Examining and Explaining Racial/Ethnic Variation in the Gender Division of Household Labor

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Background

The gender division of household labor has received increasing attention in the past few decades as scholars have focused on both the explanations for this division as well as the consequences of the time men and women spend in housework. In addressing the question of why men and women perform certain types of tasks and why they allocate their time differently, the literature posits three explanations for the gender division of housework, including the time availability perspective (Coverman 1985), the relative resources framework (Blood and Wolf 1960; Becker 1981), and the gender perspective (West and Zimmerman 1987).

Attempting to address the importance of men's and women's housework contributions, this literature generally suggests negative consequences for women when they spend substantially more time doing housework than men. These negative consequences include a direct, negative effect between the time women spend on housework and their market earnings (Coverman 1983; Hersch 1985, 1991; Hersch & Stratton 1994; McAllister 1990; Shelton & Firestone 1988) as well as a positive association between women's household labor time and both women's and men's reports of disagreements (Lye & Biblarz 1993) and women's likelihood of experiencing depression (Glass & Fujimoto 1994; Golding 1990; Kurdek 1993; Ross et al. 1983; Shamir 1986).

Given that gender gaps in wages and income vary across racial groups, one might also expect that gender gaps in household labor might vary by race/ethnicity. For example, gender gaps in married men's and women's earnings are more pronounced for whites than blacks (Cotter et al. 2000). Given the relationship between housework and wages, one might expect to see a larger gender gap in housework among whites than among blacks. Prior research suggests this may be the case, but sample sizes are small, with Hispanics and Asians often excluded from analyses (John and Shelton 1997; Shelton and John 1993; Ross 1987; Maret and Finlay 1984). Moreover, previous studies of blacks and whites are based on data that are more than twenty years old and findings are often contradictory.

The purpose of the current study is to clarify the racial/ethnic differences in the gender division of household labor among white, black, Asian, and Hispanic married men

1

and women, to explore the covariates of housework, and to assess whether predictors of housework vary by race/ethnicity. The analysis employs recent time diary data from the American Time Use Survey (2003 and 2004) with samples large enough to investigate differences across racial/ethnic groups, including Asians and Hispanics.

Data and Methods

This analysis examines respondent-reported time diary data from the 2003 and 2004 American Time Use Surveys (ATUS). The sample is restricted to white, black, Hispanic, and Asian American individuals aged 18 to 64 with a spouse present in the home and consists of 15,577 respondents (7,191 males and 8,386 females). The non-Hispanic white subsample contains 12,369 respondents (5,703 males and 6,666 females); the Hispanic subsample consists of 1,795 respondents (807 males and 988 females); the black non-Hispanic subsample contains 925 (453 males and 472 females); the non-Hispanic Asian subsample consists of 488 respondents (228 males and 260 females).

The outcome variable in this analysis is the respondent's average minutes per day spent in housework activities. Observed covariates include measures of time availability – employment, presence of children by age, presence of additional household adults – as well as measures of relative resources – age, relative age, education, relative education, weekly earnings, and relative earnings. Control variables include the school enrollment status of the respondent and respondent's spouse, whether the diary day was a weekend or holiday, and the total number of activities reported on the diary day.

Preliminary Results

Table 1 displays the mean minutes per day spent doing housework for Hispanic, Asian, white, and black men and women and tests for significant differences. Hispanic women average the greatest number of minutes per day in total housework (195), followed by white women (158) and Asian women (155). Black women spend the least amount of time in total housework, averaging 119 minutes per day. White men averaged the greatest amount of time in total housework (96 minutes per day), followed by black men (56) and Asian men (65). Hispanic men spent the least amount of time in housework (77). The findings in Table 1 suggest that significant differences do exist across these racial/ethnic groups in the amount of time men and women spend in housework.

The ratios of women's to men's time in total housework reveal that the largest gap in housework time occurs among Hispanics, where women spend three times as much time in housework per day than do men. The gap is similar among Asians (2.8). The ratio of women's to men's housework time is smaller among both whites (1.7) and blacks, with the smallest gap occurring among blacks where women do 1.5 times as much housework as men.

Tables 2 and 3 display preliminary OLS regression results for the estimates of housework time for each gender and racial/ethnic group. Differences between men and women and across racial/ethnic groups in the significance levels of the observed covariates suggest that the predictors of housework vary by gender and by race/ethnicity. The presence of children and additional adults in the household are important variables for predicting housework time for white, Hispanic, and Asian women, but not for blacks, while the employment variables are important predictors for women in each racial/ethnic group. Thus, time availability indicators predict women's housework time, while indicators of resources lend little explanatory power to the time women spend in housework with the exception of white women. For men, neither the time availability indicators nor the indicators of resources lend much explanatory power to housework time. As is the case for women, racial/ethnic differences emerge in the predictive power of these indicators for men. While, overall, time availability indicators lend little explanatory power to the housework time of men, they can better predict the housework time of white, black, and Hispanic men, while resources are a better predictor of the housework time of Asian men. What these findings suggest is that differences do exist between men and women and across racial/ethnic groups in the predictors of housework.

This preliminary analysis will be extended in the final paper. Next steps include:

(1) An additional analysis of a subsample of the population who are in dual-earner couples. This will enable an examination of another measure of relative employment (based on work hours) as well as measures of income and relative income.

(2) Formal tests for significant differences of the coefficients across racial/ethnic group in the predictors of housework.

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Table 1. Significance Tests of Mean Minutes Spent Doing Housework Each Day by
Gender and Racial/Ethnic Group

	Hispanic		Asian		White		Black		Total[a]
Women									
Total housework	195.5	b f h g	154.9	e j h	158.4	i j g	118.5	d f i	160.5
	(166.6)		(106.4)		(138.8)		(140.0)		(142.4)
N	988		260		6,666		472		8,386
Men									
Total housework	65.1	b h g	56.0	e k j h	95.6	c i j g	76.5	k i	88.9
	(123.6)		(94.4)		(137.2)		(133.3)		(134.9)
N	807		228		5,703		453		7,191
Ratio (W/M)									
Total housework	3.0		2.8		1.7		1.5		1.8

Standard deviations are shown in parentheses

[a] Total population includes 18-64 year olds who are married with a spouse present and who identify themselves as Hispanic, White(NH), Black(NH), or Asian(NH)

[b] Difference between Hispanic and Total significant at $p<0.05$

[c] Difference between White and Total significant at $p<0.05$

[d] Difference between Black and Total significant at $p<0.05$

[e] Difference between Asian and Total significant at $p<0.05$

[f] Difference between Hispanic and Black significant at $p<0.05$

[g] Difference between Hispanic and White significant at $p<0.05$

[h] Difference between Hispanic and Asian significant at $p<0.05$

[i] Difference between White and Black significant at $p<0.05$

[j] Difference between White and Asian significant at $p<0.05$

[k] Difference between Black and Asian significant at $p<0.05$

Table 2: Predicting Housework (minutes per day) by Racial/Ethnic Group: Married Women age 18-64

	Hispanic		White		Black		Asian	
Time Availability								
Presence of children by age								
Children <5 years old in household	-8.18		7.23		-9.03		6.64	
	(11.92)		(5.34)		(18.45)		(18.03)	
Children 5-11 years old in household	23.03	*	16.84	***	4.50		20.04	
	(10.29)		(4.27)		(15.35)		(15.31)	
Male children 12-18 years old in household	49.93	***	9.91	*	-11.00		51.92	*
	(13.05)		(5.14)		(17.33)		(20.48)	
Female children 12-18 years old in household	27.90	*	17.29	***	-7.13		12.40	
	(13.15)		(5.23)		(18.94)		(19.94)	
Presence of additional household adult [b]	28.38	*	19.61	***	20.46		-17.79	
	(11.36)		(4.49)		(14.28)		(17.21)	
Employment								
Both husband and wife employed	-89.44	***	-76.17	***	-53.78	***	-69.52	***
	(10.68)		(4.28)		(15.61)		(16.70)	
Neither husband nor wife employed	59.91	**	-21.93	**	69.96	**	18.21	
	(19.82)		(7.83)		(22.84)		(35.94)	
Wife employed, husband not employed	-148.02	***	-88.95	***	-61.11	**	-99.79	***
	(21.04)		(7.03)		(21.21)		(24.90)	
Resources								
Age	1.25	*	1.36	***	-0.91		1.69	*
	(.55)		(.21)		(.77)		(.81)	
Relative Age [c]								
Wife at least 3 years younger than husband	14.41		1.46		3.91		-0.38	
	(10.26)		(3.62)		(12.76)		(14.09)	
Husband at least 3 years younger than wife	-3.36		-16.46	**	-19.24		40.42	
	(14.94)		(6.28)		(20.36)		(27.09)	
Education [d]								
High School	-14.11		-17.71	*	-28.07		19.61	
	(12.52)		(8.47)		(20.86)		(33.60)	
Some College	-31.67	+	-24.88	**	-6.79		21.01	
	(16.24)		(8.85)		(22.80)		(34.35)	
College Graduate	-27.72		-21.24	*	-31.96		14.19	
	(18.24)		(9.29)		(26.71)		(31.69)	
Beyond College	-37.81		-33.46	**	-47.15		2.16	
	(28.20)		(10.43)		(32.54)		(32.87)	
Relative Education [e]								
Husband has a higher level of education than wife	-3.35		4.98		-2.03		-28.21	
	(12.20)		(4.16)		(15.72)		(17.61)	
Wife has a higher level of education than husband	-19.80		-1.86		-8.55		19.19	
	(13.87)		(4.35)		(15.24)		(17.71)	

Table 8 continued	Hispanic		White		Black		Asian	
Household Income	-4.07	*	-1.02		0.07		2.34	
	(1.69)		(.74)		(2.11)		(2.55)	
Wife in school	-71.35	+	-30.07	*	-32.55		71.05	+
	(39.77)		(12.30)		(28.61)		(40.05)	
Husband in school	232.17	+	-2.70					
	(120.08)		(63.36)					
Diary day is a weekend	-3.07		38.57	***	25.91	+	3.82	
	(10.27)		(3.82)		(13.28)		(14.63)	
Diary day is a holiday	-39.64		38.33	**	72.08	+	-105.77	*
	(34.98)		(14.27)		(36.72)		(51.25)	
Total number of activities	0.26		1.16	***	2.55	***	2.09	**
	(.60)		(.19)		(.66)		(.79)	
Intercept	216.03	***	137.21	***	147.73	**	36.93	
	(31.41)		(14.47)		(49.46)		(54.83)	
R-squared	0.233		0.107		0.181		0.229	
(N) Total Women	988		6666		472		260	

[b] No additional household adult omitted   [c] Husband works >5 hours/week more than wife omitted

[d] Husband and wife's ages within 2 years omitted [e] Less than high school omitted

[f] Husband and wife have same level of education omitted   [g] Husband's weekly earnings higher than wife's omitted

*** p<.001   ** p<.01   * p<.05   + p <.10

Table 3: Predicting Housework (minutes per day) by Racial/Ethnic Group: Married Men age 18-64

	Hispanic		White		Black		Asian	
Time Availability								
Presence of children by age								
Children <5 years old in household	20.06	*	-7.78		31.44	+	4.98	
	(10.01)		(5.25)		(16.03)		(15.50)	
Children 5-11 years old in household	7.43		-1.96		-16.82		-10.33	
	(8.43)		(4.31)		(13.26)		(13.26)	
Male children 12-18 years old in household	-3.80		-0.02		40.06	*	-22.57	
	(10.89)		(5.34)		(15.85)		(21.23)	
Female children 12-18 years old in household	18.87	+	-2.38		1.82		-0.93	
	(10.76)		(5.29)		(14.91)		(19.59)	
Presence of additional household adult[b]	-1.65		10.70	*	-6.37		12.36	
	(9.28)		(4.65)		(14.54)		(16.68)	
Employment								
Both husband and wife employed	13.90		4.91		25.86	+	17.83	
	(8.83)		(4.17)		(14.85)		(14.38)	
Neither husband nor wife employed	15.63		84.59	***	29.84		2.21	
	(19.52)		(8.44)		(27.19)		(34.14)	
Wife employed, husband not employed	49.41	**	110.88	***	45.91	*	27.93	
	(17.05)		(7.74)		(20.02)		(33.03)	
Resources								
Age	1.18	*	-0.08		0.34		2.67	**
	(.49)		(.21)		(.73)		(.87)	
Relative Age[c]								
Wife at least 3 years younger than husband	-0.58		2.16		25.03	*	-11.14	
	(8.47)		(3.76)		(12.49)		(13.95)	
Husband at least 3 years younger than wife	4.68		0.00		30.35		-10.32	
	(13.81)		(5.95)		(18.63)		(31.89)	
Education[d]								
High School	-3.10		3.61		-31.31		50.16	
	(10.42)		(8.03)		(23.21)		(39.58)	
Some College	15.54		-1.03		-30.23		28.41	
	(12.93)		(8.52)		(25.49)		(39.32)	
College Graduate	17.97		-8.33		-23.66		8.29	
	(16.70)		(9.01)		(29.00)		(39.92)	
Beyond College	-21.82		-16.51	+	26.67		-12.35	
	(22.43)		(9.99)		(35.91)		(40.98)	
Relative Education[e]								
Husband has a higher level of education than wife	-11.04		1.06		-8.23		-15.43	
	(11.19)		(4.49)		(15.21)		(14.86)	
Wife has a higher level of education than husband	2.25		-5.99		-4.85		-32.71	
	(9.99)		(4.41)		(13.66)		(20.74)	

Table 9 continued	Hispanic		White		Black		Asian	
Household Income	2.93	*	2.97	***	1.54		-3.02	
	(1.45)		(.78)		(2.50)		(2.80)	
Wife in school	-49.51		-62.15	*	-56.49		-12.80	
	(40.71)		(30.92)		(56.28)		(101.88)	
Husband in school	-5.22		-34.41	*	-21.42		-21.54	
	(33.76)		(15.71)		(45.81)		(70.47)	
Diary day is a weekend	43.03	***	62.34	***	15.40		25.93	+
	(8.07)		(3.88)		(12.46)		(13.67)	
Diary day is a holiday	-22.29		54.35	***	15.97		-46.79	
	(32.47)		(14.14)		(37.73)		(59.53)	
Total number of activities	0.05		0.83	***	1.08		0.76	
	(.64)		(.25)		(.82)		(1.07)	
Intercept	-47.64	+	19.60		5.96		-36.82	
	(26.62)		(14.91)		(53.67)		(62.42)	
R-squared	0.078		0.101		0.075		0.166	
(N) Total Men	807		5703		453		228	

[b] No additional household adult omitted   [c] Husband works >5 hours/week more than wife omitted

[d] Husband and wife's ages within 2 years omitted   [e] Less than high school omitted

[f] Husband and wife have same level of education omitted   [g] Husband's weekly earnings higher than wife's omitted

*** p<.001   ** p<.01   * p<.05   + p <.10