

REPLACING HOUSEWORK IN THE SERVICE ECONOMY

Gender, Class, and Race- Ethnicity in Service Spending

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Using data from the 1993 Consumer Expenditure Survey to examine housework-related service consumption, the author finds that spending on housekeeping services and meals out—which helps relieve women's housework burden—is affected by dynamics within marriages as well as by family class and race-ethnicity. Other things equal, families in which women have more relative power, as reflected in their income and occupational status, consume more housekeeping services and spend more of their food dollars on meals out, as do wealthier families and white families. Along with housework itself, which is well studied, these results suggest that housework service consumption is also an arena for gendered negotiation and conflict within families, and one way that gender relations vary by class and race-ethnicity.

Research has shown that women's earning power and labor force commitments contribute to changes in the housework division of labor within marriage (e.g., Berardo, Shehan, and Leslie 1987; Brines 1994; Hartmann 1981; Robinson 1988; South and Spitze 1994; Thompson and Walker 1989), but there is not enough empirical investigation of the assumption—often mentioned (e.g., Brines 1994; Presser 1994)—that some of this difference is related to greater consumption within the service economy. There is substantial research into the relief provided by service economy purchases (Arat-Koc 1989; Berardo, Shehan, and Leslie 1987; Bergen 1991; Hanson and Ooms 1991; Hochschild and Machung 1989; Nichols and Fox 1983; Oropesa 1993; Presser 1988; Rollins 1985; Weagley and Norum 1989; Wrigley 1991; Yang and Magrabi 1989), but we know considerably less about the

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processes within families that affect the amount and nature of this consumption (Hanson and Ooms 1991; Oropesa 1993).

This article investigates spending on housekeeping and meals out, which I refer to as "housework services," on the assumption that both represent replacements for household labor to some degree. The analysis tests two hypotheses about families in the housework-related service economy. The first hypothesis is that when women are in relatively powerful positions within marriage, they will command greater consumption of housework services. This may account for some of the decline in total time spent on household labor in the last few decades, as employed wives reduced their household labor time substantially, while their husbands offered only moderately greater contributions (Berardo, Shehan, and Leslie 1987; Brines 1994; Hartmann 1981; Presser 1994; Robinson 1988; Thompson and Walker 1989).¹ In other words, the movement away from housework may be easier for those women who have access to service-economy assistance, in the absence of greater housework contributions from their husbands.

Labor force demands on women's time might make housework service consumption more desirable, while increases in women's earnings and relative power improve their leverage within the family to make those purchases. However, housework service spending may also be a function of family resources apart from women's relative position within the family. The second hypothesis therefore is that housework service consumption increases with families' economic and social position net of husbands' and wives' relative positions. If this is the case, it will represent one mechanism by which gender relationships differ along the dimensions of class as well as race-ethnicity.

Hanson and Ooms (1991) found that dual-earner married couples incur increased financial costs in a number of areas, including housework services such as housekeeping and meals out. However, such spending also has benefits in terms of a reduced housework burden for women or couples. This is especially important in terms of class or race-ethnicity, because Hanson and Ooms also found that women married to men with higher earnings consume more housework services whether they contribute their own earnings or not. It seems that the benefits of housework service consumption may be achieved either by increasing women's relative power within marriages or by being in marriages to husbands with greater resources. These two routes are not equally attractive or available to all women, depending on, for example, their own earning potential and career ambitions, their families' wealth, the willingness of their husbands to share household labor, and their own attitudes toward housework.

Previous Research

Hanson and Ooms (1991) demonstrate the importance of housework service spending for dual-earner couples. However, they consider only two variables in relation to spending for housework services: family or husband's income and

single-earner versus dual-earner status. The omission of women's independent earnings, which Oropesa (1993) finds have a different effect on service purchases, is especially significant. With the micro-level data available in the Consumer Expenditure Survey, the relative income contributions of husbands and wives may be taken into account.

Brines (1994) found that housework varied for men and women according to their relative economic dependence; women appeared to follow an economic model in which they perform less housework as they reduce economic dependence within marriage, while men appeared to follow the "doing gender" pattern (West and Zimmerman 1987) in which they are especially resistant to housework at high levels of economic dependence on their wives. In this latter situation, housework services represent an important option for employed wives. Presser (1994) also found that wives' earnings were associated with reduced housework. Because of the suspected relationship between household labor time—which is not available in the data I use—and housework services, I employ some of the same variables for husbands' and wives' economic position and relative power that Presser used in her study of housework: hours in the paid labor force, relative occupational status, and educational attainment. I also repeat Presser's use of women's age cohort (a possible indicator of housework preferences), together with husband-wife age difference (a measure of potential power difference).

Hanson and Ooms (1991) show that higher-income families more often employ domestic help and eat out more, even when only one spouse is employed. Brines points out that, with regard to housework,

the effect of family income, while often the object of theoretical speculation, is relatively understudied empirically. Greater financial resources facilitate the purchase of housework services that, presumably, relieve a share of the task burden that otherwise would be performed by the wife. (1994, 671)

Unfortunately, service purchases are not included in the most complete studies of housework patterns, which leaves authors to speculate about this connection (Presser 1994; Robinson 1988). Therefore, I measure the effect of men's and women's income on housework service spending.

Unlike previous housework studies, however, I also include measures of wealth beyond income. Household spending fluctuates less than income because people often react to a drop in income by spending from savings, credit, or other sources to maintain their customary level of consumption (Bureau of Labor Statistics 1995). Therefore, spending in general is correlated with wealth as well as with income. Furthermore, assets are an important source of inequality—especially racial inequality—that is not measured by income alone (Oliver and Shapiro 1995). Financial assets and homeownership, in addition to annual income, will be considered here as measures of family resources.

Although rarely the subject of direct examination (Orbuch and Eyster 1997; Thompson and Walker 1989; Wilson et al. 1990), studies of housework repeatedly

show that white men perform a smaller share of household labor than Black men, even controlling for other factors (Bergen 1991; Brines 1994; Ross 1987; Shelton and John 1993). Shelton and John (1993, 139) found that white men contribute a smaller share of household labor than Black or Hispanic men—even as white women do less total housework than Black or Hispanic women. This is possible because white couples combined an average six hours less household labor time per week than Black couples, and eight hours less than Hispanic couples. Some of this difference may reflect greater housework service consumption among white families, especially given Whites' greater economic resources. I will investigate this relationship, and, since white advantage is not limited to higher annual income (Oliver and Shapiro 1995), I will see if it holds once the level of other financial assets is controlled. Although the sample size limits the comparisons available, where possible, I will compare white, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and mixed racial/ethnic couples.

Finally, causality in these relationships must be treated cautiously. Although many studies have shown that employed married women do less housework (e.g., Presser 1994; South and Spitze 1994), Gershuny and Robinson (1988) argue that some women may only seek paid employment if they are able to make compatible housework arrangements; also, women who have fewer children, or who have more cooperative husbands, may be able to keep their jobs longer or advance further than others. Thompson and Walker (1989) also offer evidence that housework affects paid work, and not just the other way around; the same may be suspected in the case of housework services. I therefore examine current family conditions as a proximate cause of housework spending, without ruling out the possibility that earlier housework and service consumption decisions have already affected the relative position of spouses within the family.

Data and Method

The Consumer Expenditure Survey (CEX), conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), is an ongoing panel survey in which households are interviewed once per quarter for five consecutive quarters. Its national probability sample is designed to represent all households in the U.S. civilian population; the response rate was about 84 percent in 1993 (Bureau of Labor Statistics 1995).

I use data from interviews in the fourth quarter of 1993, which took place in October, November, and December. Household interviews cover the three months prior to each interview, meaning households were asked about either July-September, August-October, or September-November. The BLS considers data from each quarter to be independent so that annual estimates do not depend on households participating in all five interviews. Therefore, spending values are multiplied by four to annualize (a practice used by the BLS for arriving at aggregate figures).² I restrict the households included in the sample to married couples in which at least one spouse reports usually working for pay at least 20 hours per week, and

TABLE 1: Summary of Variables Used in the Analysis (N = 1,917)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mean or Percentage</i>	<i>SD</i>
Percentage with any housekeeping spending	6.3	24.2
Annual housekeeping spending (\$)	30	181
Percentage of food spending out	18.7	10.9
Total annual food spending out (\$)	1,782	2,904
Wife's income (\$)	14,008	16,240
Husband's income (\$)	33,178	23,989
Financial assets (\$)	2,362	13,094
Wife's hours worked per week	27.9	18.1
Husband's hours worked per week	43.5	14.2
Percentage wife professional/managerial, husband not	13.9	34.6
Percentage husband professional/managerial, wife not	20.3	40.3
Percentage both professional/managerial	11.1	31.4
Percentage of wives with high school only	38.1	48.6
Percentage of husbands with high school only	31.6	46.5
Percentage of wives younger than 30	16.5	37.1
Percentage of wives aged 30 to 44	48.5	50.0
Husband's age minus wife's age	2.5	4.7
Number of children younger than 2	0.13	0.37
Number of children aged 2 to 15	0.92	1.11
Percentage white couple	78.1	41.4
Percentage Black couple	6.0	23.8
Percentage Hispanic couple	7.7	26.7
Percentage Asian couple	3.0	17.0
Percentage white/nonwhite couple	5.2	22.2
Percentage living in owned home	77.9	41.5
Percentage living in urban area	87.6	33.0

NOTE: Couples with at least one spouse usually working 20 hours or more per week in the labor force; race-ethnic categories are mutually exclusive.

households that are complete income reporters. The resulting sample includes 1,917 couples. (Means and standard deviations of the variables are shown in Table 1.)

The dependent variables in the analysis are spending on *food away from home* and *housekeeping services*. Each of these represents the use of money to buy housework services. Food away from home represents several categories of food spending, such as restaurant and cafeteria spending, and is compiled by the CEX. For each quarter, CEX reports food away from home and food at home for the previous three months. I calculate food away from home as a percentage of all food spending. This variable is used to represent food that requires little labor to prepare or clean up. Oropesa (1993) notes that spending alone can be misleading because of the range of costs for such services as meals out, and his data permit the measurement of eating-out occasions rather than expenditures. However, spending on restaurants as a percentage of all food spending—which partially controls for expensive tastes in both—has also been linked to a reduction in women's housework (Brines 1994).³ Spending for housekeeping services (including maid service

in condominiums) occurs in only 6 percent of these households.⁴ The analysis here therefore examines both the amounts of spending across all households as well as the percentage of all households with any housekeeping spending at all.

Variables measuring relative positions within the family include *income* independently for wives and husbands within each couple (from wages and salaries, farm and nonfarm businesses, and social security).⁵ I use these rather than a ratio variable such as those used by Brines (1994) and Presser (1994) to show the relative contribution of each spouse's independent earnings; ratio variables do not produce substantially different results, but their coefficients are less convenient to interpret when the income of both spouses is of interest.⁶ For the effect of demands on time, I include *hours worked* in the paid labor force for each spouse. Relative occupational status is measured by dummy variables indicating if the wife is in a *professional/managerial occupation* and the husband is not, or vice versa, as well as one to indicate that both partners have such occupations (the excluded category is neither spouse in such occupation). Another pair of variables indicates whether each finished *only high school*. Wife's age is represented by the same age-group variables used by Presser (1994), indicating whether she is *younger than 30*, or *between ages 30 to 44* (over 44 is the excluded category). These are used with a measure of *age difference* (husband-minus-wife, in years).

The position of the family net of individual characteristics is measured by the value of their *financial assets* (stocks, bonds, mutual funds, and other securities), as well as a variable indicating if they live in their *own home*. Dummy variables indicate each couple's position in one of five mutually exclusive race-ethnic categories: *white couple*, *white/nonwhite couple*, *Black couple*, *Hispanic couple*, and *Asian couple*.⁷

Finally, I include several control variables that may affect consumption patterns as well as housework demands: two continuous variables for the number of *children younger than age 2* and *children ages 2 to 15*; and a dummy variable indicating whether the couple lives in an *urban area*, intended as a control for the availability of services.

After a descriptive tabulation of spending across family categories, I use regression analysis to predict the dependent variables. For housekeeping services, in which more than 93 percent have no spending, I use a tobit regression model.⁸ For percentage of food spending out, a continuous variable with a more normal distribution, I use a standard ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. The models are structured identically except for the race-ethnic dummy variables. In the eating-out model, white couples are the reference category, which allows comparison of each race-ethnic group to whites. In the housekeeping model, however, because only nine nonwhite couples have any housekeeping spending, they cannot be modeled separately. I therefore include the white dummy instead, so that the coefficient represents the difference between whites and the other race-ethnic groups pooled together.

TABLE 2: Household Spending on Housekeeping and Eating Out, by Income, Earner Composition, and Race-Ethnicity

	<i>Housekeeping</i>			<i>Eating Out</i>	
	<i>Mean Spending (\$)</i>	<i>Percentage with Any Spending</i>	<i>Mean Spending if Any (\$)</i>	<i>Total Spent Out (\$)</i>	<i>Percentage Spent Out</i>
Combined income					
\$0 to 24,999	9	2.5	—	864	13.3
\$25,000 to 49,999	14	3.9	—	1,445	18.2
\$50,000 to 74,999	20	5.6	—	2,244	21.0
\$75,000+	115	18.8	614	3,266	24.6
Earner composition					
Wife only earner	18	5.1	—	1,385	16.6
Husband only earner	24	6.3	389	1,509	16.4
Both earners	33	6.4	517	1,935	19.9
Race-ethnicity					
White couple	35	7.4	474	1,901	19.7
White/nonwhite couple	12	3.0	—	1,461	16.9
Black couple	6	1.7	—	1,150	14.5
Hispanic couple	16	2.7	—	990	13.5
Asian couple	0	0	—	2,556	17.1

NOTE: Earners are those usually working 20 hours or more per week in the labor force. Means are omitted when cells contain fewer than 25 observations.

RESULTS

Table 2 summarizes the spending variables by combined husband-wife income, earner composition, and race-ethnicity. The columns show mean housekeeping spending for all households, the percentage that had any such spending, and their average spending. The last two columns show the average spending on food away from home and the percentage of food spending away from home for each group of households. Earners are defined as those who usually work in the labor force at least 20 hours per week.

The greatest differences emerge along income class lines. Households in the top income group spend more than 12 times as much (\$115) on housekeeping services as those in the lowest income group (\$9), and they are more than 7 times as likely to have any such spending (18.8 percent versus 2.5 percent). The richest households also spend almost four times as much on food away from home (\$3,266 versus \$864), representing almost twice as large a share of total food spending (24.6 percent versus 13.3 percent), as those in the bottom income group.

These income differences influence the rest of the comparisons in the table. Households with two earners show higher levels and rates of spending in each category, which is not surprising given their higher incomes. And households in which only the husband is employed more than 20 hours have more housekeeping

spending than those in which only wives are employed, presumably reflecting husbands' greater earnings. However, households in which only wives are employed 20 hours have slightly higher rates of eating out despite women's lower earnings. Finally, as expected, white couples have higher levels of spending in all categories than the rest of the race-ethnic groups. Of the 120 households with any housekeeping spending, 111 (93 percent) are couples in which both spouses are white.

This descriptive analysis cannot sort out the different hypothesized effects—the independent effects of wives' relative power in the marriage on one hand, and family class and race-ethnicity on the other. The regression analyses (Table 3) provide a more complete picture. The first column, for housekeeping, shows coefficients for a tobit regression, used because of the great number of cases with values of zero on the dependent variable (left-censored cases). The second column shows OLS regression coefficients for the model on percentage of food spending away from home.

The regression results show some support for both hypotheses. The women's power hypothesis gains support from the income and occupation variables. Although food out reflects equal contributions for the incomes of husbands and wives, for housekeeping, wives' income predicts twice as much spending as husbands' income. This stronger effect of wives' earnings supports the hypothesis that women's relative position in the marriage increases their access to this source of housework relief. The variables for occupational status show the greatest effect when wives are professional/managerial and husbands are not, also supporting the hypothesis. Other things equal, these couples are predicted to spend 2.3 percent more on meals out than couples in which neither is professional/managerial. The pattern is similar in the housekeeping model, although here the effects do not attain significance ($p = .13$). Another potential measure of relative power, age difference, shows no significant effects. The only education effect is seen in families where the husband has only a high school education or less, which spend significantly less on housekeeping services.

The second hypothesis, that higher family social and economic position leads to greater housework service consumption net of other effects, draws support from the wealth and race-ethnicity variables in the regressions. The value of couples' financial assets is associated with greater consumption in both categories, controlling for income and other variables (the effect on meals out is marginally significant at $p = .06$). All other things equal as well, white couples are predicted to spend \$377 more on housekeeping than nonwhite couples. On meals out, Whites spend a 3.3 percent greater share of their food budgets than Black couples, 2.1 percent more than Hispanic couples, and 2 percent more than white/nonwhite couples ($p = .05$) and Asian couples (not significant, $p = .13$), other variables controlled. Finally, home-owning couples are predicted to spend \$471 more on housekeeping services, and 2.6 percent more on food out, than nonowning couples.

The wife's age cohort variables show opposite effects in the two models. Women younger than 30 are predicted to spend the least on housekeeping services and the

earnings on housekeeping service spending, suggesting that demand for labor-saving service is stimulated by wives' more than husbands' income net of other factors. On the other hand, the similar effects on eating out of income and hours worked for both spouses suggests that this service is less related to women's specific demands and more equally responds to the needs or desires of both spouses. Housekeeping service, which presumably results in cleaning that is more or less indistinguishable from that performed by wives, may be considered more of a benefit to wives. Eating out, on the other hand, may respond positively to the demands of husbands because its product—the food as well as the experience—is different from eating at home, even though it also reduces wives' housework burden. The lower *R*-square term for the housekeeping regression may also reflect the greater discretion in housekeeping than in food, so that housekeeping varies more with unmeasured factors such as cultural differences, local or regional norms, and labor market characteristics.

At the same time, husbands' lower status or class background may restrict some avenues of relief for wives, as the regression analysis shows that families in which husbands have lower education are less likely to use housekeeping services even when wives earn more. This outcome is consistent with Presser's (1994) finding that in such families women do more housework. Husbands' preferences may work against wives in that situation supplementing their housework with paid help—even when wives' own earnings might make that possible.

Support for the second hypothesis is consistent. The evidence on wealth, race-ethnicity, and husbands' earnings, occupation, and education presented here shows that women in families of higher social class, and white families, have greater access to relief from the service economy, when other factors are controlled. This is important for understanding the variation in gender experience of women across class and race-ethnic groups, as well as the influence of their own employment experience and status within marriage. An undifferentiated description of gender experience in this regard would therefore be misleading.

The finding that white couples make greater use of housework services is consistent with previous findings that white men and women do less housework than their Black and Hispanic counterparts (Shelton and John 1993). Since previous research (e.g., Bergen 1991; Brines 1994; Orbuch and Eyster 1997; Ross 1987) has also shown that white families have a less egalitarian distribution of household labor, it may be that housework service consumption in white families reduces white men's housework as well. Or, if white men's inflexibility means the only alternative is more housework by women, service consumption could be how white women keep from increasing their housework burdens. The race-ethnic difference in spending may reflect, in part, the greater disposable income of families with greater wealth—an area of increasing importance in the racial inequality literature (see Oliver and Shapiro 1995). However, the fact that the white difference is not eliminated when assets and homeownership are controlled in addition to income suggests a status, cultural, or attitudinal difference associated with service con-

sumption that is not accounted for by economic differences between Whites and others.

An interesting difference emerges with regard to children. Not surprisingly, previous research (e.g., Presser 1994) has found that in couples with children, women spend significantly greater time on housework. This research shows that the number of children—especially younger children—greatly reduces the predicted percentage of spending on food out, which adds to our understanding of the pressures associated with children. This may be due to the economic demands associated with children, but it may also reflect the greater hassle of eating out with children (especially younger ones).

Overall, these results suggest that spending on housework services is affected by dynamics within marriages—such as whether or not wives are employed and their earnings—as well as by the social location of families themselves, as in their class or white status. Women with greater independent earning power may count among their advantages a greater access to housework services. But these services, which contribute to relieving women's housework burdens, are not the outcome of women's earnings and demands on her time alone. Wealthier families, and white families, consume more housekeeping services and eat out more than do lower-class and nonwhite families, regardless of whether or not wives are working for pay. This study therefore suggests one way that gender relations are the product of class and race-ethnicity—as well as gendered negotiation and conflict (Glenn 1992).

Finally, these results underscore the need to include housework services in the story of changing gender relations, a need that only increases with the growth of the service economy (Kessler-Harris and Sacks 1987). Groups of women and men have different access to the household labor of others, whether appropriated within the family or consumed in the service economy. Such access should be considered as an important strand in the complex web of gender relations.

NOTES

1. Alternatively, some housework could simply have been eliminated as standards have changed (Pleck 1985; Presser 1994).

2. The Consumer Expenditure Survey (CEX) includes consumer-unit weights, which were not used in this analysis after initial tests determined they did not affect results substantially.

3. I recognize that take-out food, for example, while counting as food away from home, may require cleanup; and there is some labor required in obtaining and distributing food away from home. The better estimate of labor-reducing meals out would be number of meals out rather than a proportion of spending (Oropesa 1993), which is not available in the CEX. The greater elasticity in the price of meals out compared to groceries may bias this variable somewhat for wealthier couples.

4. This is a much narrower measure than the "household services" category created by the CEX; it is used here because it applies directly to female-dominated household tasks instead of including such expenses as lawn care and household repairs. Another category, which includes "miscellaneous household services" as well as other repairs not counted elsewhere, was not used because it includes

nongendered elements, although it too might contain some housecleaning service. These factors, together with the possibility of underreporting associated with illicit hiring practices, means this variable is almost certainly underestimating the total amount of housekeeping service spending.

5. In 0.4 percent of cases where income was below \$0, I raised it to \$0 and added a dummy variable to the models to indicate the change. After that variable had no significant effect, I dropped it from the analysis.

6. Results of the regression analyses with ratio variables are available from the author.

7. The category white/nonwhite is an arbitrary one. Without a theoretical reason to assign mixed couples to race-ethnic categories by either wives' or husbands' identities, I chose white/nonwhite because that was the one category that captured the most mixed couples (100 out of 109). Nine couples with other race-ethnic combinations, and three Native American couples, were dropped from the analysis after it was determined that their absence did not change the other results.

8. A test with logistic regression predicting odds for any spending did not return substantially different results, so I used the tobit for its ease of interpretation.

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