Women’s Housework: New Tests of Time and Money

I use variation by the day of week - comparing weekdays to weekends - to reconsider three main explanations for variation in women’s housework time. I predict that while evidence of gender deviance neutralization should be evident on both weekdays and weekends, evidence of time constraints and, potentially, absolute earnings should be most apparent on weekdays. I test these hypotheses with the largest sample to date (American Time Use Survey 2003-2012) and careful consideration of the functional form between resources/constraints and housework time. I find that all three measures of resources/constraints – relative earnings, absolute earnings, and employment hours – perform as poor predictors of women’s housework on weekends. On weekdays, women’s own employment hours and earnings have diminishing returns on reducing housework time. I find no support for compensatory gender display as measured by women’s relative earnings. I conclude that our focus on women’s need to compensate for their gender deviance by doing more housework is no longer true, if it ever was, but furthermore it draws our attention away from the limits to outsourcing and employment practices that are out-of-sync with American families.