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Housework, children, and women's wages across racial–ethnic groups

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ABSTRACT

Motherhood affects women's household labor and paid employment, but little previous research has explored the extent to which hours of housework may explain per child wage penalties or differences in such penalties across racial–ethnic groups. In this paper, I use longitudinal Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) data to examine how variations in household labor affect the motherhood penalty for White, Black, and Hispanic women. In doing so, I first assess how children affect hours of household labor across these groups and then explore the extent to which this household labor mediates the relationship between children and wages for these women. I find that household labor explains a portion of the motherhood penalty for White women, who experience the most dramatic increases in household labor with additional children. Black and Hispanic women experience slight increases in housework with additional children, but neither children nor housework affects their already low wages.

1. Introduction

Women continue to earn less than men despite efforts to equalize pay (OECD, 2012). The gap in earnings is most pronounced when parental status is taken into account—mothers encounter lower wages than women without children and are further penalized with each additional child (Budig et al., 2012; Correll et al., 2007; Glauber, 2007). This motherhood wage penalty has been linked to a number of larger gender issues that disproportionately affect mothers as compared to men and childless women, including occupational segregation (Shauman, 2006), employment discrimination (Benard and Correll, 2010; Correll et al., 2007), the cultural devaluation of women's labor (Cohen and Huffman, 2003; England et al., 2002), and the availability of family-friendly public policies across countries (Budig et al., 2012). Each of the proposed explanations of the motherhood penalty *touches* on the actual, expected, or perceived impact of household labor on women's wages, but little research has explicitly examined the relationship between household work and the motherhood penalty.

Neither the motherhood penalty nor time spent in household labor is consistent across racial–ethnic groups. White women pay a higher price for motherhood than Black or Hispanic women (Budig and England, 2001; Glauber, 2007; Waldfogel, 1997), and there are some indications that White women may also complete more hours of household labor than minority women (Artis and Pavalko, 2003; Sayer and Fine, 2011; Silver and Goldscheider, 1994). In this paper, I link these two bodies of research to explore the relationships between children, housework, and women's wages across

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racial–ethnic groups, including the extent to which household labor may be implicated in racial–ethnic differences in the motherhood penalty. Specifically, I use longitudinal data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) to address the following research question: How do variations in household labor affect the motherhood penalty for White, Black, and Hispanic women? To answer this question, I first assess how children may differentially affect hours of household labor across these groups. I then explore the extent to which this household labor mediates the relationship between children and wages for these women.

2. Background

The motherhood penalty has been a frequently studied phenomenon both within and beyond the US (ex. Budig et al., 2012; Gangl and Ziefle, 2009; Glauber, 2007; Gupta and Smith, 2002). Women in the US make an average of 7% less per child (Budig and England, 2001), the majority of which remains unexplained through empirical research. Scholars have explored the extent to which motherhood can affect women's work hours (Bardasi and Gornick, 2008; Webber and Williams, 2008), work experience (Klerman and Leibowitz, 1999; Ludenberg and Rose, 2000), seniority (Budig and England, 2001), and opportunities for employment and advancement via employment discrimination (Blair-Loy, 2005; Correll et al., 2007; Kmec, 2011) – all of which affect wages. Women's contributions to the home are implicated in all of the above explanations. For example, an increase in household labor after the birth of a child may lead women to decrease their work hours or sacrifice work experience by taking time out of the labor force altogether.

Women's hours of household labor are inversely correlated with market wages (Hersch and Stratton, 1997; John and Shelton, 1997; McLennan, 2000; Stratton, 2001) and daily household tasks such as cooking and cleaning have the strongest negative effects on wages (Hersch and Stratton, 2000; Kühhirt and Ludwig, 2012; Noonan, 2001). Even if couples split housework relatively equally before having children, the birth of a child increases the amount of time that mothers spend in housework more so than fathers—widening existing gaps in household labor (Baxter et al., 2008; Bianchi et al., 2000; John and Shelton, 1997; Sanchez and Thomson, 1997) and likely increasing pay disparities as well.

The impact that household labor has on the motherhood penalty via differences in human capital development and occupational choices has been accounted for in previous studies; however, housework may affect women's work lives in additional ways. Notably, household labor may affect women's workplace productivity, or "work effort" (Keene and Reynolds, 2005; Maani and Cruickshank, 2010). According to Becker (1985), individuals have only a finite amount of time and energy to devote to the combination of paid and unpaid work, such that increases in household labor result in a decrease in the amount of effort that women are able to devote to paid labor. Changes in work effort have been repeatedly posited as a potential explanation for the motherhood penalty (Anderson et al., 2003; Budig and England, 2001), yet testing of this theory has been far less common. Bielby and Bielby (1988) discovered that motherhood, specifically motherhood of preschool age children, has a negative impact on women's reported work effort, yet their study did not examine how differences in work effort affect wages. Anderson et al. (2003) find limited evidence that work effort affects motherhood wage penalties, though they only indirectly examine work effort by controlling for the age of the youngest child, a proxy for amount of household labor. Although Budig and Hodges (2010) address work effort in relation to the motherhood penalty, they do so by assessing time worked (years worked and hours per week), rather than productivity during work time, and do not directly measure household labor at all. In short, household labor may affect wages due to change in work effort, but this explanation has been under examined in previous research.

The story is more complicated, however, in that both the motherhood penalty and hours of household labor vary by race and ethnicity (Budig and England, 2001; Glauber, 2007; Sayer and Fine, 2011; Wight et al., 2013). But there is a paradox. The motherhood penalty is one area where Black and Hispanic women are not economically disadvantaged in comparison to White women. White women face larger penalties than minority women (Anderson et al., 2003; Budig and England, 2001; Glauber, 2007), yet the causes of these racial differences have remained unclear. The paradox suggests that the reasons for women's continued economic inequality vary across groups of women. Racial–ethnic differences in women's contributions to the home, and how these contributions affect their work lives, may be part of this puzzle.

White women have generally been found to take on more housework than minority women (Artis and Pavalko, 2003; John and Shelton, 1997; Silver and Goldscheider, 1994), with Black women completing the least amount of household labor of all racial–ethnic groups of women (Sayer and Fine, 2011; Wight et al., 2013). A number of factors may contribute to racial–ethnic differences in household labor, including differences in extended family assistance, differences in partner involvement, and pressures to perform household labor. Minority women traditionally receive more practical household assistance from extended family than White women (Cohen, 2002; Sarkisian et al., 2007; Sarkisian and Gerstel, 2004; Uttal, 1999). Although Hispanic women and Black women may use similar supports for negotiating household responsibilities, such as relying on extended family support networks (Cohen, 2002; Roschelle, 1999), there are indications that Black women receive more assistance and more clearly benefit in employment from the help they receive (Cohen, 2002; Coltrane, 2000; Cooke, 2007).

Variation in women's household labor may also be related to racial–ethnic differences in the division of household labor between partners. Generally, the time women devote to housework increases with marriage, but men do not similarly increase their household labor and may even decrease the amount of time they devote to housework (Bianchi et al., 2000; Davis et al., 2007; Hersch and Stratton, 1994). Some research has found that Black (Cooke, 2007; Cooksey and Fondell,