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Race, Ethnicity, and the Gender-Poverty Gap

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ABSTRACT

We use data from the Current Population Survey (CPS 1994–2001) to document the relationship between gender-specific demographic variations and the gender-poverty gap among eight racial/ethnic groups. We find that Black and Puerto Rican women experience a double disadvantage owing to being both women and members of a minority group. As compared with whites, however, gender inequality among other minority groups is relatively small. By utilizing a standardization technique, we are able to estimate the importance of gender-specific demographic and socioeconomic composition in shaping differences in men's and women's poverty rates both within and across racial/ethnic lines. The analysis reveals that sociodemographic characteristics have a distinct effect on the poverty rate of minority women, and that the form and the magnitude of the effect vary across racial/ethnic lines. By incorporating the newly available immigration information in the CPS data, we are also able to document the effect of immigration status on gender inequality. The social and economic implications of the findings for the study of gender inequality are discussed in the last section of the article.

Key words: poverty; gender inequality; race and ethnicity; feminization of poverty.

Since the late 1970s, the “feminization of poverty” (Pearce 1978), a term referring to a process whereby the poverty population increasingly comprises women and their children, has been receiving growing attention among social scientists (Bianchi 1999). While there is virtual unanimity that American women are more likely than men to fall into poverty, aggregate figures pertaining to the gender gap in poverty mask critical racial and ethnic variations; this is true with respect not only to the magnitude of the gap but also the social and demographic determinants that shape it. Indeed, the “feminization of poverty” thesis was criticized for its failure to recognize that minority women are disproportionately represented among the poor. In the early 1980s, Palmer (1983: 4–5) introduced the phrase “racial feminization of poverty” to reflect the fact that minority women are at greater risk of falling into poverty than either minority men or white women. Recent data on poverty rates in the United States indicate that black, Native American, and Hispanic women are disproportionately represented among the poor, and several studies have pointed to a need to study the distinct patterns and origins of women’s poverty across both racial and ethnic lines (Hardy and Hazelrigg 1995; Starrels, Bould, Nicholas 1994; Waters and Eschbach 1995).

A second line of critique of the feminization of poverty thesis focuses on the measurement and interpretation of gender disparity in poverty. “From the beginning what the term ‘feminization’ meant and to whom it referred were not always clear [and] ...statistics cited to support the feminization of poverty tended to blur these distinctions” (Bianchi 1999: 309). In the essay, “The Perils of Provocative Statistics,” Scanlan (1991) drew on the literature on the feminization of poverty to argue that these data are misleading because they convey the erroneous notion that over time the risks of poverty have increased for women. The author also noted that the statistics on the number of women who fall below the poverty line was shifting attention away from the more critical measure of women’s economic hardship: the *proportion* of female-headed family members who are poor. In an attempt to more systematically assess trends in gendering poverty, McLanahan, Sorensen, and Watson (1989) posited that to better assess the relative economic hardship faced by women, one needs to measure the ratio of women’s to men’s poverty rates (Binachi 1999). Historical trends with respect to the gender-poverty ratio show that in any year from 1966 to 2000, American women were about 25 to 30 percent more likely to be poor than men. And although during the 1990s poverty rates declined substantially for both men and women, the gender-poverty ratio remained almost constant. While in 1990 the

ratio of men's to women's poverty rate was 1.29; the rates in 2000 were 9.9 for men and 12.5 for women, making the ratio 1.26 (computed from data in U.S. Bureau of Census 2001).

The current study documents the conjunction of racial/ethnic and gender characteristics in determining gender-poverty ratio in contemporary American society. By using aggregated data from the 1994–2001 Current Population Survey (CPS), this study extends the previous research on gender inequality in two notable ways. First, this study more carefully explores racial and ethnic differentiation in gender inequality by incorporating the Asian and the Native American populations and by disaggregating the Hispanic population. Second, by incorporating labor market and family structure characteristics, as well as the newly available immigration information, and by utilizing a standardization technique that decomposes the gender-poverty gap, we are able estimate the extent to which socioeconomic and demographic composition shapes the gender-poverty gap, both within and across racial and ethnic lines.

POVERTY, GENDER, RACE, AND ETHNICITY

The literature on gender inequality in poverty underscores two critical, but not necessarily contradictory explanations (Casper, McLanahan, and Garfinkel 1994; Northrop 1994; Pearce 1978; Smith and Ward 1989; Starrels, Bould, Nicholas 1994; Treas 1987). The neoclassical theory of human capital focuses on gender parity in labor market skills, and underlines the role played by human capital and labor market attainment in the production of gender inequality. This theoretical framework suggests that women and men acquire different skills and credentials (Blau and Kahn 1994) and that, as a result, the economic resources of women lag behind those of men and women are more likely to be poor than are men. While generally men have greater access to social and financial remuneration than do women, the extent of gender variations in human capital and labor force participation varies greatly across racial and ethnic lines. Whereas the labor force participation rates of black women are similar to those of white women, minority women are at higher risk of unemployment, their incomes lag behind those of both white women and minority men, and they are at a greater risk of falling into poverty (Schaffner-Goldberg 1990). Gender inequality in educational and occupational attainment varies substantially across racial and ethnic lines. A comparison of gender variation in education at the bachelor's degree level and higher, reveals that in the late 1990s White women had lower educational attainment than white men, whereas black women had higher educational attainment than black men (U.S.

Bureau of Census 1997). Almquist (1987) reports that as compared with Cubans, Japanese, Chinese, and Koreans, gender inequality in managerial and professional positions is relatively low among blacks, Mexican Americans, Native Americans, and Puerto Ricans.

The demographic perspective emphasizes the changing structure of the American family, and in particular, the breakup of the two-spouse family, as the main factor that has shaped the feminization of poverty since 1960 (Smith and Ward 1989, Barrington and Conrad 1994). Within such a framework, the gender-differentiated family roles, in general, and the higher dependency ratio seen for single mothers, in particular, are key to understanding why so many women are falling below the poverty line. Note as well that the factors determining single motherhood vary by race and ethnic origin. Whereas white female heads of household are more likely to become poor due to marital disruption, black and Puerto Rican female householders more typically live below the poverty line because of extramarital childbearing (Jaynes and Williams 1989, Farley 1984). It is not only that black women are more likely than white women to experience divorce, but among divorced women with children, whites are more likely than blacks to receive child support and other financial assets, as part of a divorce settlement (Cherlin 1992, Glick 1997: 126). Racial and ethnic variations in fertility rates also are substantial; Hispanic women, for instance, tend to have higher fertility rates than white, black, and Asian women (Bachu and O'Connell 2001). This pattern increases the dependency ratio (ratio of dependents to earners) of the average Hispanic family.

Acknowledging the visible variation in the gender-poverty gap across racial lines, students of social inequality have argued that black women face a greater economic hardship that is not shared by either minority men or white women (Hooks et al. 1995; but see Patterson 1993). As Harriet A. Jacobs stated in 1857: "Superadded to the burden common to all, they [black women] have wrongs, and sufferings and mortifications peculiarly their own" (in Patterson 1993: 8). Contemporary writers, however, debate both the form and the magnitude of the socioeconomic impoverishment of minority women. Hardy and Hazelrigg (1995), for instance, posit that the conjunction between gender and race/ethnicity can occur in two different forms. The additive form suggests that the hardship that minority women experience as women does not differ significantly from the disadvantages suffered by women in general. The more complex form of gender inequality, addressed by the double disadvantage hypothesis, implies an interactive form whereby the disadvantage associated with being a woman is augmented by being a minority group member. "Although being a woman is associated with a higher risk of

poverty for all women, the magnitude of that gender difference depends on whether the woman is white or non-white” (Hardy and Hazelrigg 1995: 46).

Data on the gender gap in poverty show that the poverty rates of racial/ethnic minority women surpass the poverty rates of both white women and minority men. Most previous studies on racial and gender inequality in poverty have focused on black-white inequality, and have indicated that gender differentials in poverty status are greater among African Americans (Eggebeen and Lichter 1991; Hoffman 1992; Starrels, Bould, and Nicholas, 1994; Northrop 1994; Rodgers 1987). The altered racial/ethnic composition of the U.S. population due to changes in the makeup of immigration flows and in racial/ethnic variations in fertility rates, necessitates the consideration of gender inequality as it exists among other racial and ethnic minorities. While the emphasis on black-white economic differentials, mainly in the context of gender inequality, is understandable, recent data indicate that Native Americans and some Hispanic groups experience poverty at rates comparable to or greater than those of blacks, and that non-black minority women are disproportionately represented among the poor (Waters and Eschbach 1995; Starrels, Bould and Nicholas 1994; Hardy and Hazelrigg 1995).

Poverty rates of men and women vary not only along racial/ethnic lines. It is also doubtful that the causes of the gender gap in poverty are the same across all racial/ethnic lines (Tienda and Jensen 1988). For example, while Native Americans experience a relatively high rate of poverty, many of them live in traditional households of married couples and children (Sandefur and Sakamoto 1988), a pattern that stands in sharp contrast to the black and Puerto Rican pattern and that is likely to reduce the gender-poverty gap among Native Americans. Hispanics compose the bulk of non-African American, minority households in the United States, and their proportion within the total population has increased steadily over the past three decades. While some Hispanic groups have relatively high poverty rates, previous studies report significant intragroup variation within the Hispanic population. Specifically, Puerto Rican families were found to be at a higher risk of poverty than Mexican and other Hispanic groups (Tienda and Jensen 1988; Starrels, Bould, and Nicholas 1994). The large number of foreign-born immigrants within both the Hispanic and the Asian populations expose these individuals and families to a different opportunity structure than that of the native-born population, and this puts them at greater risk of falling into poverty. While immigrants tend to pay a high economic and social cost in the host society, several studies have reported that immigrant women undergo greater hardships than do immigrant men (Boyd 1984, Raijman and Semyonov 1997).

The ensuing analysis draws upon the literature on the gender gap in poverty and the way race and gender interact to shape this gap. The analysis has been divided into three sections. In the first section the gender-poverty gap is described as it exists among eight racial/ethnic groups in contemporary American society. In the second section a multivariate analysis (logistic regression) is used to test the socioeconomic and demographic factors that determine racial/ethnic variation in the poverty gender gap. In the third section a standardization technique is employed as part of an effort to decompose the poverty gender gap and to estimate the sources of the gap both within and across racial and ethnic lines.

DATA AND VARIABLES

The data for this study come from the March Current Population Survey 1994–2001.¹ The sample population encompasses individual adults aged 18–65. The variables included in the analysis are described in Table 1. The dependent variable is the official poverty status as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. This measure is based on a set of income thresholds that vary by family size and composition. If a family’s total income is less than that family’s threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered to be poor. Since the official poverty definition is a function of both money income and family size and composition, poverty status more adequately reflects the economic hardship faced by women relative to men than do other measures of socioeconomic inequality such as employment, earnings, and occupational attainment. Three sets of independent variables are of special interest to this study: race/ethnic origin, family structure, and human capital and labor market characteristics.

Race and Ethnicity

In addition to non-Hispanic whites and non-Hispanic blacks, four Hispanic minority groups are distinguished: Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and central and southern Hispanics; Native Americans and Asians and Pacific Islanders also are included in the analysis. Each of these racial/ethnic groups can be identified in the CPS data, and each has a large enough number of cases to be included in the analysis.

¹ Data on immigration in the March CPS data have been available only since 1993.

Family Structure

In line with our previously stated assumptions about the association between family structure, gender, and poverty, four variables have been used to measure family structure. Marital status was divided into three dummy variables: married, never married, and other (divorced, separated, and widowed). Number of children was divided into four dummy variables: no children, one child, two children, and three or more children. Single parent refers to the distinction between unmarried parent and other, and number of persons in the household is a continuous variable.

Human Capital and Labor Market Characteristics

In line with the assumptions that underlie the human capital model in the context of poverty status, we expect to find that educational attainment and employment will have a negative correlation with economic hardship. Educational attainment was divided into three dummy variables: less than high school, high school, and more than high school. Employment status was divided into three dummy variables: full-time employment, part-time employment, and unemployed or not in labor force.

Other variables are included primarily as controls, given their possible effect on poverty status and their known relationship to gender and racial/ethnic origin. These variables are age, which ranges from 18–65 and was divided into five dummy variables, and immigration status, which was divided into three dummy variables: native-born, foreign-born/citizen by naturalization, and foreign-born/not a citizen. As mentioned above, we expect to find that immigration status plays an important role in determining economic hardship. Also included in the analyses is a set of eight dummy variables that identify the calendar year of the CPS data (1993–2000).

HYPOTHESES AND EXPLORATORY EVIDENCE

Drawing on the double disadvantage thesis, we propose two complementary hypotheses on the relationship between gender and race/ethnic origin. First, we expect to find that the gender gap in poverty rates is larger in comparisons of minority men to women than it is in comparisons of white men to women. Second, we expect to find that the racial/ethnic gap in poverty rates is larger in comparisons of white and minority women than it is in comparisons of the same racial/ethnic categories for men (see Hardy and Hazelrigg 1995: 46). Table 2 displays poverty

rates for men and women by race and ethnic origin. The first finding that merits attention is that for all of the racial/ethnic groups under study, women are more likely to be poor than are men. The data reveal, however, a substantial poverty gap across racial/ethnic lines.

Non-Hispanic white men experience the least economic hardship (with 6.2 percent living below the poverty line), followed by white women (8.8 percent of whom are poor). The number of poor Asian men stands at 10.3 percent, whereas 12.2 percent of the Asian women aged 18–65 are poor. Among the Hispanic population, Cuban men and women have the lowest rates of poverty within their gender category 11.8 and 16.1, respectively. Mexican men are the most likely to be poor compared to other minority-status men in the sample, while among all persons studied, the most likely to be poor are Hispanic women of Puerto Rican origin, of whom approximately one-third (31.2 percent) are poor, followed by Mexican women (26.4 percent are poor), and black women (25.7 percent).

Moving to the question under study, Table 2 displays the gender-poverty ratio for the eight racial and ethnic categories. The first measure, estimating the gender-poverty gap within racial/ethnic groups, reveals that the gap is highest in the Puerto Rican population, with women being 1.71 times more likely to be poor than men, and lowest in the Asian population, where the gender-poverty gap is a mere 1.18. The gender-poverty ratio for blacks stands at 1.62, while the equivalent figure for whites is 1.42. Note also that even though the poverty rates of Mexican and Native American men and women are relatively high, these two minority groups are less stratified by gender than is the white population. The relative stability of the Mexican and Native American family unit clearly contributes to these narrow gaps in gender poverty. Family structure, however, is not the sole source of gender inequality. Some racial/ethnic groups that are characterized by relatively low levels of family disruption and high rates of marriage such as the Asian, white and Cuban populations (see Appendix A, Tables 1 and 2) have relatively high gender-poverty gaps.

Table 2 also displays racial poverty gaps within gender lines. The results are consistent with our previous findings. The poverty gap between Puerto Rican and white women is larger than the poverty gap between Puerto Rican and white men (3.54 and 2.93, respectively), a pattern that indicates a double disadvantage for Puerto Rican women. A similar pattern is found among black and white women and black and white men (2.92 and 2.54, respectively). The poverty ratio between southern and central Hispanic and white men and southern and central Hispanic and white women are almost identical (2.40 and 2.34, respectively). The gender gaps in

poverty between other minority groups and whites are smaller among women than men. Asian men, for example, are 1.66 times more likely to be poor than are white men, but between Asian and white women the poverty gap stands at 1.38. And whereas Native American men are three times more likely to be poor than are white men, the poverty gap between Native American and white women is 2.7. In sum, the evidence suggests that for black and Puerto Rican women, the conjunction of race/ethnicity and gender is augmented; they are more likely to be poor than are men of the same racial/ethnic origin, and their disadvantage compared with white women is notable. The fact that other minority groups show narrower gender-poverty gaps than do Non-Hispanic whites indicates the extreme and distinct disadvantage faced by black and Puerto Rican women.

MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS

Table 3 extends our findings by displaying results from four logistic regression analyses that predict the likelihood of poverty among nonmarried men and women. These models help to further examine the social and demographic patterns documented by the above exploratory approach, within a multivariate context and with significance tests. Because poverty is measured at the family level and because, by definition, poverty status is the same for married couples, the population included in the following analysis consists of nonmarried individuals (see McLanahan and Carlson 2000). The dependent variable in Table 3 is binary, defined by coding poor and nonpoor as 1 and 0, respectively, based on the definition of the official poverty line.

Drawing on both the human capital and demographic approaches, four models are presented in Table 2. As a point of departure a baseline model (Model 1) has been specified that contains sex, race/ethnicity, the interaction of sex and race/ethnicity, year of CPS data, age, and immigration status as independent variables. In Model 2 (family structure), marital status, defined as never married versus other (separated, divorced, and widowed), was added to the baseline model. In Model 3 (human capital), education and employment status were added to the baseline model. Model 4 (the full model) includes the independent variables from both Models 2 and 3. The main purpose of the analysis is to measure the extent to which human capital, labor market, and demographic characteristics play a role in shaping the gender gaps among racial/ethnic groups.

The results shown in the baseline model (Model 1) reveal some intriguing estimated coefficients. The interaction of gender and race/ethnic origin for Cuban, black, Native American, and Asian groups is not significant. This finding indicates that after controlling for age and immigration status, gender does not carry an additional cost in terms of risk of being poor. The form of the gender-race/ethnic interaction for Mexican, Puerto Rican, and central and southern Hispanic men is negative and significant, a pattern indicating that nonmarried Mexican, Puerto Rican, and other Hispanic men are less likely to be poor than are women of the same racial/ethnic origin.

The results produced by Models 2 and 3, to which family characteristics and human-capital attributes were respectively added, reveal that family structure plays an important role in explaining gender inequality, human capital and labor market attributes play an important role in shaping racial/ethnic inequality. The coefficient estimate of sex decreased from $b = -.597$ in Model 1 to $b = -.479$ in Model 2; a substantial reduction in the magnitude of the race and ethnic coefficient estimates, especially among Hispanic groups, is seen mainly in Model 3. For example, the coefficient estimate of the category Puerto Rican decreased from $b = 1.391$ to $b = .795$, and the coefficient estimates for central and southern Hispanic and Cuban ($b = .417$ and $b = .356$, respectively) are not significant in Model 3.

Since our interest chiefly is in the conjunction of race/ethnicity and gender, in the remainder of this section we will focus on the interaction of those two variables. When human capital attributes are introduced to the baseline model, the coefficient estimates for men of the ethnic origin Mexican and central and southern Hispanic disappear, a pattern indicating that gender variation in educational attainment and employment status plays an important role in shaping the gender-poverty gap within these groups (see Model 3). Another finding that merits attention is that in Model 3 the nonsignificant effect of black men is altered, becoming negative and significant. This finding indicates that black women's relatively high level of employment and educational attainment (Appendix A, Table 2) narrows the gender-poverty gap within the black population.

In the full model (Model 4), human capital and family-structure characteristics were added to the baseline model. Three main findings merit attention. First, as compared to the baseline model, the coefficient estimates for both gender and race/ethnicity decreases in magnitude when the independent variables are introduced. Second, the coefficient estimates for the interaction terms, specifying those respondents who are men and minority group members,

altered in some interesting ways: The independent variables in the full model explain the total gender-poverty gap for Mexicans and central and southern Hispanics. For blacks, the introduction of both human capital and family characteristics produces a pattern similar to the one described in Model 3, indicating that gender variations in human capital and labor market attainment play a crucial role in shaping gender inequality within the black population. Reiterating previous findings, the analysis reveals that the two minority groups for which the interaction between race/ethnicity and gender remains significant and negative (double disadvantage) are blacks and Puerto Ricans.

DECOMPOSING THE GENDER-POVERTY GAP

To shed more light on the sources of the gender-poverty gap, and thereby better understand the distinct effects that labor market attainment and family structure have on gender inequality, we have utilized a standardization technique that decomposes the gender-poverty gap (Casper, McLanahan and Garfinkel 1994). Our goal here is to estimate the extent to which racial/ethnic variations in gender-specific socioeconomic and demographic composition explain the gender-poverty gap both within and across racial and ethnic lines. This procedure involves three stages. First, we specify separate logistic regression equations for men and women by racial/ethnic origin (see Appendix A, Tables 3 and 4). Second, we estimate the predicted poverty rates for men and women by using this formula

$$\text{Prob (poverty)} = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-(\beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_k X_k)}}$$

A standardization technique is next used to assess the extent to which gender and racial/ethnic differences in human capital, labor market attributes, family structure, and immigration characteristics explain differences in gender-poverty gaps.² Using this method, we attempt to answer three questions in the ensuing section in order to better understand the factors determining the gender-poverty gap within and across racial/ethnic lines:

² Due to the insignificant number of foreign-born Native Americans and Puerto Ricans, the variable “immigration status” was excluded from the logistic regression equations used to decompose the gender-poverty gap for those groups. Accordingly, immigration status was excluded from the logistic regression utilized to predict poverty among the white population to which these two minority groups were being compared.

1. What would the gender-poverty gap be if women had the same demographic and socioeconomic characteristics as men of the same racial/ethnic origin?
2. What would the gender-poverty gap be if minority women had the same demographic and socioeconomic characteristics as white women?
3. What would the gender-poverty gap be if racial/ethnic minorities had the same gender-specific demographic and socioeconomic characteristics as whites?

Appendix A reports the weighted means and regression coefficients used to predict the gender-poverty gap by gender and by racial/ethnic origin. Before we report the results of the decomposition, it is prudent to report some of the main findings of the descriptive analysis reported in Appendix A.

The descriptive analysis reveals that across all racial/ethnic categories, women are more likely to be single parents. Gender variations in percentage of single parenthood are especially noticeable among black and Puerto Rican women. Black women are the least likely to be married, and black men the most likely to have never been married: Forty-five percent of adult black men report that they have never been married. Mexicans tend to live in larger households, and are more likely than any of the other racial and ethnic groups to have three or more children.

Turning to the variables that measure educational attainment and employment, we find some striking differences between men and women across racial/ethnic lines. Among Hispanics (Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and central and southern Hispanics) and Native Americans, the percentage of women who have higher education (beyond high school) is slightly higher than for men. Apparently this advantage in educational attainment does not translate into labor force participation, as among all racial/ethnic groups, men are more likely to report full-time employment than women. The gender gap in employment status is, however, the narrowest among blacks: 54.2 percent of black men are employed in full-time jobs, while 46.7 percent of black women report a similar employment status. The gap between white men and women is wider, with figures of 68.4 and 44.6 percent, respectively.

GENDER-POVERTY GAP WITHIN RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUPS: MEN AND WOMEN

In order to estimate the extent to which gender differences in human capital, labor market, and family structure characteristics explain differences in the gender-poverty gap within racial/ethnic

groups, we imputed the mean values of men's demographic characteristics into the logistic regression models for women. For example, to estimate what the women's poverty rate would be if women had the same educational level as men, we used the intercept, coefficient estimates, and means obtained from the women's model. We then imputed the mean value of education for men and, based on the imputed value, predicted the poverty rate for women. The difference between the predicted gender-poverty ratio with the imputed mean, and the predicted gender-poverty ratio without the imputation has been interpreted as the percentage of change in gender-poverty ratio that is explained by the gender gap in educational attainment.

The findings presented in Table 4 reveal that during the 1990s participation in the labor force was the chief obstacle confronting women. While this pattern is consistent across racial and ethnic lines, its effect varies. For most racial and ethnic groups, including whites, gender variation in employment status explains between 39 and 46 percent of the gender-poverty gap. If, for example, white women had the employment characteristics of white men, the gender-poverty ratio among whites would be reduced by 45 percent.

The role that gender variation in employment plays as a determinant of gender-poverty gap is relatively small among Native Americans, and even smaller among blacks (27 and 15 percent, respectively). These findings reflect the relatively high rates of labor force participation of black and Native American women. The dependency rate, measured by number of children and single motherhood, plays a much smaller role in determining the impoverishment of women than does labor force participation. For both black and Puerto Rican women, however, the gender variations in marital status, single motherhood, and number of children play a more crucial role in determining gender differences in poverty, each accounting for about 7 to 10 percent of the gender-poverty gap.

GENDER-POVERTY GAP WITHIN RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUPS: MINORITY AND WHITE WOMEN

In this section we examine the question, "What would be the gender-poverty gap within each minority group if minority women had the same demographic and socioeconomic composition as white women?" To answer this question we have imputed the mean values of the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of white women into the logistic regression models for minority women. The results are presented in Table 5.

With the exceptions of Asian, Cuban, and Mexican women, who have marriage patterns similar to those of the white women (see Appendix A, Table 2), marital composition plays an important role in shaping the gender-poverty gap among minority groups. Substituting black and Puerto Rican women's marital composition with white women's composition reduces the poverty gap within the black and the Puerto Rican populations by about 32 and 22 percent, respectively. And when we substitute the average number of children of Mexican women with the average number of children of white women, the gender-poverty gap among Mexicans is reduced by about 18 percent, a pattern which reflects the heavy economic burden associated with a higher dependency ratio. Standardizing the gender-specific education composition reveals that Hispanic women's low level of education as compared with white women is a critical obstacle to their economic independence. If for example, Mexican women were to have the educational characteristics of white women, the gender-poverty ratio among Mexicans would be reduced by 32 percent. The comparable figures for Puerto Ricans and central and southern Hispanics would be 20 and 19 percent, respectively.

With the exception of black women, minority women's low levels of labor force participation relative to white women are undermining their economic well-being. Substituting the employment composition of minority women with that of white women reduces the gender-poverty ratio of Puerto Ricans by about one-third, and the ratios of Mexicans and Native Americans by about 21 and 16 percent, respectively. The results also show, however, that the imputation of employment has no impact on the gender-poverty ratio within the black population—a pattern which reflects the active role played by black women in the labor market. As compared to white women, the high number of foreign-born women of Hispanic and Asian origin clearly contributes to their higher risk of falling below the poverty line. For example, substituting the immigration composition of Cuban women with white women's leads to a sizable reduction in the gender-poverty gap among Cubans (35 percent).

GENDER-POVERTY GAP BETWEEN RACIAL GROUPS: MINORITY MEMBERS AND WHITES

The next step is to determine the extent to which cross-racial/ethnic differences in the gender-poverty ratio are associated with cross-racial/ethnic differences in gender-specific demographic and socioeconomic structures. Again, the white population is used as the standard. The results are presented in Table 6.

Substituting the white gender-specific marital composition for the equivalent black and Puerto Rican compositions reduces the poverty gap by about 21 percent in the black and 18 percent in the Puerto Rican populations. Table 6 reveals some interesting effects with respect to the role played by employment as a determinant of gender inequality among blacks. Thus, relative to the gender-specific employment composition of whites, the gender-specific employment composition of blacks “protects” black women from greater levels of gender inequality; that is, if black adults were to have the same gender-specific employment composition as white adults, the gender-poverty gap within the black population would be 50 percent larger.

A similar pattern, although to a lesser extent, is found among Native Americans (17 percent) and Asians (14 percent). The negative sign associated with immigration in the Asian, Mexican, and central and southern Hispanic populations implies that a large number of immigrants is associated with a lower degree of gender-poverty gap. If the immigration characteristics of Asian, central and southern Hispanic and Mexican men and women were similar to those of whites, the gender-poverty gap within those minority populations would be larger. If for example Asian men and women had the immigration characteristics of white men and women, the gender-poverty ratio among Asians would be increased by 37 percent. The magnitude of this component implies a surprisingly strong association between immigration and gender equality and thus suggests that immigration has an equalizing effect on the gender gaps in poverty, whereas assimilation may lead to a greater amount of gender inequality within racial and ethnic minorities.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The primary goals of this paper have been to describe the gender-poverty gaps among the various racial and ethnic groups, and to assess the extent to which those gaps are linked to gender-specific socioeconomic and demographic characteristics. Although the economic prosperity of the 1990s resulted in a noticeable decrease in poverty rates among both women and minorities, it coincided with the persistence of a gender-poverty gap. Descriptive statistics on the racial/ethnic and gender differences in poverty rates paint a detailed portrait of inequality in the 1990s. The most consistent finding in our study has been that women are more likely to be poor than men of the same racial/ethnic origin, although white women are less likely to be poor than

any of the minority status men. Second, whereas non-Hispanic white men are the least likely to fall below the poverty line, the gender gap in poverty among whites is wider than the gap among Mexican, Asian, Cuban, and Native American minorities. Third, the widest gaps in gender inequality, and the ones in which the conjunction of gender and minority group statuses manifests interactive effects vis-à-vis the likelihood of poverty (the double disadvantage) are found within the Puerto Rican and the black populations. This last finding indicates that gender and racial/ethnic origin have independent effects on economic hardships faced by black and Puerto Rican women. No evidence has been found, however, for the existence of the double disadvantage among other minority women.

Decomposing the demographic and socioeconomic composition of men and women of the same racial/ethnic origin has made clear the persistent role played by employment as a determinant of gender inequality. Despite the progress women have made with reference to educational attainment, and even given the rising levels of labor force participation and a narrowing gender gap in average wages—developments that characterize mainly the post-1970 period (Bianchi 1999)—it is the gender variation in labor-force participation that remains key to any understanding of the gender-poverty gap. Our findings reinforce the view that policies that aim to reduce the unemployment rate and boost full-time employment among women could significantly narrow the gender-poverty gap, especially among whites, Hispanics, and Asians.

Our comparison of the various gender inequalities across racial and ethnic lines has revealed findings for black women that are both alarming and encouraging. Black women's risk of poverty has declined because they have the highest level of full-time employment of all minority-status women, and their labor force participation rates are relatively close to those of black men. Indeed, if blacks had the gender employment composition of whites, the gender gap within the black population would be 1.5 times larger than it is (see Table 7). At the same time, even black women's notable rates of labor force participation have not resulted in the elimination of their much higher risk of falling into poverty.

Shifting the focus to demographic characteristics, for both black and Puerto Rican women family structure remains key to an understanding of their double disadvantage. The demographic composition analysis utilized in this paper suggests that in the 1990s, marital status, parenthood, and single parenthood played a critical role in shaping the gender-poverty gap of blacks and Puerto Ricans, the two minority groups having the widest such gaps in the sample. Whereas previous studies of racial inequality have highlighted men's and women's employment

levels as a key factor determining gender inequality among blacks (Hoffman 1992), our analysis suggests that high rates of employment are not sufficient to keep black women from falling below the poverty line. Even with their relatively high rates of part-time and full-time employment, many black women do not earn sufficient incomes to overcome the financial burden of childrearing. The distinct economic hardship experienced by black and Puerto Rican women is highly noticeable in light of the experience of other minority women. Some minority groups, such as Native Americans and Mexicans, that have experienced high levels of poverty but show only small gender variations in family structure, have relatively narrow gender-poverty gaps. Moreover, since men's income is a critical determinant of married women's economic status (Wilson 1987), high levels of men's income serve to heighten the economic polarization between married and female-headed minority families (Farley 1984).

As indicated in Table 5, three factors alleviate the economic status of white women relative to men. First, their higher levels of educational attainment and of labor force participation enable white women to become more economically self-reliant and less dependent on a spouse's material resources, a pattern that Hispanic women (mainly those of Mexican and Puerto Rican origin) and Native American women do not share. Second, white women have relatively high levels of marriage (over 60 percent) and low levels of single motherhood (about 10 percent), two factors that increase the likelihood of economic independence. Third, the vast majority (96 percent) of white women are native-born, which provides them with a visible socioeconomic advantage over minority women of both Hispanic and Asian origin.

Finally, this analysis has revealed that within the confines of gender lines, immigration may carry a greater risk for men than it does for women, and may explain the relatively low level of gender-poverty gap among the Asian, central and southern Hispanic, and Mexican populations. In studying these minority groups we have noted (Table 6) how immigration status plays a role in narrowing the gender-poverty gap, and the stronger effect that immigration status has as a determinant of poverty among men than among women (see Appendix A, Tables 3 and 4). Although an analysis of inequality in earnings and labor market remuneration as it exists among immigrant men and women is beyond the scope of this study, the evidence suggests that immigration status has a more polarizing effect on economic hardship among men than among women. Consequently, in a multiethnic society immigration may have an equalizing effect on overall gender inequality. Very likely, a fruitful line of further inquiry with respect to the link

between racial/ethnic origin and gender inequality would be one that focuses more closely on the mechanisms that are creating the strong association between immigration and gender inequality.

TABLE 1 Description of Variables

Poverty Status	Official Poverty Measure used by the Census Bureau: 1: Poor 0: Other.
Race/Ethnicity	Eight racial/ethnic groups (dummy variables): non-Hispanic whites; non-Hispanic blacks; Asians and Pacific Islanders; Mexicans; Puerto Ricans; central and southern Hispanics; Cubans; non-Hispanic American Indians.
Age	Five dummy variables: age range 18–65.
Number of Children	Four dummy variables: no children; one child; two children; three or more children.
Number of Persons	Number of persons in household.
Marital Status	Three dummy variables: married; never married; other (divorced, separated, widowed).
Single parent	Dummy variable: 1: unmarried with children; 0: other.
Education	Three dummy variables: less than high school; high school; more than high school.
Employment	Three dummy variables: full-time employment; part-time employment; unemployed or not in labor force.
Immigration	Three dummy variables: native-born (in U.S., Puerto Rico, Guam, and outlying area); foreign-born, citizen by naturalization; foreign-born, not a citizen.
Year of Survey	Seven dummy variables identifying the year of the CPS survey (1993–2000).

TABLE 2 Poverty Rates and Gender-Poverty ratio by Racial and Ethnic Origin

	Black	White	Central or Southern Hispanic	Asian	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	American Indian
Men	.158	.062	.149	.103	.199	.182	.118	.189
Women	.257	.088	.206	.122	.264	.312	.161	.239
Ratio W/M ^a	1.62	1.42	1.38	1.18	1.32	1.71	1.36	1.26
Ratio Men ^b	2.54	---	2.40	1.66	3.20	2.93	1.90	3.04
Ratio Women ^c	2.92	---	2.34	1.38	3.00	3.54	1.82	2.71

^a Poverty ratio: women to men

^b Poverty ratio: minority to white men

^c Poverty ratio: minority to white women

TABLE 3 Logistic Regression (Standard Errors) Predicting the Likelihood of Poverty: Single (Nonmarried) Adults, 1993–2000

	(1) Baseline Model	(2) Model 1+ Family Structure	(3) Model 1+ Human Capital	(4) Full Model
Sex (Man) ^(a)	-.597*** (.015)	-.479*** (.015)	-.604*** (.016)	-.484*** (.017)
Black ^(b)	.921*** (.017)	.960*** (.018)	.716*** (.019)	.890*** (.021)
Asian ^(b)	-.090 (.042)	.096* (.043)	-.253** (.046)	-.048 (.050)
Puerto Rican ^(b)	1.391*** (.035)	1.342*** (.037)	.795*** (.042)	.781*** (.046)
Mexican ^(b)	.834*** (.023)	.934*** (.024)	.443*** (.027)	.721*** (.029)
Cuban ^(b)	.356*** (.082)	.503*** (.085)	.131 (.095)	.350** (.102)
CS Hispanic ^(b)	.417*** (.040)	.569*** (.042)	.084 (.045)	.347*** (.050)
American-Indian ^(b)	1.096*** (.047)	1.138*** (.050)	.732*** (.055)	.861*** (.059)
Black*Man	-.055 (.029)	-.019 (.030)	-.253*** (.032)	-.303*** (.034)
Asian*Man	.121 (.062)	.085 (.064)	.228** (.068)	.199** (.072)
Puerto Rican*Man	-.359*** (.062)	-.306*** (.064)	-.233** (.072)	-.236** (.077)
Mexican*Man	-.282*** (.034)	-.320*** (.036)	.002 (.038)	-.118 (.041)
Cuban*Man	-.127 (.132)	-.161 (.136)	-.057 (.150)	-.156 (.157)
CS Hispanic*Man	-.271*** (.062)	-.312*** (.064)	-.021 (.069)	-.095 (.074)
American Indian*Man	.066 (.073)	.068 (.076)	.003 (.082)	.006 (.088)
-2 Log Likelihood	237,313	224,098	188,638	170,711

N = 262,114

*p < .05

**p < .01

***p < .001

^(a) Omitted term: woman

^(b) Omitted term: non-Hispanic white

Control variables in model 1 include year of CPS, age, and immigration status. Control variables in Model 2 include Model 1 plus number of children, marital status (never married versus other single), and number of persons in the household. Control variables in Model 3 include Model 1 plus education and employment status. Control variables in Model 4 include Model 1 plus education, employment status, number of children, marital status (never married versus other single), number of persons in the household, and immigration status.

TABLE 4 Within Racial/Ethnic Differences (Percent Reduction in Gender-Poverty Ratios: Substituting Men’s Mean Values on Variables for Those of Women of the Same Racial/Ethnic Origin)

Variable	Black	White	Hispanic (CS)	Asian	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Native American
Marital status	.08	.02	.00	.00	.01	.07	.02	.00
Single parent	.08	.02	.00	.00	.01	.09	.02	.00
Children	.10	.05	.05	.03	.07	.10	.02	.05
Education	-.05	-.00	-.02	.04	-.03	-.02	-.01	-.01
Employment	.15	.45	.39	.42	.41	.45	.46	.27
Immigration	.00	.00	.00	.00	-.01	—	-.02	—

TABLE 5: Within Racial/Ethnic Differences (Percent Reduction in Gender-Poverty Ratios: Substituting White Women’s Mean Values on Variables for Those of Minority-Status Women)

Variable	Black	Hispanic (CS)	Asian	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Native American
Marital status	.32	.08	-.02	.02	.22	.02	.15
Single parent	.08	.01	-.00	.01	.10	.00	-.00
Children	.04	.09	.02	.18	.11	.01	.04
Education	.11	.19	-.01	.32	.20	.11	.10
Employment	.00	.15	.10	.21	.32	.10	.16
Immigration	-.00	.20	.19	.09	—	.35	—

TABLE 6: Between Racial/Ethnic Differences, Standardized on Whites (Percent Reduction in Gender-Poverty ratios: Substituting Minority-Status Men and Women’s Mean Values on Variables for those of Whites)

Variable	Black	Hispanic (CS)	Asian	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Native American
Marital status	.21	.07	-.02	.03	.18	.02	.09
Single parent	.10	.04	.00	.05	.11	.00	.03
Children	.05	-.02	-.01	.00	.05	.04	.04
Education	-.02	.00	.05	.03	-.02	.05	-.02
Employment	-.50	.06	-.14	.13	-.01	.03	-.17
Immigration	-.01	-.23	-.37	-.14	—	.05	—

APPENDIX A Weighted Means and Regression Coefficients Used to Predict the Gender Poverty Gap

TABLE 1 Weighted Means Used to Predict Poverty Rates by Racial/Ethnic Origin: Men Aged 18–65.

	Black	White	CS Hispanic	Asian	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban Rican	Native American
Poverty	.158	.062	.149	.103	.199	.182	.118	.189
Age 18–25	.188	.144	.204	.163	.230	.195	.118	.174
Age 26–35	.258	.226	.324	.292	.328	.260	.241	.245
Age 36–45	.269	.270	.264	.260	.236	.260	.265	.262
Age 46–55	.179	.216	.135	.184	.133	.171	.185	.191
# of children: 1	.148	.159	.190	.195	.178	.177	.164	.163
# of children: 2	.109	.147	.163	.166	.175	.145	.144	.117
# of children: 3 +	.066	.069	.093	.071	.156	.088	.044	.097
# of persons	2.97	2.85	3.54	3.50	3.83	3.01	2.99	2.98
Married	.392	.607	.516	.591	.560	.475	.585	.493
Never married	.450	.275	.401	.354	.355	.387	.283	.332
Single/child	.106	.057	.123	.076	.127	.116	.057	.107
Education: high school	.389	.326	.275	.198	.269	.315	.293	.369
Education: more than HS	.394	.564	.352	.691	.233	.327	.455	.395
Employment: part-time	.231	.214	.245	.206	.262	.206	.193	.284
Employment: full-time	.542	.684	.629	.643	.619	.558	.663	.525
Foreign-born/citizen	.026	.016	.187	.334	.091	.013	.362	.012
Foreign-born/noncitizen	.053	.021	.665	.432	.466	.004	.402	.019
Years 1993–99								

TABLE 2 Weighted Means Used to Predict Poverty Rates by Racial/Ethnic Origin: Women Aged 18–65.

	Black	White	CS Hispanic	Asian	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Native American
Poverty	.257	.088	.206	.122	.264	.312	.161	.239
Age 18–25	.181	.140	.185	.158	.222	.174	.121	.175
Age 26–35	.261	.225	.280	.271	.310	.280	.225	.233
Age 36–45	.264	.265	.278	.270	.239	.254	.244	.272
Age 46–55	.179	.218	.158	.194	.142	.170	.196	.198
# of children: 1	.200	.176	.233	.212	.213	.215	.187	.191
# of children: 2	.155	.161	.188	.181	.209	.193	.145	.138
# of children: 3 +	.106	.076	.103	.079	.189	.129	.063	.119
# of persons	3.16	2.89	3.59	3.52	4.03	3.20	3.16	3.17
Married	.331	.627	.548	.641	.594	.418	.608	.493
Never married	.418	.202	.284	.258	.252	.329	.195	.273
Single/child	.280	.098	.180	.096	.194	.278	.120	.191
Education: high school	.356	.344	.284	.228	.269	.303	.310	.356
Education: more than HS	.451	.561	.372	.635	.259	.357	.463	.420
Employment: part-time	.267	.335	.278	.270	.285	.244	.253	.324
Employment: full-time	.467	.446	.392	.427	.337	.349	.436	.368
Foreign-born/citizen	.023	.017	.221	.344	.084	.012	.398	.016
Foreign-born/noncitizen	.040	.022	.641	.435	.402	.007	.374	.025
Years 1993–99								

**APPENDIX A Con't. Weighted Means and
Gender-Poverty Gap**

Regression Coefficients Used to Predict the

**TABLE 3 Logistic Regression Coefficients Used to Predict Poverty Rates by Racial/Ethnic
Origin: Men Aged 18–65**

	Black	White	CS Hispanic	Asian	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Native American
Constant	.461	.767	-.166	.073	-.144	.652	-.094	.593
Age: 18–25	.317	.822	.573	.430	.613	.408	-.094	.360
Age: 26–35	.495	.597	.505	.411	.502	.281	-.339	.573
Age: 36–45	.456	.409	.313	.407	.233	.057	-.158	.477
Age: 46–55	.365	.401	.566	.327	.192	.206	-.192	.294
# of children: 1	.391	1.103	.998	.454	.715	.801	.611	.302
# of children: 2	1.036	2.140	1.841	1.308	1.162	1.902	1.539	1.189
# of children: 3+	2.560	3.954	2.908	2.783	2.228	3.205	2.195	1.736
# persons	-.267	-.725	-.398	-.436	-.176	-.471	-.378	-.062
Married	-.885	-.503	-.159	.160	-.365	-.235	.043	-.845
Never married	-.162	-.071	-.002	.074	-.223	.319	-.004	-.257
Single/child	-.409	-.848	-.553	-.460	-.694	-.167	-.429	-.648
Education: high school	-.413	-.559	-.581	-.350	-.585	-.464	.043	-.615
Education: more than HS	-1.068	-1.104	-.962	-.958	-1.130	-1.158	-.634	-1.109
Employment: part-time	-1.009	-1.261	-1.154	-1.455	-1.036	-1.213	-.838	-1.041
Employment: full-time	-3.245	-3.210	-2.610	-3.352	-2.436	-3.360	-3.157	-2.862
Foreign-born/citizen	.071	.273	.125	.449	.074	_____	-.112	_____
Foreign-born/noncitizen	.273	.806	.709	.998	.587	_____	1.152	_____
Years 1993–99								

**TABLE 4: Logistic Regression Coefficients Used to Predict Poverty Rates by Racial/Ethnic
Origin: Women Aged 18–65**

	Black	White	CS Hispanic	Asian	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Native American
Constant	.931	1.372	.549	.924	.457	1.212	.273	.653
Age 18–25	.055	1.174	.505	.525	.540	.265	-.207	.422
Age 26–35	.491	.975	.581	.458	.556	.550	.500	.702
Age 36–45	.414	.671	.612	.240	.418	.290	.654	.385
Age 46–55	.134	.479	.350	.199	.206	.382	-.190	.548
# children: 1	.217	.523	.371	.104	.394	.109	.221	.299
# children: 2	.856	1.511	1.168	.898	.825	.737	.414	.771
# children: 3:	1.992	3.254	2.037	2.516	1.753	2.186	.895	1.813
# persons	-.220	-.851	-.395	-.495	-.224	-.333	-.383	-.116
Married	-1.528	-1.419	-1.291	-1.049	-1.466	-1.533	-1.460	-1.533
Never married	-.006	-.319	.013	-.183	-.258	-.098	.077	-.108
Single/child	.591	.561	.175	.166	.229	.743	.430	.073
Education: high school	-.536	-.707	-.569	-.637	-.683	-.512	-.350	-.648
Education: more than HS	-1.366	-1.449	-1.113	-1.210	-1.347	-1.249	-1.159	-1.076
Employment: part-time	-1.023	-1.116	-.870	-.983	-.761	-1.261	-1.085	-.905
Employment: full-time	-3.010	-3.203	-2.499	-2.991	-2.280	-3.561	-3.179	-2.673
Foreign-born/citizen	-.263	.140	.058	.012	.005	_____	.212	_____
Foreign-born/noncitizen	-.106	.603	.406	.528	.298	_____	1.078	_____
Years 1993–99								

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