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*Descriptive Finding*

### **The gender gap in the United States: Housework across racialized groups**

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## Contents

1	Introduction	1068
2	Methods and analytical strategy	1069
2.1	Dependent and independent variables	1071
2.2	Models	1072
3	Results and discussions	1073
4	Conclusions	1075
5	Funding	1076
	References	1077

## **The gender gap in the United States: Housework across racialized groups**

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### **Abstract**

#### **BACKGROUND**

Most resource-based theoretical frameworks in housework research are tested and further developed based on ‘average’ patterns. Consequently, in countries like the United States these frameworks rely heavily on the patterns among white women in relation to white men. As such, the resource-based factors identified by the frameworks may work to estimate the housework division of white Americans rather than any other groups, particularly racialized women and men.

#### **OBJECTIVE**

We test the extent to which resource-based factors such as time availability and income can account for the gender gap in housework participation among white, Black, and Latinx women and men in the United States.

#### **METHODS**

Using the Kitagawa–Oaxaca–Blinder decomposition method, we analyze time-use diaries from the 2003–2018 American Time Use Survey.

#### **RESULTS**

We find that resource-based factors account for the gender gap in housework participation only when there are substantial resource differences between the contrasted groups, the exception being when the comparison is made with Black Americans. The results also show that when any group of women is compared with Black men, resource-based factors have little explanatory power in the intergroup time gap in housework participation.

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## **CONCLUSIONS**

The findings imply that housework research may need to pay special attention to the diverse effects of gendering and racialization on the division of housework to avoid normalizing the theoretical frameworks that only work for the dominant white groups.

## **CONTRIBUTION**

This study uses group-level decomposition analysis to compare how resource-based factors apply to the gender gap across racialized groups in the United States.

## **1. Introduction**

Quantitative housework research points out the resource-based mechanisms in explaining the differences between women and men in housework participation. These mechanisms include bargaining with partners to reduce one's housework share (Brines 1994; Greenstein 2000), the use of individual resources to outsource housework (Gupta 2007; Killewald and Gough 2010), and eschewing housework due to time constraints imposed by paid work or other obligations (Artis and Pavalko 2003; Silver and Goldscheider 1994). However, the aggregate patterns of housework participation and the resource-based explanations confirmed by such patterns are biased in favor of the simple demographic majority, as if in the context of the global north, "all the women [and men doing housework] are white" (Hull, Bell-Scott, and Smith 1982).

Although gender research scholars have long questioned the applicability of the resource-based explanations to housework participation, bringing the gender issue forward in housework research (Cooke 2006; Davis and Greenstein 2009; Kolpashnikova 2018; Kolpashnikova and Kan 2020a; West and Zimmerman 1987), to this day no quantitative study has reevaluated the ability of economic resource factors to account for the gender gap (that is, between women and men) in housework participation while taking into account the locations of intersectional oppression (Collins 1998; Crenshaw 1990; King 1988; Ransford 1980).

However, there has been an overall plea for housework theory to be revised with respect to ethnic/racial group differences, particularly in the quantitative analysis of housework among racialized women and men (Kan and Laurie 2018; Wight, Bianchi, and Hunt 2013). Our paper adds another layer to the previous research. We analyze the gender gap where the shortcomings of the explanatory power of the existing theoretical frameworks also become apparent.

Moreover, the paper highlights that the ability of theoretical frameworks to account for the gender gap varies by racialized group; i.e., the oppression faced by various groups is distinct. The comparison results create a matrix of divergent patterns

of the domestic division of labor, reflecting the distinct ‘system of oppression’ faced by each group. For instance, the discrimination faced by Latinx men is not the same as the discrimination faced by Black women. These different systems of oppression form divergent patterns of division of labor.

In this paper we use the Kitagawa–Oaxaca–Blinder decomposition method to analyze whether the intergroup differences in economic resources translate into intergroup differences in housework participation. The study addresses the principal question of whether economic resource theories operate similarly across different racialized groups. It questions the applicability of extant housework theories in the context of complex oppressive systems and unique experiences, such as observed within the United States. This exploratory study is the first step toward and a call for bespoke theories of the division of housework for racialized groups.

## **2. Methods and analytical strategy**

We use the 2003–2018 American Time Use Survey (ATUS) (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019). The ATUS is collected based on the sampling frame from the Current Population Survey (CPS). We employ ATUS over other options because the time-use estimates for unpaid work are more accurate than those derived from stylized surveys such as PSID or NSFH (Kan 2008; Kan and Pudney 2008). The analytic sample selects married individuals and those who are in common-law relationships. We also limit the sample to those who are of an economically active age; i.e., between 20 and 65 years of age.

The final analytical sample included 34,644 men’s person-days and 41,945 women’s person-days (see Tables 1 and 2). The majority (82%) of the final analytical sample report having been born in the United States. Seventy-two percent report being non-Latinx white, 7.3% non-Latinx Black, 5.9% Latinx Americans born in the United States, and 8.6% Latinx Americans born outside of the United States (referred to hereinafter as Latinx immigrant women and men).

According to the Census Bureau (2017), the Black American population varied between 12% and 13% from 2000 to 2017, whereas in our weighted sample they only represent 7.5%. This underrepresentation is because compared to the other groups a smaller proportion of the Black Americans were married or in a common-law relationship in the analyzed period. For instance, 53% of the total ATUS sample reports being married or in a common-law relationship, as opposed to only 31% of Black Americans.

**Table 1: Descriptive variables for women**

	Women (Total)	White women	Black women	US-born Latinx women	Latinx immigrant women
Housework	174.337 (151.588)	165.559 (147.361)	142.814 (139.722)	179.559 (148.055)	255.026 (170.822)
Paid work time	191.630 (244.095)	199.445 (246.435)	202.633 (251.970)	185.254 (239.166)	128.602 (211.435)
Household income	75313.382 (42758.192)	80492.734 (41776.588)	64631.675 (41270.080)	64949.183 (41197.710)	44568.592 (33196.496)
Personal income	27228.162 (31216.275)	29453.366 (31968.074)	26397.505 (29104.358)	23122.724 (26399.560)	11502.423 (18909.261)
<b>Employment status</b>					
Full time	0.503 (0.500)	0.523 (0.499)	0.552 (0.497)	0.500 (0.500)	0.317 (0.465)
Part time	0.160 (0.367)	0.172 (0.377)	0.125 (0.331)	0.140 (0.347)	0.131 (0.338)
<b>Children</b>					
No child	0.474 (0.499)	0.522 (0.500)	0.471 (0.499)	0.368 (0.482)	0.224 (0.417)
Child: Under 5	0.232 (0.422)	0.202 (0.401)	0.215 (0.411)	0.328 (0.470)	0.389 (0.488)
Child: 5–9	0.134 (0.340)	0.121 (0.326)	0.134 (0.341)	0.156 (0.363)	0.200 (0.400)
Child: 10–17	0.160 (0.366)	0.155 (0.362)	0.181 (0.385)	0.148 (0.355)	0.187 (0.390)
Household size	3.340 (1.369)	3.178 (1.266)	3.348 (1.389)	3.652 (1.515)	4.257 (1.570)
Age	42.853 (11.731)	43.745 (11.770)	44.340 (11.462)	38.362 (12.012)	39.027 (10.319)
Education	14.023 (2.907)	14.445 (2.432)	13.995 (2.449)	13.380 (2.513)	10.556 (4.039)
Weekday	0.712 (0.453)	0.713 (0.452)	0.711 (0.453)	0.709 (0.454)	0.715 (0.451)
Own home	0.778 (0.415)	0.839 (0.367)	0.665 (0.472)	0.669 (0.471)	0.519 (0.500)
Born in USA	0.820 (0.384)	0.958 (0.201)	0.851 (0.356)	1.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
<i>N</i>	41,945	29,964	3,023	2,503	3,708

**Table 2: Descriptive variables for men**

	Men (Total)	White men	Black men	US-born Latinx men	Latinx immigrant men
Housework	91.052 (124.871)	92.341 (125.072)	84.043 (122.640)	98.779 (132.434)	85.222 (125.263)
Paid work time	305.114 (279.015)	307.828 (279.875)	268.392 (283.328)	287.566 (279.871)	326.533 (273.046)
Household income	78666.081 (42287.995)	84802.386 (41299.160)	66958.214 (40196.348)	67291.666 (40463.810)	48432.726 (32531.677)
Personal income	50214.238 (39861.842)	54621.971 (40770.960)	37425.129 (34097.242)	40610.237 (34868.678)	31190.983 (26089.436)
<b>Employment status</b>					
Full time	0.806 (0.395)	0.820 (0.384)	0.703 (0.457)	0.761 (0.427)	0.820 (0.384)
Part time	0.046 (0.210)	0.041 (0.199)	0.062 (0.240)	0.055 (0.227)	0.059 (0.235)
<b>Children</b>					
No child	0.455 (0.498)	0.498 (0.500)	0.452 (0.498)	0.382 (0.486)	0.265 (0.441)
Child: Under 5	0.241 (0.428)	0.216 (0.412)	0.214 (0.410)	0.290 (0.454)	0.362 (0.481)
Child: 5–9	0.138 (0.345)	0.121 (0.326)	0.155 (0.362)	0.167 (0.373)	0.203 (0.402)
Child: 10–17	0.166 (0.372)	0.165 (0.371)	0.179 (0.384)	0.161 (0.367)	0.171 (0.376)
Household size	3.396 (1.394)	3.226 (1.280)	3.465 (1.439)	3.571 (1.400)	4.257 (1.646)
Age	43.774 (11.430)	44.461 (11.500)	45.720 (10.922)	40.336 (11.909)	40.610 (10.489)
Education	13.899 (3.102)	14.403 (2.601)	13.631 (2.372)	13.183 (2.754)	10.228 (4.091)
Weekday	0.713 (0.453)	0.715 (0.451)	0.716 (0.451)	0.706 (0.456)	0.703 (0.457)
Own home	0.772 (0.420)	0.842 (0.364)	0.650 (0.477)	0.658 (0.475)	0.515 (0.500)
Born in USA	0.818 (0.386)	0.957 (0.204)	0.845 (0.362)	1.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
<i>N</i>	34,644	24,657	2,695	2,041	3,080

## 2.1 Dependent and independent variables

Tables 1 and 2 provide descriptive statistics of the main variables for women and men. The dependent variables are represented by the time spent on housework, measured in

minutes per day. The housework categories in the present study are cooking, cleaning, shopping, maintenance, and repairs.

We included three variables measuring resources. Paid work time is measured in minutes spent on paid activities during the diary day. Household income and personal income are both measured in US dollars per annum.

Additionally, because employment status can also affect an individual's resources (access to promotion and benefits) and the work intensity of more marginalized people might vary, we included employment status variables (being a full-time or part-time employee, compared to being out of the contractual workforce) in the models as a control.

Another variable to test the time constraint is the presence of children. The presence of older children, on the other hand, provides an opportunity for parents to outsource housework to them. The age of children is measured by a categorical variable: children under 5, children of 5–9 years of age, and children of 10–17 years of age. All these groups are compared to those who report no children under 18 in the household. We also control for the household size.

We consider that gendering processes change with age and education, both measured in years (Baxter and Kane 1995; He and Zhou 2018; Hertog 2016; Zhou 2017). Moreover, time use diaries usually reveal considerable differences in individual activities by the weekday (Kolpashnikova and Kan 2020b). Thus, we also control for whether the diary day was completed on a weekday or weekend (1 = weekday, 0 = Saturday and Sunday). We also included homeownership (1 = 'owns a home,' 0 = 'otherwise') because the lifestyles of homeowners and those who live in rented homes might differ. We added year variables for each cycle of ATUS and recorded survey weights to the original sample size.

## **2.2 Models**

We employ a variant of the pooled Kitagawa–Oaxaca–Blinder decomposition with the inclusion of the group variable (Blinder 1973; Jann 2008; Kitagawa 1955; Oaxaca 1973). The decomposition models test the effects of group-level differences in resource-based factors on the group-level absolute differences in housework participation (as measured in minutes).

The twofold models decompose the factor effects into the explained and unexplained parts. The explained part indicates how much of the gender gap in the selected housework tasks can be accounted for by the model factors, whereas the 'unexplained' part is the portion of the gap that cannot be accounted for by the factors. The decomposition models are analyzed for the total sample and by group: non-Latinx



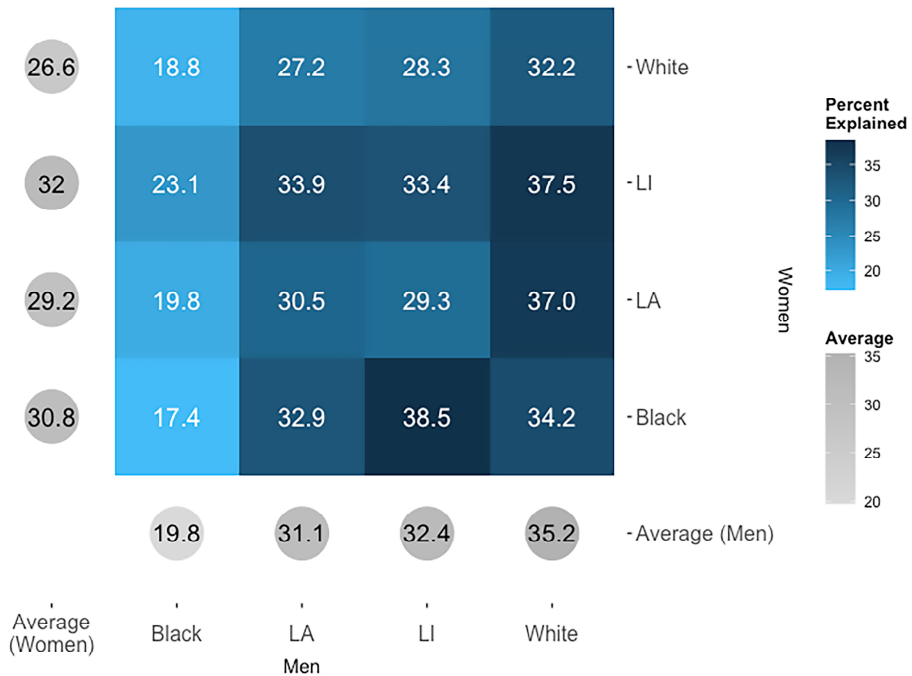
white, non-Latinx Black, Latinx born in the United States, and immigrant Latinx groups. We use the percentage explained by the models among white Americans as the referent.

### **3. Results and discussions**

Figure 1 summarizes the share of the gender gap accounted for by model factors in each group comparison, reporting the explained portions of the gender gap in housework participation (in percent). The overall summaries presented in the figure are based on the full decomposition models, reported in the online supplement. The ‘explained’ part indicates the share of the gender gap that can be accounted for by the model factors; that is, how much the group differences in housework participation would decrease by if the factors for the groups were to become equal. For instance, the numbers for white women and men show that if white women had the same proportion of full-time employment, the same levels of personal and household income, paid work time, and education, and similar household characteristics and age, then the gender gap in housework participation between white women and white men would decrease by 32.2%. Because the models are based mostly on resource-based factors with included control variables, these numbers show the extent to which resource-based frameworks can explain the group gap in housework participation. The darker squares in Figure 1 indicate that higher shares of housework participation can be explained by the group differences in resources.

In the reference decomposition model comparing white women to white men, 32.2% of the gender gap in housework participation can be ascribed to differences in resource factors. Among other groups of women, higher shares of the gender gap with white men can be accounted for by differences in resources, particularly between Latinx immigrant women and white men (37.5%). The averages for the groups show that in comparison with white men, in general higher shares of the gender gap can be explained by group differences in resources. Thus, when the comparison group is white men, on average about 35.2% of the gender gap can be accounted for by the model factors. This means that because there are considerable differences in resources between white men and women of all groups, a higher proportion of the differences in housework participation can be explained by group differences in resources. The privileged position of white men, particularly in terms of their access to resources, maintains the housework gap between white men and women of all groups.

**Figure 1: Decomposition models summary for women and men**



*Note:* Each value represents the percentage (of the gender gap in housework) explained by a specific model. Black = 'non-Latinx Black Americans' (N for men = 2,695, N for women= 3,023); LA = 'Latinx born in the USA' (N for men = 2,041, N for women= 2,503); LI = 'Latinx not born in the USA' (N for men = 3,080, N for women= 3,708); and White = 'non-Latinx White Americans' (N for men = 24,657, N for women= 29,964). Decomposition models include: paid work time, household and personal income, whether the respondent is in regular employment (full-time or part-time), children age groups, household size, age, education in years, homeownership, weekday, and year of the survey. Full model tables can be found in the online supplement.

The decomposition results with white men also confirm that women have fewer differences in resources among themselves than they have with white men, and the average share of the gender gap in housework is the largest for Latinx immigrant women (32%). Furthermore, the results show that, on average, the resource-based models account for lower shares of the gender gap in housework participation when the comparison is with other groups of (non-white) men. For instance, the differences in resources accounts for less of the gender gap in housework participation when US-born Latinx women are compared to US-born Latinx men (29.3%) than when they are compared to white men (37%).

Additionally, the summaries in the figure show that, on average, a lower share of the gender gap can be accounted for by differences in resources when white women are

compared to men (26.6%, on average) than when marginalized women are compared to men. Figure 2 also shows that even though the explained shares are the lowest for the comparisons with white women, the highest explained share is for the model that compares white women to white men.

A strikingly distinct pattern is discernable for the decomposition results of the gender gap between all women and Black men. On average, differences in resources account for the least share of the gender gap when any group of women is compared to Black men. The results show that the resource-based factors cannot explain the gender gap in the housework participation of Black husbands. This supports the idea that different groups face divergent systems of oppression, and divergent experiences shape different patterns of the division of labor.

Among women, the Latinx immigrant women have, on average, the highest explained proportion of the gender gap when compared to men of any group. Not only do they spend the most time on housework (almost double the time Black women spend), they also earn the least (see Table 1). This may also indicate that the experiences of racialization and gendering for this group of women are qualitatively different from those experienced by other women. In the example of our study, these experiences reflect the patterns of resource-dependence in the division of housework for Latinx immigrant women.

## **4. Conclusions**

Our findings demonstrate that resource-based factors have different explanatory power across the analyzed groups: whites, Blacks, US-born Latinx, and immigrant Latinx Americans.

Overall, our results show that the resource-based models are a better fit when there are higher resource differentials, such as when the comparison is made with the most economically privileged group (white men) or with the most economically marginalized group (Latinx immigrant women). However, the resource-based housework theories are unlikely to provide enough insight when the society's structure allows marginalizing some groups of men and women so that they cannot access economic resources, as is the case for Black men. The results also confirm that the theoretical frameworks should be revisited taking into consideration the intersectional positions of oppression and the vast theoretical work on intersectionality as it applies to the processes of the division of housework (Collins 1998; Crenshaw 1990; King 1988; Ransford 1980). This study calls for a more nuanced theory of the gendered division of labor that takes into consideration the contexts and histories of oppression.

The paper illustrates the limitations of quantitative empirical work on the household division of labor and the theoretical frameworks based on such work. In particular, it highlights the necessity of an intersectional approach to group analysis in housework research. Future research should integrate intersectional analysis and the relevant scholarship into housework research.

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