

# Is Anyone Doing the Housework? Trends in the Gender Division of Household Labor\*

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## Abstract

*Time-diary data from representative samples of American adults show that the number of overall hours of domestic labor (excluding child care and shopping) has continued to decline steadily and predictably since 1965. This finding is mainly due to dramatic declines among women (both in and out of the paid labor market), who have cut their housework hours almost in half since the 1960s: about half of women's 12-hour-per-week decline can be accounted for by compositional shifts — such as increased labor force participation, later marriage, and fewer children. In contrast, men's housework time has almost doubled during this period (to the point where men were responsible for a third of housework in the 1990s), and only about 15% of their five-hour-per-week increase can be attributed to compositional factors. Parallel results on gender differences in housework were obtained from the National Survey of Families and Households estimate data, even though these produce figures 50% higher than diary data. Regression results examining factors related to wives' and husbands' housework hours show more support for the time-availability and relative-resource models of household production than for the gender perspective, although there is some support for the latter perspective as well.*

Housework is contested terrain. Household members need to eat, their laundry must get cleaned, and living quarters must be straightened and cleaned from time to time. Individuals who live together must set the standards for cleanliness and

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food preparation that will be tolerated and then depend on someone to do the work of providing meals, cleaning clothes, and maintaining a “livable” home. Much of that provision can be “outsourced” to nonhousehold members, via take-out and restaurant meals, commercial laundries, and cleaning services. However, most American households have neither the resources nor the desire to purchase all household goods and services outside the home (DeVault 1991; Oropesa 1993). Hence, getting household work done involves cooperation, negotiation, and conflict among household members, usually requiring consensus but also generating potential resentment and disagreements among those who live together.

In a parallel way, housework has also become contested intellectual terrain among scholars. Given the dramatic increase in women’s paid labor force participation and the research generated by that trend, it is perhaps not surprising that there has been escalating sociological attention to trends and gender differentials in unpaid household work during the last two decades (Berk 1985; Hochschild 1989; Shelton & John 1996). That is, the interest in women’s reallocation of time to market work has spawned attention to the flip side of how women and men negotiate unpaid, nonmarket work. The lively theoretical debates have advanced many competing claims about who is doing the household work and why, how this has changed, and what it means.

There are claims that husbands do no more housework than in the past, despite the change in women’s economic provider roles, and that women continue to be (over)burdened by the “second shift” (Hochschild 1989). At the same time, there are competing claims that men are beginning to do more housework and that, as with market work, gender differentials in household work are narrowing and becoming much less gender-typed (Gershuny & Robinson 1988). Those who argue one side are suspect in the eyes of those who take the opposite view. Press and Townsley (1998), for example, argue that interpretations of trends and differentials in household work appear to have become highly politicized in the academic literature.

At the risk of stepping into an expanding quagmire, the focus of this article returns to questions about the basic trends and differentials in the American division of household labor and asks, How do American men and women differ in the amount and the kind of household tasks they report doing? Simply asking, Is *anyone* doing the housework? suggests that changes in work roles, in the composition of families, in the service economy, and in cultural norms in recent years may have been accompanied by a continued disinvestment in housework — with women’s hours continuing to decline and little concomitant increase in men’s hours.

To address these research questions, we analyze two sources of data on unpaid work: repeated cross-sectional samples (i.e., 1965, 1975, 1985, and 1995) of time diaries and the most recent wave of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH2, 1992-94). We use the time-diary data to ask whether changes in time

spent in housework from the mid-twentieth century continued into the 1990s; more specifically, has the gender gap in women's and men's time in unpaid labor narrowed, and, if so, why? We examine the subsample of husbands and wives from the time-diary data to track changes in their allocation to unpaid labor over time. And finally, using the time diaries and a sample of couples from the most recent wave of the NSFH, we examine the gender differential in domestic work within marriage.

Most research about who does housework in American homes explores the allocation of domestic chores within married couples (see Shelton 1992 and South and Spitze 1994 for exceptions). We begin by focusing on all individuals regardless of marital status. Research that examines the effect of demographic, socioeconomic, and ideological variables on men's and women's housework time for all household types helps untangle how men and women in marriage differ from men and women outside marriage (Shelton 1992). Moreover, only by examining trends in household work for all individuals can one determine whether changes are a function of shifts in the compositional characteristics of the population (such as the decline in marriage) or social and cultural transformations. Before turning to the empirical data, we first discuss the theoretical perspectives that have informed previous studies of the gender division of housework and review prior research on trends in household labor.

### Theoretical Perspectives on the Gender Division of Household Work

It seems largely undisputed that women do more household work than men, but explanations of this phenomenon diverge (Marini & Shelton 1993; Shelton & John 1996). Three theoretical perspectives on the process of domestic labor allocation dominate the literature: (1) the time availability perspective, (2) the relative resources perspective, and (3) the gender perspective.

The time availability perspective suggests that the division of labor is rationally allocated according to availability of household personnel in relation to the amount of housework to be done (Coverman 1985; England & Farkas 1986; Hiller 1984). Hence, women's and men's time in housework should be strongly related to time spent in market labor and family composition. Shelton's (1992) research documents that time constraints, as indexed by employment status, marital status, and parental status, account for a large amount of variation in household labor. The association between these indicators of time constraints and household labor differs markedly by gender, however, with women's time more affected by these factors.

The relative resources perspective argues that the allocation of housework reflects power relations between men and women: the level of relative resources partners bring to a relationship determines how much domestic labor is completed by each partner (Blood & Wolf 1960; Brines 1994). Higher levels of education and income

relative to one's spouse, for example, are expected to translate into more power, which is used to avoid doing domestic tasks. A variant on this theme is that women are primarily responsible for housework because they are economically dependent on their husbands and hence cannot successfully bargain out of doing domestic work (Brines 1994; Greenstein 1996b).

A second relative resources framework draws on Becker's (1991) microeconomic theory in which households divide labor in ways that maximize efficiency and output through specialization of partners, partners differentially skilled in either nonmarket or market labor. Women's comparative advantage in domestic labor, resulting largely from their role as mothers, results in their concentration on nonmarket work, while men's comparative advantage in wage earning results in their concentration on market labor. The greater the husband's comparative advantage in market work, as indicated by higher levels of education or income, the less time he will invest in nonmarket labor. Empirical research offers mixed support for the relative resources perspective (Blair & Lichter 1991; Coverman 1985; Kamo 1988; Presser 1994).

In recent years, a strong critique of time availability and relative resources perspectives has risen largely from feminists, who argue that the allocation of housework is about much more than time availability and rational choice. The gender perspective argues that housework is a symbolic enactment of gender relations and explains why there is not a simple trade-off between time spent in unpaid and paid labor among men and women in either marital or cohabiting relationships (Ferree 1990; Greenstein 1996b; South & Spitze 1994; West & Zimmerman 1987). With its focus on ideational and interactional expressions of gender, this perspective emphasizes that housework does not have a neutral meaning but rather its performance by women and men helps define and express gender relations within households. The roles of wife and mother are intimately tied to expectations for doing housework (regardless of other pressures) and displayed through outcomes such as a clean house (Robinson & Millie 1998).

Early formulations of the gender perspective focused specifically on gender role ideologies formed through childhood socialization about appropriate adult male and female roles (Coverman 1985). More recent formulations have combined gender ideology with the theoretical construct of "doing gender" (Berk 1985; West & Zimmerman 1987). South and Spitze (1994) demonstrate how housework is an enactment of gender — controlling for other factors, they find that women and men in marital households, compared with other household types, have the greatest gap in housework time, indicating the power of the roles "wife" and "husband." Gupta (1999) shows that when couples marry, women's housework hours increase while men's housework hours decline. Brines (1994) argues that husbands' housework contributions do not follow "logical" rules of economic exchange. Rather, the more a husband is dependent on his wife economically, the less housework he does, most likely as a way to reassert his masculinity (Brines 1994).

In other words, wives and husbands display their “proper” gender roles through the amount and type of housework they perform.

Proper gender roles are in part filtered through gender ideology. Because gender ideologies vary across individuals, attitudes about proper displays of gender will also vary (Greenstein 1996b). More egalitarian beliefs about men’s and women’s roles lead to a more egalitarian division of labor in the home. However, husbands’ power is evident — in that wives tend to be affected by husbands’ preferences and ideology, more so than vice versa (Ferree 1991; Shelton & John 1996). The interaction between husbands’ and wives’ ideologies may also be critical, such that husbands who are egalitarian must have egalitarian wives before shifting more energies into household labor (Greenstein 1996b).

In addition, the gender perspective suggests that women are disadvantaged in the allocation of housework tasks. Women’s time is spent in the least attractive housework activities (e.g., meal preparation, laundry), and these activities are more subject to the whims and demands of other family members. Whenever housework becomes necessary, such as when children create additional work, it is the woman who has to make time for it. Husbands tend not to respond to their wives’ constraints or to the demands of children.

There is also the suggestion, and some empirical literature, to bolster the claim that husbands may contribute relatively little to “core” housework tasks, in part because wives are hesitant to relinquish control or because they set standards that husbands consider to be unacceptably high (Allen & Hawkins 1999). When this happens, it too can be understood within the gender perspective. Because the cleanliness of one’s home is a reflection on women’s competence as a “wife and mother” — but not men’s competence as a “husband and father” — women may come to hold higher standards for household cleanliness and become more invested in the control and supervision of household work.

The time availability, relative resources, and gender perspectives have been tested primarily in analyses restricted to married couple households. However, each of the three perspectives can be adapted to apply to men and women in all household types (Shelton 1992). In terms of time availability, competing demands, from paid work or children, should reduce housework time in all households, because only so many activities can be accomplished with the constraints of the 24-hour day. In terms of relative resources, a higher absolute level of education may limit housework because it increases a person’s “comparative advantage” in market rather than nonmarket labor, as well as the ability to outsource tasks. In terms of the gender perspective, only by examining housework allocation across all types of households is it possible to tease out the effect of gender from the effect of marriage on time spent in housework (South & Spitze 1994).

The three explanations of the gender division of housework can be tested in a limited fashion with the time diary data we examine here. We are able to estimate trends over time for all men and women and the restricted universe of married

men and women to assess whether trends are consistent with a time availability perspective or whether there is evidence for other interpretations such as the relative resources and gender perspectives. Then, with the NSFH analysis of married couples, we are able to construct measures of each perspective and assess the relative importance of the three competing explanations of the within-couple gender differential in housework.

### Time Spent on Housework

Research over the past twenty years on the division of household labor offers mixed empirical support for the time availability, relative resources, and gender ideology theoretical perspectives. However, one nonequivocal finding is that gender explains more variance than any other factor (Shelton & John 1996). Regardless of demographic or life course characteristics, all prior research shows that women invest significantly more hours in household labor than do men despite the narrowing of gender differences in recent years (Berardo, Shehan & Leslie 1987; Gershuny & Robinson 1988; Hochschild 1989; Marini & Shelton 1993; Nock & Kingston 1988; Robinson 1988; Shelton & John 1996). Coverman and Sheley (1986) found that between 1965 and 1975 women's hours declined, with men not changing their behavior much at all, such that Americans did less housework overall. Shelton (1992), who analyzed change between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s, showed that men had made some increases in housework, and women had further declines, but that women remained at a disadvantage, with more overall work (paid plus unpaid) and less leisure. The most comprehensive analyses of change, in which comparable repeated cross-sections of time diary studies in 1965, 1975, and 1985 were analyzed, similarly showed that women's hours of household labor declined substantially between 1965 and 1985, while men's increased somewhat (Gershuny & Robinson 1988; Robinson & Godbey 1997).

Why did gender differences narrow from the 1960s through the 1980s, and has this trend continued to the present time? Below we briefly review factors that relate to participation in unpaid household labor and assess whether the overall trend in housework may largely be a function of the changing characteristics of the population.

#### EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Women's employment has been found to be negatively associated with time spent in household labor (Brines 1994; Gershuny & Robinson 1988; Robinson 1993; Robinson & Converse 1972; Sanchez 1993; Shelton 1990; Shelton & John 1996; Vanek 1974; Walker 1969). Women's education has also been found to be negatively associated with household labor time (Berardo, Shehan & Leslie 1987; Bergen 1991; Brines 1994; Shelton & John 1993; South & Spitze 1994). Each of these has been

increasing for women over the past decades (Spain & Bianchi 1996). This suggests that, other things equal, women's time in unpaid work should be declining.

Unlike for women, whether men are employed has not been shown to alter the amount of time invested in household labor (Coverman & Sheley 1986; Sanchez 1993; Shelton 1990; Shelton & John 1996). However, how much they work does affect hours of housework — men's paid work hours have been found to be negatively associated with housework hours (Coltrane & Ishii-Kuntz 1992; Coverman 1985; Haddad 1994; Kamo 1991; South & Spitze 1994). Blair and Lichter (1991) also report that men's hours of paid employment are positively associated with extent of household task segregation — that is, the more hours of market work, the more men's housework hours are predominantly in the more discretionary "male" tasks of outside maintenance and repairs. Men have been retiring earlier than in the past, resulting in an employment decline for older men. However, there has not been much change in the average hours of work among employed men (Rones, Ilg & Gardner 1997). Hence, it is not clear whether employment changes for men have been significant enough, in and of themselves, to increase men's hours of unpaid work.

The bulk of research indicates a positive association between men's education and time spent in housework (Berardo, Shehan & Leslie 1987; Bergen 1991; Brayfield 1992; Brines 1994; Kamo 1988; Presser 1994; Shelton & John 1996; South & Spitze 1994). However, Shelton (1992) reports a curvilinear relationship, where men with high school degrees or some college education perform more housework than either men who are high school dropouts or men with a college education. Similar to women, men's educational attainment has increased over time (Mare 1995). To the extent that the relationship between education and doing housework is positive for men, this change may be increasing men's housework time.

#### MARITAL AND PARENTAL STATUS

Marital status also affects housework hours, and the effects differ for men and women. Married women spend more time on housework compared to women who are not married, while most studies report little or no difference in men's household labor time by marital status (Shelton & John 1993; South & Spitze 1994). Indeed, Gupta (1999), using longitudinal data, showed that men who form couple households reduced their time in housework.

Much of the housework literature in recent years focuses on husbands' time in housework compared to wives', perceptions about the distribution of domestic tasks, and the dynamics that occur in the process of domestic labor allocation within married-couple households. Research has shown that wives spend considerably more time in housework compared with husbands, even when they are working in the paid labor force. The persistence of employed wives' primary responsibility for

domestic labor has been dubbed the “stalled revolution” (Hochschild 1989) because of its seeming intransigence in the face of additional market work by women. Yet, the 1980s may have been the cusp of some changes in men’s activities in the home (Blau 1998). Husbands’ time in housework rose somewhat through the 1980s in absolute terms, and even more so relative to wives’ time, because women so greatly decreased their domestic labor activity (Robinson & Godbey 1997). The proportion of work that husbands are reported to have done in recent years ranges from about 25% to 40%, depending on measurement criterion and the range of tasks defined as housework (Berk 1985; Kamo 1988; Warner 1986).

Within married-couple households, tasks continue to be largely specialized by gender (Ferree 1991). Women have continued over recent decades to perform the core housework — traditionally “female” tasks like cooking and cleaning — while men report traveling to stores, shopping, cooking, and doing repairs (Robinson & Godbey 1997). Estimates of men’s contribution to “core” housework tasks range between one-quarter or less to about one-third for their proportion of cooking, cleaning, dishwashing, and laundry (Goldscheider & Waite 1991; Shelton 1992). Men participate most in yard and home maintenance.

In most studies, the presence of children in the household has been found to be positively related to time spent in household labor (in addition to child care time) for both women and men, although the effect appears to be much stronger for women (Brines 1994; Gershuny & Robinson 1988; Haddad 1994; Presser 1994; Sanchez & Thomson 1997; Shelton 1992; South & Spitze 1994). A few studies have found either no effect (Ross 1987) or a negative effect for men (Pleck 1983). Over time, as marriages are delayed and families have fewer children (McLanahan & Casper 1995), adults (at least women) should be allocating fewer hours to household work, other things equal.

Changes in housework time beyond the changes in Americans’ employment, educational, marriage, and parental statuses may indicate social and cultural change in household services and their value. There are several possibilities to consider. Even if there is less propensity overall to perform housework, it may not merely go “undone.” Both the service economy and technology could fill in some of the gaps. For example, Oropesa (1993) shows that women with full-time jobs relied more on housecleaning services (though still only 20% did so) and on restaurant meals than part-time employed and nonemployed women. However, restaurant meals (including those delivered to homes) were used much more often than cleaning services for all types of women, regardless of work status, averaging about one meal every two weeks. National Consumer Expenditure Survey data corroborate these findings: almost 80% of consumer units spent money on meals at restaurants, and the percentage of households using household cleaning services increased (but only from 5.1% to 6.6% of households between 1980 and 1990) (Gray 1992).

Some might argue that technological change has allowed housework hours to decline without much notice since the fewer hours women and men together



allocate to housework produce results and products more efficiently. However, Robinson (1980) notes that sometimes technology does not reduce people's time in housework but merely reallocates it to other housework tasks. For example, people with dishwashers rinse dishes first, and those with washers and dryers launder their clothes more frequently.

It is possible, then, that some amount of housework went "undone" in 1995, at least compared with 1965. This may be especially true if we consider that the amount of cleaning time should have *increased* over the years, all else being equal, since homes have become significantly larger over time, with more rooms to clean. If work does go undone, it may be that people generally do not care about the services "lost" compared to time gained for other pursuits — that is, their cleanliness standards and standards for home prepared foods may have declined. Alternatively, or perhaps concurrently, people may not be completely satisfied with less housework output — wishing for dust-free shelves and home-baked desserts — but nonetheless may be unwilling to allocate their efforts to it.

## The Present Study

The first question we address in this study is, What has happened to trends and gender differentials in nonmarket, household work in the 1990s? We extend past research and focus on the 1990s to examine the extent to which the decline in unpaid work has continued for women and, in parallel form, to what extent, if any, unpaid work is increasing for men. We also examine the degree to which change in the time spent in unpaid work is a function of demographic or compositional shifts (more employment for women, later marriage, fewer children).

We employ two approaches to assess the degree to which changes in housework time for women and men have been affected by demographic changes rather than changes in standards or preferences for doing housework. First, using the four data points between 1965 and 1995, we predict housework hours and examine interactions between year of study and independent variables measuring employment and family characteristics. Second, we conduct a decomposition analysis of the 1965-95 change in housework hours of men and women in which change over time is separated into components to identify the portion of the change in housework hours resulting from (1) compositional shifts (i.e., more employment for women, less for men; later marriage and more divorce, and fewer children for both men and women) versus (2) changed propensities to do housework, given a particular employment, marital, or parental status.

In the second part of the analysis, we focus on married people and ask, Do recent data indicate that there has been gender convergence in domestic labor within married-couple households? Some researchers have suggested that husbands' behavior may have changed in the 1980s, but until now, recent and comparable

data for examining married men's behavior have not been available (Blau 1998; Ferree 1990). Hence, we round out our overview of time trends and gender differences in household work by focusing on husbands and wives and factors that influence their *relative* involvement in household work. In terms of dynamics within couples, what factors narrow or widen the gender differential in within-household time allocation to domestic tasks? To what extent are the results consistent with the time availability perspective, the relative resources/economic dependency interpretation, or the gender perspective on housework?

## Data

### TIME DIARY SAMPLES

This article examines respondent-reported time diary data on housework that were collected in four national studies in the U.S. in 1965, 1975, 1985, and 1995, all of which were based on strict probability sampling methods. The earlier studies (1965 and 1975) were done in person, had higher response rates, but were not spread over the entire year. The later studies (1985 and 1995) were done in part or wholly over the telephone, have lower response rates, but are spread over the entire year. For a more complete discussion of the differences in samples and methodology, see Robinson and Godbey (1997). In this analysis, we weight the data at each point so that all days of the week are equally represented.

Our sample of Americans aged 25 to 64 years consists of 1,048 respondents (469 males and 579 females) in 1965, 1,710 respondents (783 males and 927 females) in 1975, 3,130 respondents (1,405 males and 1,725 females) in 1985, and 852 respondents (359 males and 493 females) in 1995. The four survey years are combined in the multivariate analysis, yielding a total sample of 6,740 (3,016 males and 3,724 females). The means and standard deviations for the time diary variables are presented in Appendix A.

### NSFH SAMPLE

In wave 2 of the 1992-94 National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH2), 10,007 of the 1987-88 National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH1) primary respondents were reinterviewed, as were both current spouses and NSFH1 spouses, if different from current spouse (Sweet & Bumpass 1996). We analyze the 5,747 husbands and wives married at NSFH2, excluding 749 couples missing spouse or primary respondent questionnaires at NSFH2, 480 couples where either partner is aged 24 or younger or 65 or older at NSFH2, and 411 couples where both partners are missing data for three or more of the nine housework items at NSFH2. We apply the imputation procedures described in South and Spitze (1994)

for couples where both partners answer at least seven of nine housework items. After these exclusions, our sample consists of 4,107 couples, weighted to provide nationally representative estimates. With the exception of race, all variables are measured as of NSFH2. Means and standard deviations for all NSFH variables are presented in Appendix B.

#### DIFFERENCES IN ESTIMATES OF HOUSEHOLD WORK HOURS IN TIME DIARIES AND THE NSFH

The data collection methods, and hence the basic measures of time spent doing housework, differ significantly between the diary studies and the NSFH. In the time diary surveys, respondents report all their daily activities within a structured diary format. The diary minimizes the reporting burden on respondents by allowing them to report behavior in their own words and in its naturally occurring order. In addition, the time diary's structure forces respondents to respect the important measurement features of the time variable, namely, that all 24 hours of the day must be accounted for and that activities occur in a series of sequences (including the preparation, waiting, and cleanup times necessary for work or other tasks).

A number of methodological studies have established the accuracy and reliability of the time diary method. Comparisons of "retrospective" and "prospective" approaches, of national and single community studies (Robinson 1977), of telephone and in-person interviews (Juster & Stafford 1985), and of varying formats (Chapin 1974; Walker 1969) all produce very high correlations between aggregate time use estimates. Evidence of the basic validity of time diary data comes from "beeper" studies, in which diary reports and reports produced in response to randomly generated prompts from an electronic paging device are compared (Robinson 1985), and comparisons between the respondent's and the spouse's reports of the presence or absence of the marital partner during the day (Juster & Stafford 1985); these produce higher than 0.80 correlations across diaries. (A review of the evidence on validity and reliability can be found in Robinson and Godbey 1997:74-77.)

The housework estimates that we derive from the time diaries are based on the respondents' report of their primary activity during each minute of the diary day. Information on secondary housework activity for each survey is not available, but it usually amounts to less than an hour per week. While the time diaries are the preferred way to capture time use that is variable, relatively unstructured, and flexibly allocated, such as housework, the data may slightly underestimate time allocated to housework, in that only the primary activity is reported by respondents.

In the NSFH, the measurement of housework hours is based on simple respondent estimates of the "approximate number of hours they spend per week" doing activities such as "preparing meals" or "cleaning house." Comparisons of estimates derived from time diaries and from surveys like NSFH show that estimates of hours of household work tend to be much higher in the latter than in the former

(Marini & Shelton 1993). As discussed below, our own comparisons also suggest that estimates of weekly housework hours tend to be about 50% higher in the NSFH2 than in the 1995 time diary data.

Marini and Shelton (1993) suggest that the time diary method of data collection provides estimates that are superior to the shortcut method of general respondent estimates that are available from the NSFH. Although many respondents can give fairly reasonable general estimates of the time they have spent in highly structured and routine activities, the reporting burden becomes considerably more difficult when it comes to household tasks and free-time activities.

In sum, hours of housework are probably better estimated with the diary data, and the repeated cross-sections allow assessment of long-term trends. There are no diary data for couples to estimate within-household estimates of the husband-wife gap in doing housework the NSFH data allow. Moreover, the NSFH has a much richer set of behavioral and attitudinal covariates that can be used to examine gender differentials in housework and test alternative theoretical perspectives. To the extent that our primary focus is on the *relative* rather than absolute time that husbands and wives spend doing housework, NSFH distortions in the amount of housework become less relevant. To examine the comparability of the two data sources, ratios of wives' to husbands' reported housework time are calculated and reported below.

#### DEPENDENT VARIABLES: WEEKLY HOURS OF HOUSEWORK AND THE GENDER GAP

##### *Time Diaries*

Total housework time was obtained by summing respondent time diary reports of time spent in eight different types of activities: cooking meals (coded 10), meal cleanup (11), housecleaning (12), laundry and ironing (14), outdoor chores (13), repairs (16), garden and animal care (17), and bills and other financial accounting (19). Activity time spent by respondents on these eight tasks is calculated based on the elapsed time between the start time of the activity and the end time of the activity, and hence is reported in minutes per day per activity. Weekly housework hours are calculated first by weighting the sample so that all days of the week are equally represented and then by multiplying the daily amounts collected in the diary by 7.

##### *NSFH*

In comparing married couples in NSFH2, three dependent variables are examined: husbands' total weekly housework hours; wives' total weekly housework hours; and the housework gender gap, or the mean difference between wives' and husbands' estimated weekly housework hours. The gap variable is an arithmetic function of the estimates for husband and wife: it is enlarged (or shrunk) either because a wife's

or a husband's contribution to housework increases or decreases with a change in the independent variables. Yet showing the separate regressions for husbands' and wives' hours in addition to the gap helps clarify the source of the change in the gap.

It is customary in the research literature on gender differences in housework within households to focus on a ratio variable, either the ratio of husbands' to wives' housework hours or, more commonly, the percentage of total hours contributed by husbands. The problem with ratio dependent variables, particularly in regression analysis, is that it can be very difficult to sort out what a change in the dependent variable actually means, because the independent variable may be affecting the numerator of the ratio, the denominator, or both simultaneously. Husband's share of housework can increase either because he does more or because his wife does less. We choose the difference measure for this analysis in order to present a clear picture of how the independent variables affect not only the husband-wife gap in housework but also the components of that gap, the husband's hours and the wife's hours of housework.

All relative measures of household work are subject to some unknown amount of error. Both a ratio measure commonly used in the housework literature and a difference measure such as we employ in this analysis are based on wives' reports of their housework hours, imperfectly measured, husbands' reports of their housework hours, also subject to error, and, perhaps, also correlated error between the two reports. While it is difficult to ascertain the impact of these errors, we believe the difference measure and the examination of the two components of that difference give a better sense of the data than the usual ratio approach. In addition, we correct for extreme values that are likely to introduce error in reports of housework. We recode all estimates that are extremely high (exceeding the 95 percentile of the distribution) back to the 95 percentile. This truncation of the range is done because prior research suggests that when housework estimates are very high, there is greater discrepancy between time diary and recall reports of housework than for estimates in more moderate ranges (Robinson 1999). By truncating the range, we make some attempt to eliminate the most error-prone estimates of wives' and husbands' housework hours in the NSFH2 data.

Husbands' and wives' mean weekly housework hours are derived from primary respondent's and spouse's answers to a question on the self-enumerated NSFH2 questionnaire asking for the approximate number of hours per week normally spent on seven household tasks. Tasks include preparing meals; washing dishes and cleaning up after meals; cleaning the house; washing clothes, ironing, and mending; outdoor and other household maintenance tasks; paying bills and keeping financial records; and car maintenance and repair.<sup>1</sup> We sum husbands' and wives' weekly hours on the seven tasks to obtain husbands' and wives' total housework hours. We subtract a husband's total housework hours from his wife's total housework hours to obtain the housework gender gap.

*Time Diaries*

The time availability, relative resources, and gender perspectives have been applied primarily to married couple households. We adapt these perspectives to our analysis of men's and women's housework time in all household types. We examine two measures of time availability: time in paid work and household composition. Employment status is classified into three categories: not employed (the omitted category), employed full-time, and employed part-time. Employment status is based on respondent self-reports, rather than on usual hours of paid employment per week.<sup>2</sup> Parental status is a dummy variable that is coded 1 if children under age 18 reside in the respondent's household and coded 0 if there are no children under age 18 living in the household.

We include two sets of variables that pertain to resources as well. Age is classified into the categories of 25 to 34 (the omitted category in the regressions), 35 to 44, 45 to 54, and 55 to 64. Education is classified into three categories: high school diploma or less education (the omitted category), some college education, and a college degree or postbaccalaureate education.

The gender perspective suggests that marital status would affect men and women differently, all else equal, with married women doing more hours relative to single women, but with men not affected by marital status. We include marital status as a dummy variable, coded 1 if the respondent is currently married and coded 0 for respondents who are divorced/separated, widowed, or never married.

*NSFH*

Independent variables include those related to the three broad theoretical perspectives discussed above as well as several demographic controls.<sup>3</sup> Time availability is measured in terms of weekly work hours and household composition. For each spouse, weekly work hours is measured as the usual number of hours worked per week at one's main job. The household composition variables measure the presence of children in the household. Following South and Spitze (1994), children in the household are divided into the number of children aged 4 or younger, the number of children aged 5 to 11, the number of girls aged 12 to 18, and the number of boys aged 12 to 18. Past research suggests that, among children aged 12 to 18, girls may decrease total housework hours of parents either by doing some housework themselves or by creating less housework than boys (Goldscheider & Waite 1991).

To measure relative resources, we include measures of relative educational status, income, and age of husbands and wives. Relative education is coded into a series of four dummy variables: (1) husband has a college degree and wife does

not (omitted category in the analysis), (2) neither wife nor husband has a college degree, (3) both wife and husband have a college degree, and (4) wife has a college degree and husband does not. Husband's education (years of school completed) is included as a control variable. Relative wage and salary income for the year preceding NSFH2 is measured in terms of the wife's proportion of the couple's total income. Husband's logged wage and salary income is included as a control variable. Relative age is measured by a series of dummy variables: (1) husband is more than two years older than the wife (omitted category in the analysis), (2) wife and husband are the same relative age (within two years), and (3) the wife is more than two years older than the husband. We also include husband's age, measured in years, and husband's age-squared variables in our models as controls, since research suggests that time spent in housework peaks around midlife (South & Spitze 1994).

We test the gender perspective with three variables. Two measures of gender ideology are included, with women and men who have more egalitarian attitudes expected to have a more equal division of household labor compared to couples with more traditional attitudes. A gender ideology scale consists of three questions from NSFH2 that have been used in various combinations in previous analyses to measure gender ideology (DeMaris & Longmore 1996; Greenstein 1996a, 1996b). Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with the following statements: (1) "It is much better for everyone if the man earns the main living and the woman takes care of the home and family"; (2) "Preschool children are likely to suffer if their mother is employed"; and (3) "It is all right for mothers to work full time when their youngest child is under 5." Husbands and wives answered using a 1-to-5 scale, with 1 indicating strongly agree and 5 indicating strongly disagree. Item 3 was reverse-coded so that high scores on these questions indicate a more egalitarian gender ideology. Responses to the three questions were then summed, yielding a scale ranging from 3 to 15 (Cronbach's alpha is .75 for wives and .74 for husbands).

The second gender ideology measure, attitudes about an equal division of household labor, is based on respondents' agreement with the following statement: "A husband whose wife is working full-time should spend just as many hours doing housework as his wife." Responses were measured on a 1-to-5 scale, with 1 indicating strong agreement and 5 indicating strong disagreement; responses were reverse-coded so that high scores indicate a more egalitarian gender orientation. Interaction variables between spouses' ideologies for each of the two ideology measures were created as well.

We construct a measure of different employment statuses of husbands and wives in order to examine Brines's (1994) argument that unemployed men do little housework despite time available in an attempt to reassert their masculinity. Three dummy variables are created: husband employed but wife not employed (the omitted category in the analysis), both husband and wife employed, and husband

not employed (with wife of any work status). Employment is measured as working for pay at the time of the NSFH2 interview.

Finally, we include several demographic controls. We do not have a measure of size of housing unit, but we do know tenure. Homeowners may do more housework than renters because owned units tend to be larger than rental units. Homeownership is coded as 1 for yes and 0 for no. Disability may preclude doing certain household tasks. Disability status is indicated by a dummy variable scored 1 for wives (or husbands) who report a physical or mental condition that limits their ability to do day-to-day household tasks. School enrollment is measured by a dummy variable scored 1 for wives (or husbands) enrolled at the time of the NSFH2 interview. Prior research suggests that the division of labor may be more equitable among minority couples (Ross 1987), so we include race in the model. Race is a dummy variable scored 1 for non-Hispanic white wives and husbands.

### Findings from Time Diary Data: Trends in Housework Time

Figure 1 shows the overall trend in the average weekly number of hours of housework performed by women and men. Consistent with earlier research, housework by Americans is down significantly over time, from an average of 17.5 hours in 1965 to 13.7 in 1995, or almost 4 fewer hours per week. Women's and men's hours spent in housework have converged over the period, primarily due to the steep decline in women's hours of housework. Men's reported hours of housework increased between 1965 and 1985 but have leveled off since then.

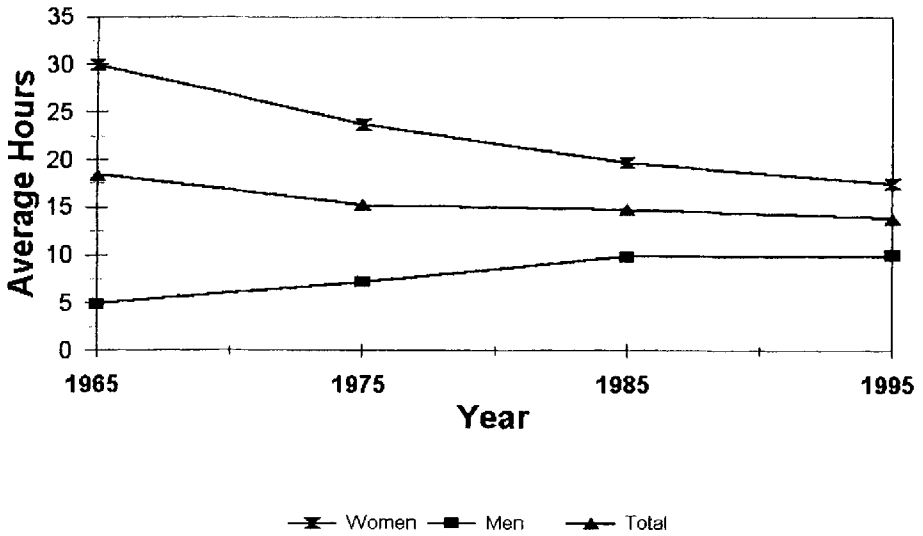
Table 1 reports the weekly housework hours for men and women and the ratio of women's to men's hours for all persons aged 25 to 64. Housework is separated into core tasks — cooking meals, meal cleanup, housecleaning, and laundry — and other tasks that are more discretionary and/or less time-consuming — outdoor chores, repairs, gardening/animal care, and bill paying.

Table 1 shows that women spent about 30 hours doing unpaid household work in 1965, over six times the 4.9 hours men spent in housework. Women's housework hours dropped to 23.7 hours per week in 1975,<sup>4</sup> 19.7 hours per week in 1985, and reached a low of 17.5 hours per week by 1995. Men's hours increased to 7.2 hours in 1975, 9.8 hours in 1985, and leveled off at 10.0 hours in 1995. In 1965, women averaged 6 times more hours than men, but this fell to only twice the number of men's housework hours by 1985. The ratio declined further to 1.8 in 1995, largely because women did less housework, not because men increased their hours of household work.

Almost two-thirds of total housework hours (for the entire sample) are spent doing the core housework tasks of cooking and cleaning (data not shown).<sup>5</sup> When we examine these tasks, all continue to be much more often the purview of women than men. Cooking, more than any of the cleaning tasks, is an area in which women



FIGURE 1: Average Hours of Housework for Men and Women



and men have shown great convergence, with women's reported hours 8.8 times men's in 1965 but only 2.8 times men's in 1995. In 1995, women continued to spend about 3 to 7 times as many hours as men on cleaning and laundry tasks. For all core tasks, the ratios have become much smaller; that is, women's and men's hours have become more similar, but women still do much more of this work.

Whereas there is a linear decline across time in women's participation in core housework tasks, trends in women's hours spent in other tasks are less monotonic. After 1965, men increased the time they spent in outdoor chores, repairs, garden/animal care, and bill paying. Hence, whereas in 1965 the ratio of women's to men's hours in these tasks taken as a whole was around unity, in later years women did about 60% as much of this type of work as men.

Table 2 combines the four survey years and predicts the variability of housework hours by year, marital and parental status, age, education, and employment status. Significant interactions of predictor variables with gender were found; hence models are run separately for men and women. Testing all interactions of these predictors with year identified significant interactions for the employment variables with time. These are also included in the model.<sup>6</sup>

Results for all women and all men are presented in columns 1 and 2 of Table 2. Consistent with a time availability perspective, employment status affects both men

TABLE 1: Trends in Average Weekly Housework Hours by Gender for Individuals Aged 25 to 64

	All Women				All Men				Ratio of Women's Time to Men's Time			
	1965	1975	1985	1995	1965	1975	1985	1995	1965	1975	1985	1995
	Total housework	30.0	23.7	19.7	17.5	4.9	7.2	9.8	10.0	6.1	3.3	2.0
Core housework	26.9	21.0	16.3	13.9	2.3	2.5	4.0	3.8	11.9	8.3	4.0	3.7
Cooking meals	9.3	8.1	7.0	4.6	1.1	1.5	2.0	1.6	8.8	5.3	3.4	2.8
Meal cleanup	4.5	2.4	1.9	.7	.5	.3	.4	.1	9.9	9.4	4.9	5.4
Housecleaning	7.2	7.3	5.0	6.7	.5	.5	1.3	1.7	15.5	14.0	3.9	3.8
Laundry and ironing	5.8	3.2	2.4	1.9	.3	.2	.3	.3	22.1	13.5	7.5	6.9
Other housework	3.1	2.7	3.4	3.6	2.6	4.7	5.7	6.2	1.2	.6	.6	.6
Outdoor chores	.3	.7	.5	.8	.4	1.0	1.3	1.9	.7	.7	.4	.4
Repairs	.4	.6	.5	.7	1.0	2.0	1.8	1.9	.4	.3	.3	.4
Garden and animal care	.6	.8	.8	.8	.2	.7	.9	1.0	2.4	1.1	.9	.8
Bills, other financial	1.8	.7	1.6	1.3	.9	1.0	1.6	1.5	2.0	.7	1.0	.9
N	579	927	1,725	493	469	783	1,405	359				

TABLE 1: Trends in Average Weekly Household Hours by Gender for Individuals Aged 25 to 64 (Continued)

	Married Women			Married Men			Ratio of Women's Time to Men's Time					
	1965	1975	1985	1965	1975	1985	1965	1975	1985	1995		
Total household	33.9	26.1	21.9	19.4	19.4	4.7	6.7	10.4	7.2	3.9	2.1	1.9
Core household	30.4	22.9	18.4	15.8	15.8	1.8	1.9	4.0	16.6	12.3	4.6	4.3
Cooking meals	10.7	9.0	7.9	5.3	5.3	.9	1.0	1.9	11.5	8.8	4.1	3.8
Meal cleanup	5.0	2.8	2.2	.9	.9	.4	.3	.4	12.2	10.0	5.4	5.2
Housecleaning	8.1	7.3	5.6	7.1	7.1	.4	.4	1.4	21.7	16.2	4.1	3.8
Laundry, ironing	6.6	3.8	2.7	2.4	2.4	.1	.1	.3	55.3	32.4	9.4	9.5
Other household	3.6	3.1	3.5	3.7	3.7	2.9	4.9	6.4	1.2	.6	.6	.5
Outdoor chores	.4	.7	.5	.8	.8	.5	1.0	1.5	.7	.7	.3	.4
Repairs	.5	.9	.6	.8	.8	1.3	2.2	2.1	.4	.4	.3	.3
Garden, animal care	.6	.8	.8	1.0	1.0	.3	.6	1.1	2.2	1.3	.8	1.3
Bills, other financial	2.0	.8	1.6	1.1	1.1	.8	1.0	1.8	2.5	.7	.9	.7
N	452	722	1,175	296	296	416	678	1,041	211			

Source: Authors' calculations, time diary sample (1965-95)

TABLE 2: OLS Coefficients for Determinants of Weekly Housework Hours for Men and Women

	All Women	All Men	Married Women	Married Men
<i>Year<sup>a</sup></i>				
1975	-5.35***	-2.74	-5.08***	-4.47
1985	-9.12***	2.04	-7.65***	3.33
1995	-10.08***	3.69	-10.00***	8.38+
<i>Time availability</i>				
<i>Parental status<sup>b</sup></i>				
Children under 18 in household	2.99***	1.79**	3.22***	1.27*
<i>Employment<sup>c</sup></i>				
Full-time employment	-14.22***	-7.66*	-12.82***	-8.88*
Part-time employment	-11.84***	-11.84*	-8.43*	-12.88+
<i>Resources</i>				
<i>Age<sup>d</sup></i>				
35 to 44	1.45*	1.71**	1.39	1.24+
45 to 54	3.55***	1.95**	3.50***	1.16
55 to 64	3.52***	4.70***	2.90*	2.16*
<i>Education<sup>e</sup></i>				
Some college	-1.05	.12	-1.84*	.32
College graduate	-1.35+	1.47*	-1.91*	1.57*
<i>Gender perspective</i>				
<i>Marital status<sup>f</sup></i>				
Married	5.09***	-.15		
<i>Interactions</i>				
1975 × full time	1.05	4.76	-.84	6.38
1975 × part time	4.60	11.53+	1.30	14.84+
1985 × full time	5.52***	1.96	1.74	1.09
1985 × part time	7.61*	10.98*	2.27	10.30
1995 × full time	3.13	.32	1.28	-4.49
1995 × part time	10.55**	16.02*	9.68*	23.60*
Intercept	27.92***	9.43*	33.06***	11.16**
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.19	.06	.17	.07

Source: Authors' calculations, time diary sample (1965-95)

<sup>a</sup> 1965 omitted

<sup>b</sup> No children under 18 omitted

<sup>c</sup> Not employed omitted

<sup>d</sup> 25 to 34 omitted

<sup>e</sup> High school or less omitted

<sup>f</sup> Not married omitted

+  $p \leq .10$  \*  $p \leq .05$  \*\*  $p \leq .01$  \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$  (two-tailed tests)

TABLE 3: Decomposition of 1995 – 1965 Changes in Average Weekly Hours of Housework<sup>a</sup>

	Women		Men	
	Hours	Percent Change	Hours	Percent Change
Average hours of housework, 1995	17.5		10.0	
Average hours of housework, 1965	30.0		4.9	
1995 – 1965 change	-12.5	100	5.1	100
Due to propensity (intercept + slope) differences	-9.0	71	4.3	86
Due to intercept differences	-9.8	78	-.7	-13
Due to slope differences	.8	-6	5.0	99
Due to compositional (mean) differences	-6.4	51	.7	14
Due to interaction	2.8	-22	.0	0

Source: Authors' calculations, time diary sample (1965-95)

<sup>a</sup> The 1965 data are used as the standard for this decomposition. Decomposition is based on the following equation:

$$\bar{E}_{95} - \bar{E}_{65} = b_{095} - b_{065} + \sum_{i=1}^n \bar{X}_{i65} (b_{i95} - b_{i65}) + \sum_{i=1}^n b_{i65} (\bar{X}_{i95} - \bar{X}_{i65}) + \sum_{i=1}^n (b_{i95} - b_{i65}) (\bar{X}_{i95} - \bar{X}_{i65})$$

and women, with full-time and part-time employed men and women doing significantly less housework than those not employed. Children increase time spent in housework for both men and women. Housework estimates do not include time spent doing child care — thus, children increase hours doing housework, such as laundry, cleaning, and cooking. What the time availability perspective cannot completely explain, however, is that children increase housework more for women than men. This suggests that something happens in households with children that goes beyond the rational allocation of domestic work hours to meet increased demand.

Because the time diary data are collected on individuals, we do not have measures of relative resources of married couples. However, variables measuring individuals' resources show significant effects on time spent in housework, though not in the expected direction. Relative to younger persons (those aged 25 to 34, the omitted category in the regressions), all older age groups do significantly *more* housework. Men aged 55 to 64 average almost 5 more hours per week than men aged 25 to 34. For women, housework hours are marginally higher after age 35 and appear to rise again after age 45 and then level off. Educational differentials are relatively small in the multivariate models, with college graduate men doing over an hour more and college graduate women over an hour less than those with a high school education or less. Consistent with the gender perspective, being married significantly increases housework hours for women, but not for men, with marriage associated with a five-hour-per-week increase in housework for women.

In the analysis of interactions with time, the most interesting finding is the significant interaction terms for employment and year in the models for women. All the interactions are positive, suggesting that the decline in housework hours after 1965 was actually more steep for nonemployed women than among women engaged in market work.<sup>7</sup>

The results for married women and married men, presented in columns 3 and 4 of Table 2, are in general quite similar to the results for all women and men. What is most striking is the significant positive coefficient for 1995 in the married men's regression. In 1995, married men were doing over eight more weekly hours of housework compared to their married counterparts in 1965.

Table 3 presents results of a decomposition analysis of the change in average hours of housework between 1965 and 1995.<sup>8</sup> The results indicate that almost all of the five-hour-per-week increase in men's housework time is related to their increased propensity to do housework; relatively little (14%) is due to shifts in men's demographic characteristics. Over time, an increasing percentage of men (3% in 1965 compared with 14% in 1995) are not working for pay as men retire earlier from the workforce. This shift in employment can account for virtually all of the compositional component in the decomposition results for men.

For women, compositional changes are a much more important explanation of the 12.5-hour-per-week decrease in household work, with about half of the decline associated with larger proportions of 1995 women who are employed and college educated and smaller proportions who are married and living with children in the household. More specifically, if women in 1995 had the same characteristics as those in 1965 — with the same low rates of labor force participation and higher rates of marriage and greater numbers of children — the decline in hours would be about 6 hours per week, not 12.

An even larger portion of the decline, however, can be attributed to a decreased propensity of women to do housework. Most of the propensity difference results from intercept differences at the two points in time, and the interaction component is also sizable for women. The interaction picks up the fact that, as women have become more educated and more often employed, the negative propensity to do housework has declined for the employed relative to the nonemployed and the better educated relative to the less educated.<sup>9</sup> The intercept component picks up the change over time in the propensity of the women in the omitted categories in the regressions (the nonemployed, less educated, unmarried, and childless) to do housework. The large share of the decline in housework hours of women that can be attributed to the intercept component suggests that the likelihood of doing housework was, if anything, declining fastest for those with the most time available for domestic work — nonemployed, unmarried, childless women. During the period between 1965 and 1995, there was a sizable and widespread disinvestment in housework by women.

TABLE 4: Estimates of Weekly Housework Hours for Married Men and Married Women

	Married Women		Married Men		Ratio <sup>c</sup>		Gap <sup>d</sup>
	Time Diary <sup>a</sup>	NSFH2 <sup>b</sup>	Time Diary	NSFH2	Time Diary	NSFH2	
Total housework	19.4	30.5	10.4	15.3	1.9	2.0	15.3
Core housework	15.8	27.0	3.7	7.5	4.3	3.6	19.5
Cooking meals	5.3	9.0	1.4	2.7	3.8	3.4	6.4
Meal cleanup	.9	6.1	.2	2.1	5.2	2.9	4.0
Housecleaning	7.1	7.6	1.9	1.9	3.8	3.9	5.7
Laundry and ironing	2.4	4.3	.3	.8	9.5	5.2	3.5
Other housework	3.7	3.5	6.7	7.7	.5	.5	-4.2
Outdoor chores	.8	1.9	2.1	4.9	.4	.4	-3.0
Repairs	.8	n/a	2.2	n/a	.3	n/a	n/a
Garden and animal care	1.0	n/a	.8	n/a	1.3	n/a	n/a
Bills, other financial	1.1	1.5	1.6	1.3	.7	1.2	.2
Car maintenance	n/a	.1	n/a	1.5	n/a	.1	-1.4
N	296	4,107	211	4,107			

Sources: Authors' calculations, time diary sample (1995) and NSFH2 (1992-94)

<sup>a</sup> Married men and married women in the time diary sample are not married to each other.

<sup>b</sup> Married men and married women in the NSFH2 sample are married to each other.

<sup>c</sup> The mean of married women's hours divided by the mean for married men

<sup>d</sup> The mean of the within-couple difference, i.e., a wife's hours minus her husband's hours

In sum, the evidence suggests a continued decline in housework by women but a stalled increase (after 1985) on the part of men, though perhaps not for married men. Interestingly, both the pooled regression results and the decomposition analysis suggest that the decline for women is notably more pronounced across time among women who are not employed than for women who are employed. This suggests that the propensity to use time for housework declined most among the group with the most, not the least, time available for housework.

The time diary data are used to provide a description of trends over time and allow us to address the three theoretical perspectives in a limited fashion. However, they do set the stage for the analysis of theories of the division of labor with couple data in the NSFH. Coefficients for indicators of time availability, such as employment status and children, do affect housework in predictable, seemingly rational ways. However, other aspects of the analysis — the fact that marriage increases wives' but not husbands' housework, that children expand mothers' household work more than fathers', and that the shedding of household work has been just as pronounced among those with more rather than less time available for nonmarket work — all suggest that there is a need to incorporate measures that go beyond assessing basic compositional factors, basic "time availability" and demand for household work variables. To do this, we must examine couples married to each other to construct relative resources variables. Also, gender ideology measures are not available in the time diary studies but are asked in the NSFH. We turn to this assessment in the next section.

### Housework Differences among Husbands and Wives

Overall, at each point in time, married women's total weekly allocation of time to housework is about two to three hours higher than for the larger sample of all women (compare panel B to panel A in Table 1). For married men, the total time in housework is slightly less than for the total sample of men in 1965 and 1975, and slightly greater in 1985 and 1995. The ratio of married women's to men's time is generally a little higher than for the total sample, consistent with the research literature that shows that women increase their time devoted to housework after marrying while men's time does not change or declines (Gupta 1999; South & Spitze 1994).

Table 4 compares weekly estimates of housework hours of married men and women in the NSFH sample with estimates from the 1995 time diaries. NSFH estimates of weekly hours are 50% higher for married men and women, but the ratios of women's to men's hours of housework tend to be quite comparable to those estimated from the time-diary data (as in Marini & Shelton 1993). As with time-diary estimates, wives in the NSFH do more total housework than husbands,



performing twice as much household labor, in relative terms. In the NSFH, wives spend 3.6 times as many hours as husbands on core housework tasks and about half as much time as husbands on the other tasks. Differences between husbands' and wives' hours for the specific tasks are also similar to estimates reported in time-diary studies. Among core tasks, husbands spend the most time cooking and the least time doing laundry. Of the other tasks, wives spend the least time doing car maintenance. Over three-quarters of wives' hours are spent in core housework, whereas husbands allocate about half their housework hours to core tasks.

The final column of Table 4 shows an estimate that we cannot generate from the time-diary data, namely an estimate of the average "within-couple" gap in hours devoted to housework. The gap is estimated to be about 15 hours per week. Given that estimates tend to be about 50% higher in the NSFH, one might speculate that were we to have information on couples in the time diary study, the gap would likely be about 50% less, or around 10 hours a week. Note that a 10-hour difference separates the mean housework hours for all married men and women (not married to each other) in the 1995 time diary (columns 1 and 3 in Table 4).

The NSFH regression analysis of wife's time spent in housework, husband's time spent in housework, and the within-couple housework gender gap is shown in Table 5. Overall, factors associated with time availability and, secondarily, with the relative resources of husbands and wives are the most important predictors of housework time. To assess this, we compared standardized coefficients of the variables, as well as the adjusted  $R^2$  for models with and without the variables measuring each perspective (data not shown).

In terms of time availability, both employment hours and children are important predictors of unpaid labor time. The wife's hours of market work affects the couple's housework hours, increasing her husband's housework, decreasing her own housework, and reducing the housework gap. The husband's weekly hours of market work decrease his housework, have a small effect on his wife's housework, and increase the gender gap. Children aged 0 to 4 and 5 to 11 significantly increase time in housework for both husbands and wives. However, children under 12 increase wives' hours in housework more than three times more than for husbands. The number of girls aged 12 to 18 has a significant effect on wives, increasing their housework over one and a half hours, but has no impact on husbands. Boys aged 12 to 18 increase wives' housework by three hours per week and nearly one hour for husbands. Children of all ages increase the housework gender gap, with the greatest increases in the gap for the younger-aged children. Children tend to increase housework hours for both mothers and fathers but do so relatively more for mothers, so the gap widens, especially when preschoolers are present.

The relative resources of husbands and wives also affect the division of unpaid labor. Compared with couples in which the husband has a college degree but the wife does not, couples in which the wife has more education than the husband have smaller gender gaps in housework. The greater the proportion of couple income

TABLE 5: OLS Coefficients for Determinants of Weekly Housework Hours and the Gender Gap for Married Couples

	Wife's Housework Hours	Husband's Housework Hours	Housework Gender Gap
<i>Time availability</i>			
Wife's average weekly hours of employment	-.17***	.04***	-.22***
Husband's average weekly hours of employment	.05*	-.06***	.11***
Number of children 0 to 4	3.41***	.72*	2.69***
Number of children 5 to 11	3.17***	.78***	2.40***
Number of girls 12 to 18	1.80***	-.45	2.25***
Number of boys 12 to 18	2.95***	.91**	2.04***
<i>Relative resources</i>			
Education <sup>a</sup>			
Neither wife nor husband has college degree	2.47*	1.27*	1.20
Both wife and husband have college degree	-1.61+	-.38	-1.24
Wife has college degree, husband does not	-2.01	2.02**	-4.03**
Husband's education in years	-.48**	.16+	-.64***
Income			
Wife's proportion of couple income	-4.24**	2.89***	-7.14***
Husband's logged wage and salary income	-.66**	.65***	-1.31***
Age <sup>b</sup>			
Wife's age and husband's age within 2 years	-1.40**	-.21	-1.19*
Wife's age > 2 years husband's age	-.22	-.77	.54
Husband's age	-.03	-.24*	.21
Husband's age <sup>2</sup>	.00	.00*	-.00
<i>Gender perspective</i>			
Gender ideology <sup>c</sup>			
Wife's gender ideology	-.66*	.17	-.83**
Husband's gender ideology	-.79**	.17	-.96**
Wife's and husband's gender ideology interaction	.05	-.01	.06+
Wife thinks should share housework	-2.11*	-.09	-2.02+
Husband thinks should share housework	-.86	.78	-1.65
Wife and husband share housework interaction	.24	-.03	.27
Couple employment status <sup>d</sup>			
Both wife and husband employed	-2.41*	-.37	-2.04+
Wife employed, husband not; or both not employed	-2.26	.82	-3.08+

TABLE 5: OLS Coefficients for Determinants of Weekly Housework Hours and the Gender Gap for Married Couples (Continued)

	Wife's Housework Hours	Husband's Housework Hours	Housework Gender Gap
<i>Controls</i>			
Couple owns home (1 = yes, 0 = no)	2.07**	1.36***	.71
Wife's health condition limits housework (1 = yes, 0 = no)	-.75	1.00*	-1.74*
Husband's health condition limits housework (1 = yes, 0 = no)	-.46	-.31	-.14
Wife in school (1 = yes, 0 = no)	-2.36*	1.43*	-3.79**
Husband in school (1 = yes, 0 = no)	.68	-.16	.84
Wife is white, non-Hispanic	-1.27*	-.43	-.84
Husband is white, non-Hispanic	-.41	-.85*	.44
Intercept	57.24***	11.79**	45.45***
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.22	.06	.20

Source: Authors' calculations, NSFH2 (1992-94)

<sup>a</sup> Husband has college degree, wife does not omitted

<sup>b</sup> Husband's age > 2 years wife's age omitted

<sup>c</sup> High scores = egalitarian ideology

<sup>d</sup> Wife not employed, husband employed omitted

+  $p \leq .10$  \*  $p \leq .05$  \*\*  $p \leq .01$  \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$  (two-tailed tests)

the wife earns, the less housework she does, the more her husband does, and the smaller the gender gap. Wives who are the same age as their husbands do fewer hours of housework (and have a smaller gender gap) than wives who are more than two years younger than their husbands.

We assess the gender perspective with measures of the couple's gender ideology. Wives with a more egalitarian gender ideology do less housework, reducing the gap, but their ideology does not affect husbands' housework hours. Husbands' egalitarian ideology does not cause them to increase their own hours, but wives married to husbands with a more egalitarian gender ideology do less housework than wives married to husbands with a more traditional gender ideology. There is a small positive interaction effect, which attenuates slightly the expected reduction in the gender gap when both husband and wife have egalitarian ideologies. Additionally, wives who think housework should be shared equally do less housework and thereby reduce the gender gap. The comparable measure for husbands has no significant effect on husbands' or wives' housework hours.

In terms of the couple employment measure, wives in two-job couples did less housework than wives in traditional families. Husbands who were unemployed did not do significantly less housework than employed husbands in a more

traditional family where the wife was not employed. Contrary to Brines (1994), who found unemployed husbands did less housework than employed husbands and argued that this supported the gender perspective, the NSFH findings offer no such support.

In terms of control variables, homeownership increases both husbands' and wives' time in housework, but it does not significantly increase the gender gap. Husbands do more housework when their wife is unable to do it for health reasons. School enrollment by wives significantly reduces the housework gap, increasing husbands' and decreasing wives' housework. Men's student status has no significant effect either on husband's or wife's housework or on the housework gap. Race of the spouses has a statistically significant effect, with white husbands and white wives performing significantly fewer hours of housework than minority husbands and wives.

Overall, more variance in wives' hours than in husbands' hours can be explained by these variables, as is indicated by the adjusted R-squared statistics.

## Conclusion

This study underscores the continued dramatic changes in the performance of unpaid household labor since the 1960s. While there is still someone doing housework, much less of it is being performed in American homes. This is especially notable in that homes have become significantly larger during this time — suggesting a greater need to do cleaning, other things equal.

What has replaced this “undone” labor? It is likely somewhat made up with a reliance on the service economy for goods more often produced in the home in years past (like take-out meals). Additionally, there may be a general devaluation of the work or its results (i.e., a decline in standards). For example, ironing may seem more boring or onerous, and wrinkle-free clothing may be less important to women (and men) today and to the culture in general. Indeed, the lore regarding mid-twentieth-century housewives, who ironed even the sheets that the family slept on, may indicate that in midcentury there was an *overvaluation* of housework, with standards now more in line with Americans' preferences for how to spend their time.

Though not as pronounced as in earlier years, the someone doing housework today is still usually female. The trend in women's labor shows that the steady decrease noted through the 1980s has continued, so that a woman in the 1990s performs a bit more than half the hours that a woman in the 1960s did. Moreover, even accounting for changes in the characteristics of women in the two eras, there is a significant decrease in women's propensity to do housework.

Men, and especially husbands, did more housework in 1995 than in 1965, with the largest increases occurring prior to 1985. Very little of the increase in the past

decades is due to compositional changes but rather to their increased willingness to perform this labor. This research suggests that if husbands' *relative* proportion of unpaid work is examined, they look more egalitarian in recent years. Gender segregation of tasks continues, with wives performing the "core," traditionally feminine tasks to a large degree and men concentrating their household labor on other, more episodic or discretionary tasks.

Why have men, regardless of marital status, increased their propensity to do housework? The increase among married men is likely due to a real need for increased participation as wives devote more time to paid rather than unpaid work. This increase is likely to have occurred in conjunction with changed attitudes about what is expected, reasonable, and fair for men to contribute to the maintenance of their home. It is perhaps harder to explain why single men's hours in unpaid labor increased. Possibly, it is related to their different characteristics — that is, men are single longer than in the past and may live in larger dwellings that require more work. However, the increase across all men indicates some degree of cultural change in ideas about "women's work." It is likely more acceptable for men to cook and clean, indeed, welcomed, for men to show competence at making a home-cooked meal, for example.

It is unclear why the trend of men's increase in housework from the 1960s has leveled off in the most recent period, while women's hours have continued to decline. The "stall" could indicate merely that men will continue to increase their allocation to housework over the next decades, but at a slower rate than in the 1970s and 1980s. Alternatively, there may be some relatively stable "ceiling" for how much time men will contribute to housework, unless there are significant changes in how paid work is structured, or to gender relations more generally.

In terms of factors affecting how couples divide up unpaid labor today, we find that time availability, relative resources of the spouses, and gender ideology were all important predictors of the gap between husbands' and wives' unpaid labor, with time availability and relative resources measures accounting for more of the variance in domestic labor allocation than the gender perspective variables. Having said this, one caveat is that it is possible that our measures of time availability and relative resources are better indicators of these theoretical perspectives, while the elements of the gender perspective are harder to capture. In both the NSFH and the time-diary analyses, husbands' hours in unpaid labor are much less responsive to time availability or relative resources than wives'. Although indirect, this suggests that gender, and the gender perspective, is important for understanding how married couples allocate their time — wives' more than husbands' housework time continues to be affected by the exigencies of family life.

## APPENDIX A: Means and Standard Deviations of Dependent and Independent Variables, Time Diary Sample

Panel A: Entire Sample

	All Women							
	1965		1975		1985		1995	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
<i>Dependent variable</i>								
Total housework	30.01	17.29	23.70	16.57	19.74	15.62	17.47	18.22
<i>Independent variables</i>								
Marital status (1 = married; 0 = not married)	.76	.41	.69	.43	.68	.45	.68	.43
Children under 18 (kids = 1; no kids = 0)	.58	.48	.52	.46	.45	.48	.54	.46
Aged 25 to 34	.28	.43	.32	.43	.34	.46	.30	.42
Aged 35 to 44	.28	.43	.24	.39	.28	.43	.32	.43
Aged 45 to 54	.27	.43	.22	.38	.20	.38	.25	.40
Aged 55 to 64	.18	.37	.22	.38	.18	.37	.13	.31
High school or less	.81	.38	.76	.40	.59	.47	.52	.46
Some college	.08	.27	.12	.30	.18	.37	.26	.41
College graduate	.10	.29	.12	.30	.22	.40	.22	.38
Full-time employment	.32	.45	.40	.45	.55	.48	.59	.46
Part-time employment	.06	.24	.05	.20	.07	.25	.12	.30
Not employed	.62	.47	.56	.46	.37	.47	.29	.42
N	579		927		1,725		493	

## Notes

1. Two other housework activities that are reported in the NSFH, "shopping for groceries and other household goods" and "driving other household members to work, school, or other activities," are not included. Shopping is coded in the time diary studies, but the codes include all time spent shopping, including time browsing at shopping malls and activities that might be thought of as leisure. Because "shopping" in the time diaries is not limited to "shopping for groceries or household items," as in the NSFH, we exclude shopping from our estimates of housework. "Driving other household members" is not coded in the time diary studies in the same terms as in the NSFH, so it is not used either.

2. A question on respondent hours employed per week was not included in the 1995 study. To maintain comparability across all time points, a paid work hours covariate is not included in these analyses.

3. In order to reduce missing data, the mean was substituted for missing values on weekly work hours, education, and gender ideology, and we included dummy variables for these cases in the regression models (coefficients not shown).

APPENDIX A: Means and Standard Deviations of Dependent and Independent Variables, Time Diary Sample (Continued)

## Panel A: Entire Sample

	All Men							
	1965		1975		1985		1995	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
<i>Dependent variable</i>								
Total housework	4.88	8.32	7.23	12.36	9.75	15.02	9.95	16.78
<i>Independent variables</i>								
Marital status								
(1 = married; 0 = not married)	.80	.40	.82	.40	.74	.46	.67	.49
Children under 18								
(kids = 1; no kids = 0)	.59	.49	.46	.51	.42	.52	.44	.52
Aged 25 to 34	.27	.44	.29	.47	.34	.50	.32	.49
Aged 35 to 44	.30	.46	.24	.44	.29	.48	.32	.49
Aged 45 to 54	.25	.43	.26	.45	.19	.42	.18	.40
Aged 55 to 64	.18	.39	.21	.42	.17	.40	.18	.40
High school or less	.76	.43	.66	.49	.53	.53	.47	.52
Some college	.08	.28	.14	.36	.16	.39	.26	.46
College graduate	.15	.36	.20	.41	.30	.48	.27	.46
Full-time employment	.94	.24	.82	.40	.79	.43	.84	.39
Part-time employment	.03	.18	.02	.15	.03	.18	.03	.17
Not employed	.03	.17	.16	.38	.19	.41	.14	.36
N	469		783		1,405		359	

4. The 1965 Americans' Use of Time study and the 1975 Time Use in Economic and Social Accounts used different sample designs. The 1965 study collected data from individuals between 19 and 65 years of age living in cities with a population between 30,000 and 280,000 and in households that had at least one adult employed in a nonfarm occupation. The 1975 study collected data from a representative sample of U.S. households. To determine if change from 1965 to 1975 was the result of different sample designs or from behavioral shifts, we examined mean weekly housework hours for the 812 respondents from the 1975 study who match the 1965 sample design. The overall trend is the same for both the restricted and full 1975 sample, and estimates differ only very slightly. Accordingly, we present data from the full 1975 sample in Table 1 (means for the restricted 1975 sample are available from the authors on request) because the full sample is comparable to the 1985 and 1995 samples.

5. In 1995, the total sample (men and women combined) averaged 14 weekly hours doing housework, of which 9 hours (64%) were spent in the core housework tasks (i.e., cooking, meal cleanup, cleaning, and laundry). In 1965, the total sample averaged 18

## APPENDIX A: Means and Standard Deviations of Dependent and Independent Variables, Time Diary Sample (Continued)

Panel B: Married Women and Men

<i>Dependent variable</i>	Married Women							
	1965		1975		1985		1995	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Total housework	33.94	16.12	26.05	15.88	21.91	16.27	19.44	20.03
<i>Independent variables</i>								
Children under 18 (kids = 1; no kids = 0)	.69	.44	.56	.43	.52	.48	.60	.49
Aged 25 to 34	.29	.43	.30	.40	.31	.44	.30	.45
Aged 35 to 44	.30	.44	.25	.38	.31	.44	.31	.46
Aged 45 to 54	.26	.42	.26	.38	.21	.39	.25	.43
Aged 55 to 64	.15	.34	.19	.34	.18	.37	.13	.34
High school or less	.81	.38	.75	.37	.62	.47	.51	.50
Some college	.10	.28	.12	.28	.17	.36	.26	.43
College graduate	.09	.27	.13	.29	.21	.39	.23	.42
Full-time employment	.18	.37	.34	.41	.51	.48	.57	.49
Part-time employment	.06	.22	.06	.21	.08	.26	.13	.34
Not employed	.77	.40	.60	.42	.41	.47	.30	.45
N	452		722		1,175		296	

weekly hours doing housework, of which 15 hours (83%) were spent in core housework tasks.

6. Although year does not remain statistically significant in multivariate models, the increase in men's housework hours and decrease in women's housework hours between 1965 and 1995 is statistically significant in bivariate regressions using year to predict housework hours.

7. For men, the only significant interactions are for part-time work and year. Very few men in any given year are employed part-time (2-3%). We include part-time work as a category for men for consistency in variable specification with the models for women. However, the vast majority of men in the age range of 25 to 64 are full-time workers.

8. There are various ways to standardize rates or assess change in rates versus compositional factors over time. We employ the method suggested by Althausser and Wigler (1972) that separates change into that attributable to differences in "rates" or "propensities" (i.e., intercept and slope differences), differences in "composition" (i.e., changes in means of the independent variables with time), and an interaction component.



**APPENDIX A: Means and Standard Deviations of Dependent and Independent Variables, Time Diary Sample (Continued)**

Panel B: Married Men and Women

Dependent variable	Married Men							
	1965		1975		1985		1995	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Total housework	4.74	7.67	6.72	11.87	10.36	15.98	10.42	18.77
<i>Independent variables</i>								
Children under 18 (kids = 1; no kids = 0)	.71	.43	.55	.50	.53	.53	.52	.56
Aged 25 to 34	.26	.42	.28	.45	.28	.47	.23	.47
Aged 35 to 44	.30	.43	.25	.43	.30	.48	.32	.52
Aged 45 to 54	.26	.41	.27	.44	.22	.44	.21	.46
Aged 55 to 64	.18	.37	.20	.40	.20	.42	.24	.47
High school or less	.76	.41	.68	.46	.54	.52	.44	.55
Some college	.09	.27	.13	.33	.16	.38	.28	.50
College graduate	.15	.34	.19	.39	.29	.48	.27	.49
Full-time employment	.95	.21	.84	.36	.81	.41	.87	.37
Part-time employment	.02	.12	.02	.14	.02	.16	.02	.17
Not employed	.03	.17	.14	.34	.17	.39	.10	.34
N	416		678		1,041		211	

Source: Author's calculations, time diary sample (1965-95)

9. The interaction of year with education was actually not statistically significant in regression models pooled across years.

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## APPENDIX B: Means and Standard Deviations of Dependent and Independent Variables, NSFH2

	Mean	S.D.
<i>Dependent variables</i>		
Wife's weekly hours of housework	30.50	17.90
Husband's weekly hours of housework	15.25	9.49
Wife's housework hours – husband's housework hours	15.25	20.40
<i>Time availability</i>		
Wife's average weekly work hours	27.01	19.05
Husband's average weekly work hours	40.01	18.57
Number of children 0 to 4	.28	.61
Number of children 5 to 11	.46	.81
Number of girls 12 to 18	.20	.49
Number of boys 12 to 18	.22	.53
<i>Relative resources</i>		
Education		
Husband has college degree, wife does not	.13	
Neither wife nor husband has college degree	.62	
Both wife and husband have college degree	.18	
Wife has college degree, husband does not	.07	
Husband's education in years	13.46	3.14
Income		
Wife's proportion of couple income	.37	.33
Husband's wage and salary income	29,424.45	30,735.35
Age		
Husband's age > 2 years wife's age	.44	
Wife's age and husband's age within 2 years	.49	
Wife's age > 2 years husband's age	.07	
Husband's age	44.78	12.09
Husband's age <sup>2</sup>	2,140.20	1,147.66
<i>Gender perspective</i>		
Gender ideology <sup>a</sup>		
Wife's gender ideology	8.87	2.95
Husband's gender ideology	8.18	2.74
Wife thinks should share housework	3.78	1.00
Husband thinks should share housework	3.64	1.00
Couple employment status		
Wife not employed, husband employed	.20	
Both wife and husband employed	.68	
Husband not employed, wife employed; or both not employed	.12	

**APPENDIX B: Means and Standard Deviations of Dependent and Independent Variables, NSFH2 (Continued)**

	Mean	S.D.
<i>Controls</i>		
Couple owns home (1 = yes; 0 = no)	.83	
Wife's health condition limits housework (1 = yes; 0 = no)	.11	
Husband's health condition limits housework (1 = yes; 0 = no)	.08	
Wife in school (1 = yes; 0 = no)	.05	
Husband in school (1 = yes; 0 = no)	.03	
Wife is white, non-Hispanic	.75	
Husband is white, non-Hispanic	.76	
N	4,107	

Source: Author's calculations, NSFH2 (1992-94)

<sup>a</sup> High scores = egalitarian ideology

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