point, giving an explanation and so forth can create barriers to
understanding (Michaels 1985, 5)."

"Perfect congruence between interviewer, interviewee, and interpreter is probably
not possible, not even always desirable. …However, if a sensitive collaboration has not
occurred in the interview and the analysis, researchers may have "heard" nothing
(Riessman 1987, 191). Minority research participants often do not consider themselves
representatives of their culture. They just share their personal experiences as individuals
(Dennis and Giangreco 1996).

Thus, interviewing is a method in feminist geography which provides of access to
knowledge socially constructed gender and race relationships, as it reveals women's lived
experiences. It follows that shared gendered experiences between researchers and the
researched may not provide enough common ground for effective exchange of
information. Differences in race, ethnicity, social classes and so on between researcher
and researched might have become obvious and exaggerated in the process of interaction
(Oakly 1981).
4. Role of Reflexivity

What is the relationship between our own background, current position and values, and our research agenda? How do we know what we know? Through what sort of lenses is our knowledge filtered? Who is included and who is excluded by the social practices and subject matter of academic geography? For whom are we writing? And what is, what should be, the relationship between our theories and our politics, between thinking and action?

(McDowell 1992, 56)

Reay (1996, 60) defines 'reflexivity' as "...a continual consideration of the ways in which the researcher's own social identity and values affect the data gathered and the picture of the social world produced." Therefore, researchers' gender, race, and class are basic elements of a reflexive approach. However, feminist geographers put emphasis on reflexivity, which is "...about learning to recognize others' constructions of us through their initiatives, spaces, bodies, judgement, prescriptions, proscriptions, and so on" (Nast forthcoming). Definition of Nast refers mutual construction of knowledge whereas Reay concerns more of researchers.

Researchers cannot be free from their own background and way of perceiving the world. In other words, there is no bias-free social science research because society is not neutral with regard to sex, gender, race and ethnicity (Rosser 1988 in Billson 1991). Researchers' roles are like an instrument (England 1994). That is because without having researchers, there's no lens to view the society. When researchers are aware of this filtering process, the results will reflect researchers' lenses and community reaction. As a result, the study process of reflexivity is an examined one, which could produce knowledge closer to the reality. For instance, when Johnson (1990) studied the Australian textile industry, she considered that her viewpoint (her epistemology) was colored by her
background. Her point of view affected her subjective knowing and her interpretation of data. A second example is provided by Gerson (1987, 283) who interviewed more than sixty women with / without children and work. She concluded that "it depends on how women perceive and define their situations as well as on the objective circumstances that structures these perceptions."

Reflexivity builds on a notion of "betweenness": "in order to even recognize that betweenness exists, one has to acknowledge the human cognition exists as a valid way of knowing, and that in human cognition there is inherently a partial and mediated truth" (Moss 1995, 446). According to McLafferty (1995, 440), "reflexivity also means a closer and more open relationship with research subjects whenever possible." Further more, Nast (forthcoming) discusses reflexivity:

...We are rarely taught to locate, creatively work with, and recognize reflexivity in terms of what is out-of-(our)-control. We are not taught the skill of engaging with processes and materialities that draw us bodily into other worlds and that require that we "let go" of carefully crafted objectives, agendas, and models and give our bodies / spaces over to other bodies and places. The "giving over" is not always voluntary, nor is it necessarily a gesture or sign of powerlessness. Rather it allows bodies materially and strategically to field or capture, and to be locatable material field of, difference.

Researchers bodies and places are not always controllable. When Nast (forthcoming) went into Kano City in northern Nigeria, she experienced a lack of people's perceptions of her body and concluded that "the body is a place." Because of her appearance, she was perceived as odd and had difficulty getting know her participants.
Research Participants

There are four racial ethnic minority women telecommuters in this study. I made up names and changed some details of the lives of my interviewees in order to protect their privacy. The first woman I interviewed is Joyce Lee-Tan, a Chinese American, who works for a large agricultural commodity producer as a manager. She has been telecommuting about a year, since she married and moved New York City from Omaha, Nebraska. Joyce is in her early thirties and has a husband, but no child. The second telecommuter is Anna Kingston, an African American, who works for a large telephone company as a computer programmer. She is a single mother in her early forties with a teenage son. She telecommutes on an as-needed basis. The third woman I interviewed is Michelle Brown, a Mexican American. She is a lawyer in her early thirties with a husband and two little girls. The fourth one is Ou Johnson, an American born Chinese. She works for a large computer company as a sales manager. She is in her middle thirties and has a husband and two girls.

When I was recruiting participants, although some well-known companies and/or organizations have hundreds of telecommuters in Omaha, they did not choose to cooperate. As I made phone calls to find participants, basically bigger companies (Human Resource Managers) HRMs know what telecommuting was. However, I had to explain what it was and whom I was looking for to HRMs at some larger and many smaller business. Some people sometimes did not distinguish between telecommuters (employees) and home workers (self-employed) and needed further explanation. As I went through the process of recruiting participants, I recognized the importance of time in
the business world. One manager in an international company told me that a one to two hour interview is a huge amount of time to ask from employees who might cooperate in the research. Finding participants in Omaha, Nebraska, was not easy because the estimated number of telecommuters is not large, racial ethnic minority population is lower than national average and because many businesses were reluctant to provide access to their employees. Thus the access to telecommuters was limited.

**Design and Methodology of the Present Study**

I interviewed the participants at their offices, except for Joyce Lee-Tan. Joyce came to my apartment because we knew each other before this study and she asked to do so. Although I wanted to conduct interviews at my participants’ homes, they all suggested that we meet at their work places. Though I had the same questions for each woman, each interview took a different length of time, depending on how my participants responded. The interview with Joyce Lee-Tan took me around seventy minutes. With Anna Kingston, it took us only fifty minutes. The conversation with Michelle Brown took seventy-five minutes. With Ou Johnson, the official taped interview lasted eighty minutes. As I am going to discuss later, Ou Johnson and I talked more than thirty minutes after the interview itself was concluded.

The questions I asked are grouped into six categories, and include questions concerned with working from home, family and work, race-ethnicity background, household duties, company treatment, and space relations. Some example questions follow. Under the working from home category, I asked “how do you like working form
home so far?” For the family and work category, I asked about family structure and how this affects the nature of work. Under race-ethnicity background category, questions like “how do you identify yourself?” “tell me about being a _____ woman in Omaha,” and “by working from home, can you be the woman who you think you are supposed to be or you want to be?” For the household duty category, “how do you share the household work with your family members?” and “has the division of household work changed since you started working from home?” I asked about her treatment by the company such as whether her company keeps a desk for her or not. For the space category, I asked where her office is located in her household, how her journey to work has changed after started working from home, and so on.

In the process of planning and conducting this thesis research, I began to question my position relative to this topic and to the research participants. I asked myself: how do I know what I know? How do their perceptions of me influence the respondents? How does my foreign status, including my English as a second language, influence the reaction of interviewees? What is my position as a researcher in this research? I am a foreign non-white woman and a geography graduate student. So the way ethnic minority women perceive me might be different from how they might perceive an Anglo student interviewer. I am also a racial-ethnic minority in this society. Racial-ethnic minority telecommuters and I have this in common, but there are also important differences between us.

I engaged in dialogue with racial-ethnic minority women telecommuters' concerning their lived experiences. I cannot be an insider in any situation in this country
in a way, but nor am I totally an outsider with my ethnicity and gender. This makes me unique as an interviewer and such might have influenced the process of data collection. One example is in the interview with an African American woman. I felt she liked to answer questions from the perspective of only a mom or a worker, not a Black mom or a Black worker. She did not reveal as much about as the rest of the women did. I felt she was protective of information about herself, and did not want to be seen as a representative of ordinary Black women, but as an individual middle class woman. Although we talked, we did not communicate well. She asked me to repeat the questions more than other women did, which made me feel that she had difficulty with me or with my English. Also, she used the phrase "how can I say this?" many times. This made me think that she felt I did not understand her well enough. A second example comes from my interview. After I finished interviewing with Ou Johnson, she walked me out to the elevator. She started asking me something like: how about you, Hope? I bet you have been discriminated against with your nationality in this country, haven't you? She said it with such confidence, I was astonished, and surprised to discover my own hidden Japanese prejudice. In recent history, Non-Japanese Asian people are not treated as same as Japanese people in Japan. When Ou Johnson asked me the question, I wondered why she asked whether I (Japanese) have been discriminated against or not when she says she (Chinese) has not? Also, why do I think this way? After I talked with several people about this issue, both Japanese and Americans pointed out the World War II Japanese internment. Because Japanese people were mistreated and discriminated against in this country, perceptions toward Japanese people could be different from other Asians in the
United States. The conversation I had with Ou Johnson contrasted our different backgrounds and perceptions of ourselves.

I learned a lot from these women: especially from the African American and Mexican women because I do not belong to their culture and did not know them as well as I do Asian culture. After reflecting on my interviews, I came to agree with Nast (1994, 57) about her definition of betweenness (or reflexivity).

Betweenness highlights the fact that we can never not work with "others" who are separate and different from ourselves; difference is an essential aspect of all social interactions that requires that we are always everywhere in between or negotiating the works of me and not-me. In some instances differences are culturally, socioeconomically, or politically great such that researcher and researched find little between them with which to establish personal or social common grounds. But even where difference in a field are small, because we are positioned simultaneously in a number of fields we are always, at some level, somewhere, in a state of betweenness, negotiating various degrees and kinds of difference—be they based on gender, age, class, ethnicity, "race," sexuality, and so on.

I as a Japanese cannot be separated from my participants' perceptions of me in the process of interviews. As Minister (1991, 38) points out "...in woman talk, reflexivity is not only legitimate, it is inseparable from the process." In this way, reflexivity as method made me see how I was and where I was, and how I was perceived in this study.

Conclusion

A comparison of geographic research methods illustrates important differences among them and highlights the potential role of reflexivity. As Dyck (1993, 57) points out, "whatever methods are used, we must be aware of ethnocentrism and aim to deconstruct the category of 'woman.'" I will discuss my study results in Chapter 4, where
the reflexive interpretation approach is used. The dialogue I had with my participants is all considered and interpreted from the experiences of my reflexivity. I felt that being a woman was perceived positively because my questions were almost women related topics. My racial and ethnic background contributed in terms of reflexivity. In my study, reflexivity was indispensable because interaction between myself as a researcher and my participants shaped the data, my perceptions and theirs, and its interpretations.
CHAPTER IV
ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In this chapter, I am going to discuss and interpret the differences and similarities among my participants. Central to their experiences of telecommuting are their gendered relations to paid work and home life, and their ethnic and racialized minority status.

In section B, I am going to talk about racial ethnic minority women telecommuters; their backgrounds, the advantages and disadvantages of telecommuting for each, how each started working from home, and how they have felt about telecommuting. Then, I am going to discuss social reproduction and production in section C; that is, how telecommuting enables my participants to accommodate their paid work and unpaid household work as racial ethnic minority women. In section D, I will discuss whether race matters or not for racial ethnic minority women telecommuters, in other words, how their skin colors affect their public and private lives. In the final section, I will summarize what I have found in my research and emphasize the significance of the relationship among race, ethnicity, and geography.

Racial Ethnic Minority Women Telecommuters

As Tomaskovic-Devey and Risman found (1993), professional telecommuters tend to be satisfied with productivity enhancement and other benefits of telecommuting. My four interviewees were all professionals and were each basically satisfied with telecommuting.
Joyce Lee-Tan, a Chinese-born American woman, works for a large agricultural commodity producer in Omaha, Nebraska by telecommuting. She lives in New York City, New York. She immigrated to the United States when she was a child and was a newly wed when I interviewed her. She did not work from home until she left Omaha to marry her husband, Mr. Tan, also a Chinese-born American living in New York City. Her boss suggested that she should telecommute rather than quitting the job. Her company has met her needs as a telecommuter and she is satisfied with her treatment by the company. Telecommuting has been a great way for Joyce to accommodate work and household duties.

In contrast to Costello's (1989) finding that women home workers want to go back to the office to work, Joyce likes working from her home office very much. She says, "I love it [telecommuting]. It's great and I do not think I wanna go back to work any more after I start working at home." Although she puts nine hours a day in telecommuting, she says it is not real work. Working at home gives her privacy, which she could not have at her office. Now, Joyce can save money on work clothes, cosmetics, and gas as do many home workers (Costello 1989, Mokhtarian and Salmon 1994). Also, Joyce’s productivity has increased. This finding in my research is consistent with existing studies (Kraut 1989, Olson 1989, Olszewski and Mokhtarian 1994, Pratt 1997, Ritter and Thompson 1994, Tomaskovic-Devey and Risman 1993).

On the other hand, like other home workers who struggle with solidarity (Critchfield 1996), Joyce has no one to talk to, cannot compare how she is doing, and does not know the company's direction as well as she did before. She also misses the
fringe benefits such as free check-ups, easy mailing system, and things like that in the office. Joyce now is out of the loop. She had to learn how to get information from people, how to call and make an effort to initiate things. Every one and half a months, she commutes to Omaha where she catches up with information and up-dates her computer and so on.

Joyce Lee-Tan loves telecommuting because she can manage work and family. She enjoys the advantages of telecommuting. She thinks she will keep on telecommuting and does not think she will return to full-time office work.

In comparison to Joyce Lee-Tan, a Chinese-born-American, Ou Johnson, is a first generation American-born Chinese. Though she was raised in a traditional Chinese family, surrounded with its customs and language, the way Ou thinks is very American. She works for an international computer company as a sales manager. She has an Anglo husband and two little girls who go to childcare every day. It was her company's decision to send employees home to work in order to save overhead costs. So Ou did not have the choice of remaining in the office. Her company does not own many physical offices any more. Many employees have become telecommuters, or are mobile and travel around the country now.

Ou became a mother after she began telecommuting. So, she cannot say for certain how much telecommuting helps her parenting. However, she can say that telecommuting helps her to manage her work and household duties. She says:

There are some pluses and minuses to it. I like the flexibility because I have two young children and getting used to that routine and getting them up to the daycare. It's been an adjustment. And it also has a flexibility to
work when I have a time, when they are in bed, I can work at night. Disadvantage is a lack of interaction with other people.

She likes the flexibility (Duxbury, Higgins, and Mills 1992, Levaux 1995, Tomaskovic-Devey and Risman 1993). She can focus more clearly when she is working from her separate home office because she has fewer interruptions. When she needs to meet someone, print out things and send faxes she comes to the office, and that gives her a break from home. Although Ou Johnson has experienced both positive and negative aspects of telecommuting, she emphasized the advantages of working from home as a wife and a mother.

Michelle Brown is a Mexican American woman who came to the U.S. when she was a baby. She is a lawyer with an Anglo husband and two little girls. As Pratt (1997) found in her research, Michelle’s primary reason to work at home is to accommodate work and household commitments. After she got pregnant with her second baby, she decided to reduce the number of her work hours. Prior to that, she heard about telecommuting and mentioned it to her boss who encouraged her to combine telecommuting with her office work.

Now she telecommutes thirty percent of her total work hours. She says, “I like it [telecommuting]. I like it a lot. It gives me a lot of opportunities to spend time with my kids and I can also get some work done. So it's a nice break in my day, too." Many home-based employees read and write with computers, then talk to their co-workers on the phone (Kraut 1989). Michelle also finishes her work which requires high level concentration at her office, then brings work which requires less concentration home (such as reading mail and e-mail).
In this way, she can watch over and sometimes interact with her children in their playroom, which is next to her home office. Unless it is necessary, she does not work more than two hours at a time. Usually, she sees how her children are doing and plays with them a little bit every hour. She appreciates the way things worked out for her children.

Anna Kingston is an African American woman who works for a large telephone company as a computer programmer. Anna is a single mother with a teenage son. As Preston, McLafferty, and Hamilton (1993, 232) report, “Black women are more likely to be single parents than any other racial or ethnic group of American women.” Also, according to a study done by Kraut (1989, 29) “marriage decreased the probability of working at home for black women but increased the probability for nonblack women.” It may be ideal to balance work and family life by telecommuting, especially, for those who do not have a husband. In Anna’s case, her motivation to start telecommuting was her own son who often got sick when he was little. Anna wanted to stay home with him, but did not want to take days off very often. Then, house renovations required that she be home a lot. Although nothing keeps her at home now, part-time telecommuting has remained a part of her work life. Anna says that the advantages of telecommuting include saving money on gas, parking tickets, and childcare costs.

Those who are in special circumstances such as dealing with a family member’s illness tend to enjoy telecommuting (Ritter and Thompson 1994). However, in the case of Anna Kingston, it was different. Though she admits that working from home is more relaxed, quieter, and more productive, she did not like full-time telecommuting at all.
because the boundary between work and private time was not clear. More (n.d.) explains that “the bad news is that work may expand, not only blurring but also erasing the line between work and home. Instead of the ‘anywhere, anytime’ office, you could find yourself working everywhere, most of the time.” Anna Kingston was not satisfied with full telecommuting for this reason. Anna describes the situation when she telecommuted full-time:

Truly speaking, I really don't care for it [telecommuting] because it takes stress on you because you end up doing things around the house, plus usual work to do. Because I deal with three regions of times like Mountain, Central, and Pacific time. And your clients know you work from home. So they end up calling you later hours, the end of the day. So it makes your days longer.

She started working at seven in the morning and continued until to nine at night or later during the summer. She even had some phone calls from her clients after midnight. As a result, invasion of her private time has kept her away from becoming a full-time telecommuter. As a result, Anna has learned to balance her work in this way: she telecommutes ten percent of her total work hours, irregularly. This amount of telecommuting time does not hurt her private sphere very much because she can protect her private time by using voice messaging (her clients do not know whether she is working home from or not). The rest of the work hours, she goes to the office. Thus, Anna Kingston did not like working from home full-time. She acknowledges the advantages of telecommuting and accepts being a part-time telecommuter.

Most telecommuters have informal rather than formal work arrangements with their companies (Pratt 1997, 5). Three women in this study (Joyce Lee-Tan, Michelle Brown, and Anna Kingston) organized their telecommuting only with their managers. In
other words, HRMs may not be aware that they have telecommuters. Joyce Lee-Tan and Ou Johnson, two Chinese Americans telecommute full-time, and Michelle Brown, a Mexican American woman, and Anna Kingston, an African American woman, combine telecommuting with their regular office work.

Social Reproduction and Production

Before I began this research, I expected to find situation like this:

The most visible group has been women, who are coping with a double load—the traditional duties associated with home and children and their growing responsibility for earning a paycheck.

...At the end of the official workday, it's back to the second shift—the duties of housewife and mother. Grocery shopping, picking up the children, and cooking dinner take up the next few hours.

(Schor 1991, 20)

Many women out there are juggling work and housework, and are stressed out. Even clerical telecommuters who can accommodate time and space conflict are the same (Costello 1989). However, I did not see this second-shift (Hochschild 1989) or "work-family conflict" (Duxbury, Higgins, and Mils 1992, 175) problem among my participants. This may be because they are all professionals who might have more flexibility than clerical home workers, and they have already adjusted, in order to organize their lives the way they want.

In Joyce Lee-Tan’s case, she has no children, and her husband is willing to share the household duties with her. Joyce thinks they share everything fifty-fifty. Ou Johnson’s situation is not bad, either. Her husband also works from home and shares the household duties, too. Though Ou needs to remind her husband to do his share, she also
thinks they share household duties fifty-fifty. Michelle works part-time, twenty-eight hours a week, which gives her enough time to finish both paid and unpaid work. However, she still says that she does share with her husband. Although Anna Kingston complains about the vague boundary between work and home, hers is not a matter of the second-shift. As a single mother, she does not expect to share household.

Another reason that I did not find the resentment and stress associate with the second-shift among my participants might be that some home workers put priority on religion more than on their careers (Kraut 1989, Mokhtarian and Salomon 1994). This is true for two of my interviewees. Ou Johnson and Anna Kingston did not mention religion. But Anna Kingston told me that her priority is her family, thus, her son. In the case of Joyce Lee-Tan, she puts the higher priority on her religious belief and has decided to not work when her work gets in her way. So far, home as a working place enables Joyce Lee-Tan to be a good wife. She says:

Because I have more time to be at home, because of the focus I have, I can finish working faster. Therefore, I have more time at home being a wife and other things. It helps a lot.

In the home office environment, she can maintain higher productivity, and has fewer disturbances, which contributes to her positive home life, including her role as a wife. She says:

I like to be the caretaker. If I had a job somewhere else, I cannot do that because it will take more time to drive. So you cannot cook. I like to make soups. For me that's how I show care and love to cook for the man you love. And I can do those things. So it's very important to me that I can do something as a wife.
Because Joyce telecommutes, she does not have to take time for commuting and can make special dishes such as soups for her husband. Being a caretaker is her perception of the Chinese woman's role. So telecommuting helps her to be the woman she wants to be. Her increased productivity via telecommuting helps Joyce to perform more household activities.

For Ou Johnson, career is one of the core elements in her life. Although it is an advantage not to see her boss every day, at the same time, it is also a disadvantage for her not to be able to learn from her boss as a young worker. Although telecommuting gives her flexibility, she is not sure whether it helps her productivity. Her company is like many companies in the U.S. that started restructuring to save overhead costs, and resulted in reduced leased and owned space (Pratt 1997). Most employees in Ou's company have also been telecommuting so do not work together in the office any more. Before, when she was in the office, she could get together with her team members. Now, it takes more time to find the right person for a project. She does not know people and their skills as well as she used to. Sometimes it takes two weeks to get in touch with someone to work with. She assumes this may have affected her customers, too. She could offer better and faster service to her customers if she did not telecommute. She says that her company is internally complicated because almost everyone is mobile.

When I asked her whether telecommuting fulfills her wife and mother's role or not, she says:

If I had a choice, I don't know I would have picked it or not. In fact, there are a lot of women find that they need to stay home. It would drive me crazy. I need to be out. I feel like a sense of accomplishment is when I'm working. Although I accomplish a lot, I should be proud of taking care of
my family, that's not when I feel a sense of accomplishment. It's what I'm working, doing those things. I do it at work that I feel oh, I accomplish this today.

Working at the office gives Ou Johnson a sense of accomplishment. That is because she does not see mothering as a fulfilling task. It is just a part of your life, not a goal. She is a goal-oriented person. Education was very important for Ou, and now her work is her new focus. As Costello (1989, 203) pointed out, “some women felt devalued in their status as housewives;” this is how Ou would feel, if she only stayed out home without working.

As Kraut (1989, 39) points out “…women who worked at home did more household chores than office workers…,” Michelle Brown talks about her household sharing with her husband.

My husband and I are sharing a lot of the duties except now that I'm home, I kind of had to do that a little bit more. I took that on because I am at home so I can do more things. I can go get the groceries. I can clean the house. I can do a lot more because I'm home.

She does more household work spontaneously since she began telecommuting because she is home working. In her case, she reduced her amount of work hours and started telecommuting, which affects her family life positively as a wife and a mother. She admits becoming a good wife:

I think I'm a better wife because I'm less stressed working at home, have time to prepare nice dinner, which I like to do that for my family. I'm much more relaxed, if I make my husband clean up a lot of times, you know I'm just much more relaxed as a wife. And I think I have a better relationship with my husband because I don't spend all the time going "I'm tired, I'm sad, I need to rest, get away from me, go take care of these kids. I don't do that any more because I'm really a lot more rested. I'm not stressed.
Michelle feels good now because she has time to prepare meals. Also, she is relaxed which affects her relationship she has with her husband. Thus, telecommuting makes her a rested good wife. She also says that she is a better mother:

As far as the mother, I think I'm a better mother because I spend more time with my kids. I get to see them growing. I actually, get more entertained with them. And the way I think that's good because it makes me work on more patience. And it makes me appreciate being at work when I'm here and makes me appreciate my kids more when I have them.

Telecommuting enables Michelle to be both a good mother and a good worker. That is because the time she has at home enables her to do more household work and also to spend quality time with her children. She does not have to be stressed out anymore and can enjoy the time at work. Her mother is also satisfied with her telecommuting:

How about I tell you about my mom. Many times she used to tell me, I want you to stay home with kids. And now that what changed she says I don't think you should you know, you went school for all those years and keep doing this part time thing. I think that's the best thing for kids.

As Segura (1994, 46) describes “Chicana [Mexican] families tend to be mother-centered, with women responsible for the majority of household / child-rearing decisions and tasks, and they also embody a patriarchal ideology.” Her mother is very Mexican according to Michelle. Michelle says that her mother thinks mothering is the most important. Segura affirms the idea that “..the family is a site for Chicanas to affirm a gendered way of teaching and practicing Chicano culture.” Her mother now favors Michelle's telecommuting. That's maybe because Michelle can fulfill her wife and mother's role, then is able to maintain her career by combining part-time telecommuting and working at office.
Michelle honestly says, "I do want both [career and home life]. I do. And I don't know that's a selfish thing. But I do want both because it's so nice. It really is." Although she wants both she says she put the first priority on mothering. When I asked her which is more important for her being home as a wife, and / or a mom, or making a living outside, she answered:

I would say being home as a mom. But I'm finding out that I need to be out. I think making a living gives me a value that mothering doesn’t. Mothering provides me a lot of a fulfillment. And I realized that is a tremendous value that I'm offering to the society to be a mom, to be with my children. But I also realized that I need the value of making money to bring into my household. And I may know that I can do it. That's a value to me. I would say mothering is the most important. But I do need the other. I do need to be here [at work].

Unlike Ou Johnson, Michelle Brown feels fulfillment being a mother. She acknowledges what she needs is both being a mother and also being a capable worker. She did not want to sacrifice one for the other. She knows that she can function well at work when she is being a good mother at home. She says:

It's not just about talking to three-year old all day who doesn’t wanna do. You wanna talk, but you're telling them you know. I can function with adults. I'm smart enough to have conversation, to handle my cases, to take care of my negotiations. I can do all of that. It is a level of confidence. And in a way, this helps me to deal with my kids, too. Because I guess I feel like this keeps me stimulated, keeps my brain stimulated to a certain extent.

Being a good worker and a mother go together for Michelle and help each other. Part-time telecommuting enables her to have what she wants for her life.

Anna Kingston is a single mother who does not share the household work with her teenage son. When her son was little, he did not understand that Anna was working from home. For her son’s perspective, Anna should be available to play with him because
Anna was home. Even after her son got older, he still did not like Anna working from home when he was home. For him, home is a place for social reproduction, not productive work. That's why Anna specifically pointed out the disadvantage of the vague boundary in full-time telecommuting. She prefers to separate two spheres, production of work and social reproduction of home, as much as she can. If the nature of her work were different, she might be able to enjoy working from home full-time.

Race Matters!

Today's race, ethnicity, social class, and nationality interconnect as a result of history (Ammot and Matthaei 1991, Young and Dickerson 1994). Therefore, knowing the similarities and differences of these elements in comparison to the dominant Anglo culture is very important.

My first interviewee, Joyce Lee-Tan, had high level of awareness of her position in this society and acknowledged where she is:

A lot of times, I feel like I'm right in the middle [between American and Chinese]. Sometimes, I think I'm right in the middle. But then, in terms of family, I'm definitely more Chinese, in terms of work I'm more American. So I think I'm in the middle and sometimes it's kind of confusing to me where I think I am. Because when I'm with a Chinese group of friends and people, they look at me as very American and I feel more American. And if I'm with the group of American friends or Caucasian, other than Asian friends, they look at me [as] very Asian, I feel very Chinese. So sometimes I even feel like I am not in the group because of that.

Her perception of herself depends on whom she is with. In other words, her identity is very relational to two racial and ethnic groups. Her Chinese-born American husband might have intensified her ‘in between’ position in comparison to the rest of the women I
interviewed who have an Anglo husband. In Joyce's case, she came to the U.S. when she was around ten years old, so she might have a very solid Chinese ethnic background in comparison to the rest of the women.

Although she feels she is in between the American and Chinese culture, she distinguishes herself from Chinese people at work in this way:

I feel that Chinese in work is quieter. They are more tolerant. And I'm not like that. I'm pretty outspoken at work. And I can say no when I think I cannot do it. And I can get together with a group of people and mingle well together. So I have earned the trust and respect of my co-workers as friends. So better than the other Chinese I've seen in some workplaces. All my friends' [Chinese] experiences where they do not feel like they do not fit in with their co-workers, or they feel like their co-workers are taking advantage of them. I do not feel like that. So I feel more I'm more like American when I'm at work.

Joyce thinks she is more American when she is at work. She does not carry over negative aspects of immigrated Chinese. That may be because she has gotten education in this country and trained for American society. For instance, she points out the language skills she has in this way:

I think being a telecommuter because you talk on the phone more, I think it's for Chinese American. For me, it's easy because I don't have an accent, Chinese accent. And then, people usually cannot tell if I'm Anglo female or Chinese female. So that's advantage to me. So I think it's not easy for all Chinese people because people tend to more understand person who does not have an accent.

In contrast to the language, one cannot assimilate one's biological features. When I asked Joyce whether people make assumptions about her race and / or ethnicity or not, she mentioned how her Oriental looks affect her work:

I answer calls. Sometimes customers call and they just want to solve the problem and [we] answer the question. And it seems like whenever there is an Asian food product question, they say, "oh, Joyce can do it," like
fortune cookie [Chinese] problem, or Udon noodle [Japanese]. It is assumed, we have to solve it.

Her co-workers, who are supposed to know Joyce better than strangers, assume that she might know not only the Chinese food, but also every other kind of Asian food. It might not be a negative assumption, but it shows the naivete of her co-workers. However, after she started working from home, these experiences have been eliminated almost completely.

It maybe less [of those experiences] because those co-workers come to me with those problems because they see me, I'm right there. I'm very accessible because they can just, be street across the hall and then I'm right there. But when I'm at home, I have voice mail. It's a little bit harder to get a hold of me. So yes I have less of those occurrences.

As a result of telecommuting, her ethnicity has become invisible at her former office. So that her co-workers do not rely on her based on their assumption of her ethnicity like before.

Joyce further highlights the relationship between ethnicity and space. The place she lives is more ethnically diverse than Omaha, Nebraska. She and her husband can enjoy choices such as among restaurants.

The Chinese culture or the Asian culture is very important to my husband and I (sic). So we always search for those kind of culture. So it does affect, in a positive way because for example, there are more restaurants, Chinese restaurants, or Asian restaurants. It makes a more positive place to live.

Because Joyce can telecommute, she can overcome the time and space conflict in her life (Duxbury, Higgins, and Mills 1992, Ritter and Thompson 1994). Cyber-reach through computer, fax machine, and telephone enables her to live in New York City without quitting her job in Nebraska. Although she works with her co-workers in Omaha,
and serves her clients, she is physically not there. This is how she accommodates her home and work life together. Joyce now has more choice in her private life because she is in a bigger city where so many things are available and also enjoys much freedom to go back and forth between two cities through physical and cyber commuting.

As More (n.d.) points not everyone can telecommute because not everyone has the self-discipline required. Joyce told me the same thing in relation to her culture. She says:

I feel like I took the positive side of the Chinese culture and then work in the American culture society. So I feel like it really affected me in a way that I'm hard working because that's the kind of a stereotype. But some of them are true, too. About Chinese culture is that we are very diligent workers, very smart.

As she connects her diligence to her own background, it shows her perception of herself as a member of specific ethnic group, Chinese.

In the process of interviewing Joyce, I felt she perceived me as Japanese. She carefully stated where she belongs by differentiating among people as either Anglo or Chinese. She did not use the word Asian almost at all. In a way, she simply repeated my word usage (I used the word Chinese American after she described her perception of herself as Chinese American).

However, I see this as a reflection of her sensitive perception of me as her interviewer and also of my interview questions. If I had been an Anglo woman, she could have used the word Asian American to describe her belonging group. However, since I am also an Asian, she tried her best to specify what she is by not using the word 'Asian,' but Chinese. In this way, Joyce Lee-Tan saw me as an Asian, specifically, as Japanese.
She sees herself in the middle between American and Chinese culture which means she may have had a solid awareness of herself as Asian (like I do). So she might have been aware of it and tried to differentiate her Asianess from mine by referring only to Chinese. She also made clear the differences among Chinese people as those who have an English accent or not. This completely separates my Asianess from hers, as I have an accent.

Ou Johnson, an American-born Chinese woman, shows her perception of me as a Japanese woman, too. When I asked her about the different women's roles in Chinese culture, she answered that “I think they are similar. I think in your culture, I can see it being very different.” I asked, “do you mean Japanese and American are different, but Chinese and American are kind of similar?” She answered yes because of her perception of her own mother (who acted like an Anglo woman according to her) and her mother's point of view of Japanese women (as totally different from Chinese women).

She also perceived me positively as an Asian, and also as a foreigner. She has not had a chance to be a friend with any Chinese Americans, Chinese people, or even other Asians in her whole life. She mentioned discrimination from Chinese Americans toward her at Chinatown when she visited California. She did not feel comfortable with Chinese Americans in California unlike she did with me. She told me if I am a part of a society, she would be willing to try to get to know Asians. This meant she sees me as not a part of a society, a foreigner. Our dialog illuminates the relationship she has with the dominant Anglo culture. Ou Johnson identified herself as “American Asian.” As she said, I also sensed that she did not have a clear awareness of her Chinese background. She may know it unconsciously, but cannot distinguish what it is. She roughly compared her
identity with what she imagined mine to be: “I feel like I'm American versus with the Chinese background, versus you, Japanese, just the opposite.” What she meant was that although her appearance is not completely Anglo, she lives in Anglo dominant culture, but not I (who temporarily stay in this society).

Also, she thinks people perceive her as American even before she utters a word. The way she carries herself and also her appearance (for an Asian she's got big eyes and is tall) does not contribute to biased behavior toward her as an Oriental female, whereas her brother, who has more Mongoloid features feels that he is treated more like an Asian, or non-English speaker. As Jankowski (1995, 84) pointed out “there was the “acceptable” nonwhite middle class, which included those who had been highly educated and were professionals.”

Thus, Ou Johnson perceived me as Japanese, an Asian, and also a foreigner. I think we established rapport, and she told me that talking to me helped her learn something she has never thought about. She wanted to know my point of view as Japanese or as an Asian woman. That is why we had a long talk in front of the elevator in her building after the taped interview. However, at the same time, she perceived me as a second-class ethnic person in relation to her perception of herself as American Chinese.

In contrast to Ou Johnson, Michelle Brown, a Mexican American woman, knows her position in society. Michelle Brown was much clearer about what is missing in her life as a Mexican woman. Although she had difficulty in identifying herself in relation to Anglo culture, unconsciously she knows where she belongs. In her speech, her position between American and Mexican culture is evident through her identification of herself
and her family by the words 'they' and 'we.' When I asked her how she perceived herself, she answered:

That's a really hard question because we came here when I was a year old and I never lived in Mexico again. So I was raised here, but like my parents still don't speak a lot of English. We speak Spanish to my parents. They just never really took hold of the language, now except they sounded funny. So they don't want speak it, even thought they understand a lot of it. They just didn't really jump right in. But in a lot of the ways they assimilated us very much. We assimilated all Christmas customs, all the holidays here. We don't keep many Mexican holidays. Actually, we don't keep any.

This is how she described the relationship she has with the dominant culture.

Unconsciously she knows where she belongs, but the boundary is vague. When I asked her which side (either American or Mexican) she is on, she could not answer it right away. She said, “I'm probably more American than anything.” Also when I asked her how she identifies herself, she could not answer the question. Rationally, she is a Mexican American.

At the same time, she differentiated where she is very clearly in relation to telecommuting. “I think in some ways I'm right in between because obviously what I'm doing [telecommuting] is right in between [home and waged workplace] and I'm getting benefit from each side [being a worker and also being a mother] as I still have not given up one thing for another.” In other words, she feels she is fulfilling both American and Mexican roles by working from home and cherishing quality time with her children. However, as she confessed, Michelle’s ‘in between’ position might be more on the American side in comparison to Joyce Lee-Tan who perceives herself in between American and Chinese culture.
As Etter-Lewis (1991, 47) points out, "...women of color suffer double discrimination." Michelle Brown acknowledged the existence of gender and racial ethnic discrimination at work while both Chinese-born and American-born Chinese women felt that they have been discriminated against because they are women, but not because they are part of a racial ethnic minority. Michelle thinks being a minority woman gives her double disadvantage:

I think minority women sometimes have a harder time. Because you have the woman issue, and it's not always the case, depends on your working environment. But there is an issue that you are woman. And there is the issue on top of that you are minority. So you have kind of two strikes against you at times and you cannot help these things against you.

In a study on racial ethnic minority women superintendents in an urban district, race was the definite factor besides gender (Tallerico et al. 1994, 446). Tallerico explains that this is because "gender and racial issues are embedded in the rubric of politics." Being a minority woman is different from just being a woman because as Michelle pointed out, on top of everything, she is minority and tends to be discriminated against. Then, if she is a woman, there tends to be another discrimination. Michelle perceives her treatment at work this way:

I have not noticed it [discrimination] a lot in here. ...But I do believe that it exists. And like I said again it's once they know, if they don't know, if I don't say anything [that she is Mexican], they don't know. Sometimes, I won't say anything because they can find out it later after they already like me. That's too late [to discriminate against her as a Mexican woman] (laughter). You know what I mean?

Michelle acknowledges that if she says she is Mexican, people might have prejudice toward her. So she would not start by giving information about her ethnic background. She described how people have been treating her:

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Sometimes people still make comments like oh, you got a job because you're minority or they let you do that because you are woman and minority. Or that guy likes you just because you are a woman, I do hear that. I hear that in here [at work] sometimes you know very subtly, but..

Although Michelle Brown passes as Anglo (especially after she got married and took an American last name), she is the one person in my study who had a very high awareness of who she is and where she is in the society as both minority and a woman.

At any rate, Michelle is not recognizable ethnically and fades into society. Therefore, her experiences may have been different from other Mexican women who look different from her. This finding is consistent with Reay (1996, 63): usually, those who have a lighter skin color have totally different experiences. “Just as bell hooks points out that the very light skinned black woman, by having the ability to pass as white, has access to a totally different perspective on ‘race’ from someone who is dark skinned and will never pass” (hooks, 1984 in Reay 1996). Michelle mentions the difficulty of being outnumbered at work that:

I think there's more problems of being a woman than the other [being a man] because a majority of them, people that work at here are usually a man, white males. So I think sometimes it's a little hard for them, especially the older generation you know. There's a young woman coming into some meetings and telling me you cannot do something. So it's probably a little bit of affecting a woman. And I’m young.

Being young, and especially, being a woman in her work environment gives Michelle some difficulties. However, she says it is just an initial thing and after people get to know her, she is fine. She does not think she runs away from those negative experiences by telecommuting because she still needs to come to the office and meet new people.
Combining both working at office and telecommuting enable Michelle to maintain her career and mothering at this moment of her life.

In contrast, Anna Kingston, an African American woman, who wanted to perceive herself or present herself only “as a middle class female.” This may have been because of the change Black people experienced in recent history. Winant (1995, 41) explains the recent change of Black identity from “Negro-to-Black conversion experience” that is, release from slave mind-set to “true Black identity” which affected every black’s social and cultural life. As a result, middle class Blacks and working class Blacks are clearly distinguished.

First, I explained to Anna Kingston how I got interested in interviewing racial ethnic minority women. Then, I told her that I wanted to ask about her race and ethnicity background. She answered just “as a middle class female.” She did not use any racial and ethnic term to describe herself in the race and ethnicity category question and said “I don't know that what you meant.” So I reworded my question to describe myself as a Japanese woman and an international student at this moment. Then, she replied reluctantly as “...well, a Black middle class.”

She was not only perceiving or presenting herself as middle class, but also maintained that there are not many differences between Black and Caucasian cultures. When I asked her both women’s and mother’s roles in her culture, she told me that she does not see any differences between them and those of Anglo society:

No, difference, I don't think. I have to admit you know blacks have been, I don't know how it was in Africa before, they came over. But we probably lost a lot of our original culture. We kind of are blending into the society, the white society. So at this point, that's what I'm saying it's basically the
same. But years ago probably was not the same but I think we are blending in more with the white society now. Things are definitely changing, so not much difference.

She might have felt that I have prejudice against her or Blacks. So she might have wanted to clarify it that Blacks have been in the States for a long time and assimilate to the dominant culture, especially her personally. So she may have reacted to my question when I asked her about women's roles in Black culture:

I have to admit I've talked to White people. And I've talked to Black people, and Indian people. And I really cannot see the difference as far as the role is concerned in the family. I really don't see the difference. It all depends on the personality of the male and the female in the family. And I really cannot see the difference. Sometimes a White family has a domineering husband which I also see in the Black family and the man controls every-thing. Sometimes in the Black family, a domineering wife [controls]. I really cannot see the much difference. I don't know that what you're looking for.

I felt that she wanted to demonstrate that Black people are not different, or not inferior, in comparison to Whites. When I asked her whether there were not many differences between Anglo and Black culture or not, she said:

Personally, I don't see it. I have to admit I live in a community where almost every body is white and I don't know whole that makes a difference or not. But I'm sure it does.

She insisted on speaking only about herself, nor about black culture or historical factors.

This may be because of her awareness of her class and the way she lives, or that the place she lives shields her from differences. In any way, I felt that she wanted to locate herself where she sees she is in the middle class where differences between Blacks and Whites may not be as clear as in other social classes.
Then, I asked her whether she has been discriminated against as a Black woman or not. She admits that there is discrimination, but says that it is subtle:

I think subtle discrimination. I really think a lot of times people don't realize they're being discriminated, they're discriminated against another person. You know I've probably done things myself to whites, or to others. If you do something like this. I wish they would tell me, so I would not do it again. You know something that they're probably skeptical telling you and just like, I do references sometimes, but I don't come up and say why did you do that, whatever, I try to be tactful and let them know that that did not go too well.

When I asked her whether people make assumptions about her ethnicity or not (Smith 1995), she answered right away.

Oh, Yes! Well, you know (silence). I think so. Sometimes I think maybe I'm been paranoid. Maybe they are not really. Because you know television tends to influence people in a certain way and people make statements because of things they hear on T.V. negative about Blacks whatever.

She feels that she is discriminated against because of her race, but this does not mean that she is different from the dominant culture.

I asked her whether working from home keeps her away from subtle prejudice or not. She responded: “well, you're working from home. You are not dealing with subtle prejudice around the office. It's more comfortable.” She gave me some examples of common prejudice she has encountered:

You have less capabilities you know since you are not less intelligent. ...Statement was made at work to me. You feel something like this, you get undertone that this person bluntly made a statement that he went a doctor. And a nurse was giving him a blood test or something. And he said, ‘and she was Black, and I was amazed. She did a real good job,’ things like that. I was amazed, she did a real job you know. You have to prove yourself first. You hear something like that.
She knows and has experienced prejudice, and is sensitive to it. She may be tired of it. Therefore, when I interviewed her as a Black woman telecommuter, she might have been very protective from any generalization that I did not mean to do. Right after I interviewed her, I did not feel that we had a deep conversation. As I listened to our dialogue again and again, I felt that she did not or could not trust me as her interviewer, which affected our whole conversation.

When I asked whether working from home could be really good, because she would not have to deal with negative experiences like this, she reacted in this way:

Yes, I can still get things done. But the company policy is that this is mainly between your boss and yourself. They don't have a set rule saying that you can or you cannot work from home. I'm trying to think how to say this. They'd rather for you to be at the work location most of the time. But you have an option of working from home, if it's necessary.

Perhaps she meant that she cannot run away from negative experiences completely and my assumption is naive.

Because of Anna's perception of me (as a Japanese student), the conversation did not go deeper. Cannon, Higginbothaw, and Leung (1988, 450) have pointed out that "when Black women felt assured that the research was worthwhile, they were eager to participate." I do not think Anna felt my study was worthy. One reason might be that her acquaintance referred me to Anna. So in a way, Anna could not refuse to be interviewed. A second reason might be that as she was raised in a working-class family, she might have changed her social status to middle class, and Anna might have wanted to be sure I would perceive her as middles class.
Conclusions

Interviewing racial ethnic minority women telecommuters in Omaha, Nebraska, shows that there are differences and similarities among them. Ethnic identity was important for each of them, especially concerning their gender ideals and the division of household labor and childcare. There are more similarities among them at work. As Amott and Matthaei, (1991, 13) argue “…there is no common experience of gender across race-ethnicity and class, of race-ethnicity across class and gender lines, or of class across race-ethnic and gender.” Racial and ethnic backgrounds contributed to important differences in my study.

Three of my participants see telecommuting as a means of accommodations their needs for paid work and their domestic roles. These are Joyce Lee-Tan, Michelle Brown, and Ou Johnson. When they telecommute, they can overcome the space and time conflict between work and home. Though Joyce Lee-Tan lives outside of Nebraska, she still could reach out to the office in Omaha. This cyber reach gives her higher productivity, which has a positive effect on her household duties as a Chinese American wife. In other words, she feels that she fulfills a feminine role. Her racial and ethnic background has encouraged her to take on more household duties as a good wife as she telecommutes. This applies in the case of Michelle Brown, a Mexican American woman, too. In Michelle Brown’s case, she may not realize the significance of her racial ethnic or cultural based background, but subtly expressed it through the conversation we had. Telecommuting reinforces telecommuter’s ideas of themselves as members of specific ethnic groups among my participants. Besides Anna Johnson, three of my participants
had clear cut ideas of the roles of wives and / or mothers. They think that because they can stay home, it is easier for them to fulfill tasks as a good wife and / or a mother.

In the interviewing process, I did not feel that I was perceived as an insider. My participants perceived me as Japanese and / or Asian, and a foreign student. Unlike Gilbert (1994), who perceived herself in her study as a complete outsider, I see my position in my research as neither insider nor outsider (Mascia-Lees and her colleagues 1989 in Katz 1994, 72; Nast 1994, 57), because the place I positioned myself was in the middle between American and racial ethnic minority.

My Japanese background impacted on knowledge produced and the study results: Reflexivity between my participants and me reveals their identities as both racial ethnic minority women and as Americans in the relation to the dominant culture which consciously and unconsciously intertwined within them. As a result, telecommuting reinforces telecommuter's ideas of themselves as racial ethnic minority women in the realm of home in the case of Joyce Lee-Tan and Michelle Brown.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS

Summary

Since the 1970s, companies in the United States have been in the process of downsizing, in order to survive the globalization of the economy. Information technology has advanced and has removed boundaries in organizations and has affected office space and facility usage. All employers can now have access to same the resources through computer network system. In such a situation, technologies such as computer modems and facsimile machines have enabled some employees to work from home for part of their work hours or even full-time rather than physically commuting. This labor process (called telecommuting) has become popular as technologies advanced.

At the same time, geographers have come to understand the importance of gender in analysis. Before then, women’s lives were invisible in geographic research. Ignoring gender produces inadequate and incomplete geographical knowledge.

Many women pursue telecommuting arrangements for different reasons than many men do. Many women try to meet family and household commitments by working from home. That is, because gender identity is closely tied to work, both paid and unpaid. It is said that like other labor processes, telecommuting is fundamentally gendered. Women often face the ‘second shift,’ bearing primary responsibility for household work in addition to their paid work. Whether a woman encounters this conflict or not depends on how she sees herself. Some women are content with what they do, some are not.
Existing literature on Anglo telecommuters suggests that telecommuting enhances productivity, flexibility, and time with family, and reduces business-related expenses such as office clothes, gas and so on. When the economy restructured in the 1970s, many women started working for paid work because one income was no longer good enough. However, many women's roles at home have not been changed concomitantly with women's paid work. These, women still need to be in charge of both household duties and childcare. A little is known about Anglo women's telecommuting, however, racial ethnic minority women's lives have not been studied.

Karrakar (1992) suggested that self-definition of femininity and self-evaluation of gender-appropriate role behavior are related to race. However, racial and ethnic minority women's lives have not been studied. As much literature pointed out, gender, race, and/or ethnic categories are not natural ideas, but are socially constructed. This socially constructed gender, race and/or ethnicity influences the spatial relations of reproduction of domestic work and production of waged work. One reason why women start telecommuting is the work-family conflict; that is, women who have paid work also have to face the demands of household work and childcare. So how one's race and/or ethnicity might affect women to choose to work from home was my concern.

In this situation, I decided to conduct interviews with racial ethnic minority women who telecommute in and to Omaha, Nebraska. Omaha is the biggest city in Nebraska. Minority population here is below national average. This was a suitable place to conduct a study when existing literature located in more the West and the East coasts.
Thus, the purpose of my study was to bring not only gender, but also race and ethnicity into geography. In order to get good research results, I had to know how racial and/or ethnic minority women telecommuters work from home, how their race-ethnicity based cultural background affect their daily lives and so on. Also, I wanted to see the life of minorities not through the lens of Anglo scholars, but from an intersubjective point of view by using a reflexive approach. Interviewing was my tool to collect information from racial ethnic minority women telecommuters.

**Contributions of This Study**

Four research questions provided the focus for this study: (1) are there any ethnic differences in the relative popularity or experience of telecommuting among female Omaha telecommuters? (2) how is the division of domestic work in telecommuters’ households affected by their racial and/or ethnic backgrounds? (3) how does telecommuting reinforce or contest telecommuter’s ideas of themselves as members of specific ethnic groups? (4) does telecommuting help women to feel that they are fulfilling a feminine role? This section addresses each of these questions, in order.

I could see race-ethnicity based differences in the experiences of telecommuting among female Omaha telecommuters. For instance, in the case of Joyce Lee-Tan, a Chinese American, a woman can be a caretaker (which is her conception of a Chinese woman) because she can stay home and work. As a worker, Joyce can be away from her co-workers assumptions of her ethnicity, so is Anna who has subtle discrimination.
My participants are all professionals, which might keep to explain why they do not experience conflicts associated with the second shift. However, this finding may also be related to race and ethnicity. My study shows that my participants' private lives are based primarily on their racial and ethnic backgrounds and their value. For instance, Joyce Lee-Tan can make soups for her husband, that is, how she shows her love. She says if she commutes to work somewhere else, she cannot be a caretaker in this way.

The other example is Michelle Brown. She told me that her mother, who is very Mexican, is happy with Michelle working at home. That is because Michelle can stay home with her children and can do more household work. As Segura (1994) pointed out, Michelle admits that mothering is the most important thing in her life. Two little lives are relying on her. Obviously, she inherited this value from her mother.

Though Anna Kingston does not care for full-time telecommuting, she told me that working from home as a part of her work hours helps her to be away from black discrimination. This is clearly not a concern among Anglo telecommuters as reported in the existing literature.

Telecommuting definitely reinforces telecommuter's ideas of themselves as members of specific ethnic groups among my participants. Although two of my participants (Ou Johnson and Michelle Brown) had difficulty in identifying themselves, dialogues we had showed how they perceived themselves. I could see their self-awareness as racial and / or ethnic minority women. Women in my study perceived themselves in relation to the dominant culture. Therefore, each of them had a different position in this society.
Joyce Lee-Tan, who was raised overseas and also in the United States, sees herself in between two cultures. When she is with Asian friends, she is perceived as very American and she feels very American, too. And when she is with non-Asian friends, they see her very Chinese and she also feels very Chinese. However, in terms of home, she says she is more Chinese and in terms of work, she is more American. What she meant is that race / ethnicity do not bother her as a professional worker. But as a wife, her values come from her racial ethnic, and cultural background. People whom Joyce associates with privately are almost Chinese or Chinese Americans including her husband who might have intensified her Chineseness more in her private life.

In Ou Johnson's case, she told me that she is "American Asian." She lives in Anglo culture with her Anglo husband. However, as she described herself as an American Asian, her position is not exactly the same as that of Anglo women.

Michelle Brown had difficulty in identifying herself verbally because she came here when she was a baby. She telecommutes in order to get what she wants in her life, that is, being both a good worker and a mother. Although she is a lawyer, she does not mind prioritizing mothering as first. Many of her values come from her background, Mexican; although she says she thinks and acts more like an American.

Anna Kingston did not want to be differentiated as a minority black woman in comparison to the rest of the women in this study. That is maybe because Anna’s ancestors came to the U.S. long time ago. She says Blacks have blended into the dominant culture. Thus, she does not see any differences between Anglo and Black culture. All women in this study got their education in the United States, but their family
values might have been different from those of African Americans because their parents were born in overseas, who might have carried over their own cultural background into their family life. Anna tried to present herself only as "a middle class." She was annoyed that she might have been seen or labeled as a Black woman by me.

Telecommuting helps two women (Joyce Lee-Tan, a Chinese-born American woman and Michelle Brown, a Mexican-born American woman) to feel that they are fulfilling a feminine role. Because they telecommute they can manage time for more household duties and also can work on relationships with their family members.

Overall, telecommuting helps women in my study to accommodate work and household duties. Three out of four women are satisfied with working from home. Every woman's situation in my study was different. In Joyce Lee-Tan's case, she likes telecommuting so much that she does not think that she will go back to work in an office. So too for Ou Johnson, although it is not her own choice, but her company's. Michelle Brown will come back to work as a full-time on-site worker after her two children go to school all day. Ann Kingston will keep on being a half-time telecommuter to accommodate her private and work life.

**Future Research Direction**

Two directions for future research are suggested by the results of this study. First, a study focused on one racial and/or ethnic group might show not only individual differences, but also similarities in a group. In other words, generalization could be possible. Further, comparison among different racial and/or ethnic groups with more
participants might reveal generalizable racial and/or ethnic based differences among racial ethnic minority women. Comparisons between men and women from different racial/ethnic groups would facilitate further, in-depth exploration of the research questions addressed in this study.

Second, further examination of reflexivity is clearly called for. As Linstead (1994) suggests, as researchers develop as professionals, the more likely they are to lose the capacity to become involved in the experience and through that to understand it. The more they observe everyday life, the easier it is to distance themselves from it, and perhaps explain it, but the harder it becomes to understand it. Further research into reflexivity might reveal the relationship among researchers and researched.
Appendix

Revised Interview Questions

Working from home:
1. How do you like working from home so far?
2. What was your motivation to start telecommuting?
   
   Was it related to your working environment or more related to household reasons?
   
   Who decided you working from home? Was it you, your boss, or others?
3. Is it different from working at office?

Family and work:
4. What is your job title?
5. What is your job duty?
6. Tell me about your family and its structure

Race-ethnicity background:
7. Were you born in the US?
   
   How long have you been here?
8. How do you identify yourself?
9. Tell me being a _____ woman in Omaha.
10. Tell me what are the women’s roles in your culture.
    
    How about are mothers’ roles?
11. Is working from home important for you to fulfill wife’s and / or mother’s role as a _____ woman?
12. How are women’s roles in your culture different from that of Anglo American women?
13. Which is more important for your being home as a wife and / or mother, or making a living outside?
14. Is your answer expected women’s attitude in your group or not?
15. Do people make assumptions of your ethnicity?
    
    How about being an ethnic minority women? Is it different from an ethnic man?
16. Does working from home keep you away from negative experiences?
17. By working from home, could you be a woman who you think you are supposed to be or you want to be?

Household duty:
18. How do you share the household work with your family members?
    
    Are there any rules between you and your husband?
19. Is the way you do the household work related to your culture?
20. Do you think you and your husband have equal burdens of domestic work?
21. How do you feel about sharing the household work so far?
    
    Is it fair to you?
22. Has it changed after you started working from home?
23. Do you think telecommuting might enable you to be a good wife and a mother?
24. Do you think a _____woman is expected to juggle both household work and paid work?
25. Is telecommuting an answer for you to solve the time and space conflict?

Company treatment:
26. Does your company treat you the way you want them to?
27. Has your salary changed since you started telecommuting?
28. Did your company provide you office facilities?
29. Have you ever discriminated against being a _____woman at work?
   Now, you do not have to deal with it?
30. How could you think of advantage and disadvantage of telecommuting?
   How about your boss?
31. Are you satisfied with telecommuting?
   What attracts you most?
32. Do you imagine if you were to have a child, you would keep on telecommuting?
33. Do you think after your children grown-up and you still work from home?
   Do you have some plans for your career?
34. Will you keep on working under this working arrangement?

Space:
35. Does your office still have a desk for you?
36. How does this working arrangement change your journey to work?
37. After starting telecommuting, how have you changed your daily life such as to get groceries, to take children school or some lessons and so on?
38. Where do you work in your house?
39. Do you have a separate workspace?
   Yes-Tell me how you spend your time between your office and the rest of the house.
   How does your husband like your office?
   No-Where does you usually work?
   Do you have an office on purpose or just an economic reason?
40. Do you stay close to your children when you work rather than having a separate room?
41. What impact has telecommuting given you?
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