

# Houston/Harris County Gender and Sexuality Data: Annual Report

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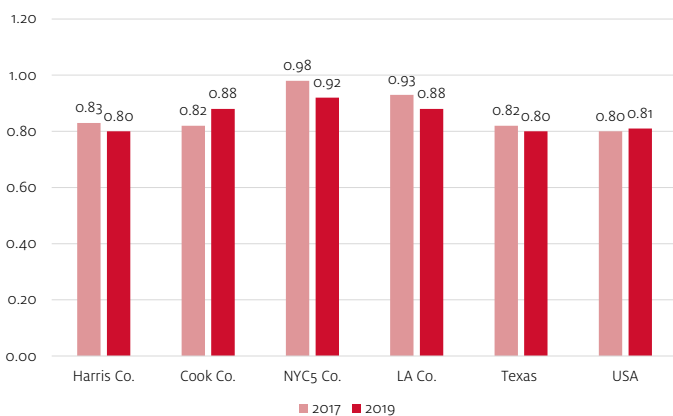
This second annual UH IRWGS report on intersectional gender and sexuality data for Harris County contains analyses of the US Census Bureau's annual American Community Survey (ACS) data for 2019, among other sources from 2019 and 2020, on matters such as the gender wage gap, poverty, education, single parenting, fertility rates, political candidates, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) demographics. The data analyzed here frame the inequitable context within which the further challenges of the 2020-21 Covid-19 pandemic have occurred in Houston.

In what follows, we draw connections among such issues as the low wages of women relative to men in the Houston/Harris County region, the "double gap" faced by women of color, high poverty among women, domestic violence (DV), shifting birth rates, low state education investment, lack of support infrastructure for women workers, cuts in access to abortion and birth control, lack of reliable data in many spheres, and efforts to cut medical care for transgender youth. This report provides data and analysis to spur dialogue and shape more equitable policy, especially with regard to issues of current and future workforce, healthcare, civic participation, economic and social status, and community.

## HARRIS COUNTY GENDER PAY GAP GREW IN 2019

In 2019 the national gender wage gap—or percentage discrepancy between what full-time (FT) working women and FT working men, on average, were paid—narrowed slightly, from 20% to 19%, with

Figure 1: Median wage in cents on the dollar paid to full-time working women, relative to full-time working men, by year and geography.



Data Source: Ruggles et al. (2021), American Community Survey data for 2019. Microdata retrieved from IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota ([www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org)); UH IRWGS analysis.

FT working women's median wage at 81.1 cents on the dollar that men made, though in most major cities the gap was smaller (see Figure 1).<sup>1,2</sup>

However, in Harris County the wage gap widened from 17% in 2017 (83 cents to the dollar) to 20% in 2019 (80 cents to dollar). Harris County's 20% gap was notably greater than in comparable urban US counties—12% in Cook County (Chicago) and LA, and 8% in New York City<sup>3</sup> (see Figure 1).

## GENDER, RACE/ETHNICITY & WAGE INEQUALITY

As it did nationally, the gender pay gap in Harris County in 2019 varied considerably among women by race/ethnicity, as compared to nonHispanic (NH) White men, the highest paid group in the county. And the gaps were markedly larger here than in the US and Texas overall (Figure 2).<sup>4</sup> (These charts do not include part-time workers' wages, which are often lower than the FT median documents; women are twice as likely to work part-time as men, often due to care responsibilities [Dunn, 2018]).

In Harris County in 2019, in an oil and gas downturn, median wages fell for all groups, except Hispanic men and women, who nevertheless still had the lowest wages (see Figure 3).

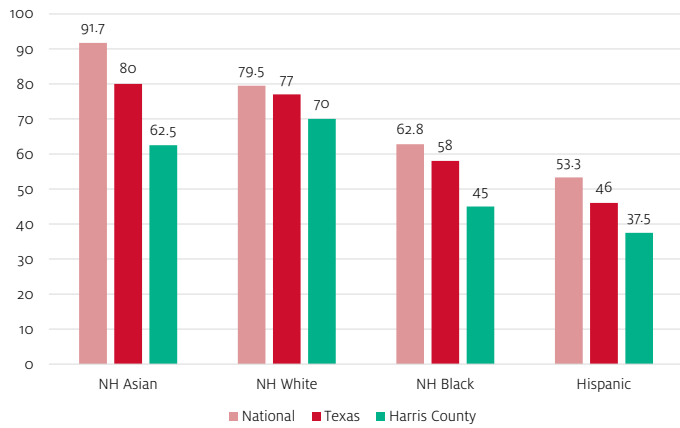
<sup>1</sup> Median wages were adjusted in UH IRWGS analyses reported herein for price level across geographic area and year using Regional Price Parities [RPP] and the Personal Consumption Expenditures Price Index [PCE], both utilizing data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, US Department of Commerce. RPPs adjust the price level across Metropolitan Statistical Areas with the US as the base, and the PCE price index adjusts the price level across years with the 2017 dollar as the base. RPP data were last updated on December 15, 2020 (new statistics for 2019, revised statistics for 2017-2018). PCE price indexes data were last revised on July 31, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Factors affecting the gap may include among others: occupational segregation (channels women/men into different jobs, with different pay), varying rates of promotion, pay discrimination within jobs, intersectional racial/gender bias, inequitable pay for comparable jobs, etc. (American Association of University Women, n.d.)

<sup>3</sup> New York City has taken multiple steps toward gender equity, including a salary history ban, raising the minimum wage to \$15/hr, universal public pre-K, and awarding many city contracts to minority and women-owned businesses.

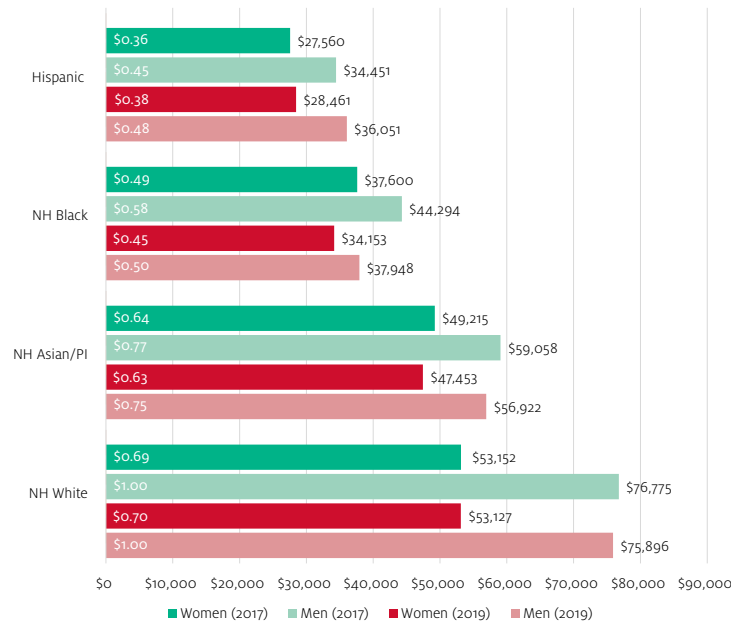
<sup>4</sup> The data in Figure 1 compares all women's wages to all men's wages, including men in race/ethnicity groups who make relatively little, thus the relative difference between all men and all women is less great than in the Figures that follow. The data in Figures 2 & 3 looks at intersectional gender & race/ethnicity data, comparing the wages of women in specific race/ethnicity groups to the wages of Houston's highest paid group, NH White men, demonstrating bigger gaps.

Figure 2: Median wage in cents to the dollar paid to full-time working women by race/ethnicity, relative to full-time working nonHispanic (NH) White men, 2019, by geography. PI = Pacific Islander; Hispanic includes all races.



Data Source: Ruggles et al. (2021); UH IRWGS analysis.

Figure 3. Harris County median annual wages paid to full-time workers, by gender and race/ethnicity, and superimposed comparison wages to the dollar paid to nonHispanic (NH) White men working full time (2017 vs. 2019).



Data Source: Ruggles et al. (2021); UH IRWGS analysis.

**Poverty in Context**

Living at or below the official poverty line—the prevalence of which is shown in Table 1—isn’t the limit on real-world poverty (see Table 2 for the poverty guidelines for 2020). Your income can be more than double that amount, and you may still be poor. The United Way of Greater Houston estimates a family of three needs at least \$60,000/year to meet basic needs in Houston, and that as of 2018, 47% of families in the region struggled with wages under that threshold (14% below the poverty line and 33% within the category UW calls ALICE [(Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed)] (n.d.).

Table 1. Prevalence (percentage) of population living at or below the poverty line in 2019, by geography.

US	12.3 %
Texas	13.8%
Harris County   Houston	15.3%
Cook County   Chicago	13.0%
LA County	13.6%
NYC5 Counties	16.1%
King County   Seattle	7.6%

Data Source: Ruggles et al. (2021); UH IRWGS analysis.

Table 2. 2020 Federal poverty guidelines.

1 Person	\$12,760
2 People	\$17,240
3 People	\$21,720
4 People	\$26,200
5 People	\$30,680
8 People	\$44,120

Source: US Dept. of Health & Human Services (2020).

**The Oil & Gas Industry Effect**

We derive that the wide gender wage gaps in Harris County are due in part to Houston’s oil-and-gas-heavy work environment including higher proportions of NH White men in highly paid jobs than in other major cities. The three industries central to oil and gas in the US (Oil & Gas Extraction, Petroleum & Coal Products Manufacturing, and Pipeline Transportation) are largely sex- and race-segregated,

with women and minority individuals highly underrepresented (Tomaskovic-Devey, 2017). Women make up only 22% of employees in the oil and gas sector and their representation relative to men decreases with seniority (Women in Energy, 2019). Lack of representation in one field may create similar biases in ancillary industries (legal, finance, etc.), effectively an “old-boys network.”

Failing to share those relatively high salaries across groups here appears to be one of the contributors to the phenomenon that

**The Gendered Hardship Matrix**

At base, gender is a work-assignment system, with a wage scale. It's intersected by race/ethnicity, which is also utilized to assign tasks and wages and further narrows options for many.

Care tasks have long been viewed as "women's work" – a "naturalized" function viewed as deserving of no or low pay—and, as a result, women of all social positions, kept busy with care work and with no civic status or money of their own to spend, have had small roles in public life or policy making until recently. Because care tasks continue to be un- or low-paid, many women and their children become dependent on men for financial support, while society overall still depends on women to do the work of bearing, raising, and maintaining the nation's workforce.

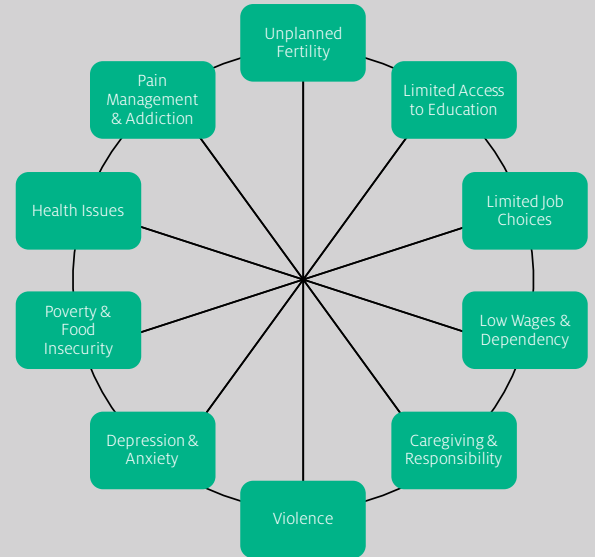
Though women have now advanced into leadership roles in some fields of employment, the lack of childcare support for working families has limited that advance to a "trickle up." There's a connection between the fact that even in non-pandemic times children are in public school during working hours only 37% of the time between age 0 and age 18 (Gregory & Miller, 2020) and the fact that women are the CEOs of only 6.0% of S&P 500 companies (Women in Energy, 2019; Gregory, 2013). During the pandemic when many schools were closed the lack-of-

support effect was amplified, as many women's careers were interrupted for caregiving. In April 2020, 3.5 million US mothers of school-age children left active work, and by January 2021, while many had returned, 1.6 million still had not (Heggeness et al., 2021).

The combination of women's financial dependency, lack of policy influence, and enormous caretaking responsibility catalyzes a network of negative effects, at all income levels. But for lower-income women in particular, gender and economics connect within a nexus we've named the Gendered Hardship Matrix (see Figure 4). Without a strong social safety net, challenges for women—including low wages, unplanned fertility, caregiving responsibilities, violence, depression, poverty, food provision duties, health issues, among other factors—may cascade and compound.

For example, economic dependency due to low wages may lead women to stay in abusive relationships (Barnett, 2000), and this dynamic may be intensified among women with children (Nouer et al., 2014) and for immigrant women, who may feel

Figure 4: Gendered hardship matrix.



Source: UH IRWGS.

isolated (Reina et al., 2014). Undocumented immigrant women may fear deportation if they report abuse; and even if not undocumented themselves, some immigrants fear deportation of family members. Economic pressures make other forms of hardship more likely, and the unplanned arrival of children may lead to a decline in resources or in the potential for resources, simultaneously with an increase in the need for more.

NH White men in Harris County made more than that group did nationally or in other major urban counties, and other groups made less (Figure A). Women in Harris County with less money to spend also have arguably less influence within the Houston community than they otherwise would to challenge the gender status quo. However, Houston does have a history of women political leaders (past and present) that may balance that out in some respects.

**The Double Gap: Race/Ethnicity & Gender**

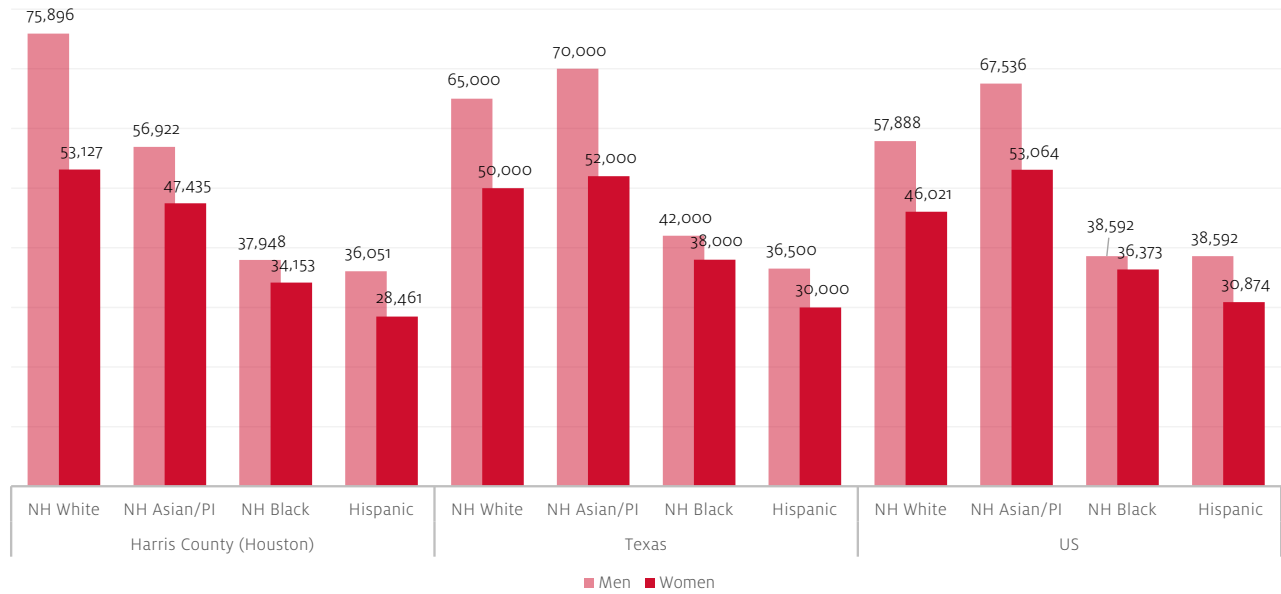
The gender wage distortion at the high end of the pay scale created by the oil-and-gas environment is echoed by a parallel distortion at the low end, where Houston's Hispanic and NH Black women earned less than the already low median wages they earn nationally (Hispanic women earned a median \$28,461 here vs. a median

\$30,874 nationally; NH Black women \$34,153 here vs. \$36,373 nationally) (see Figure 5). The intersection of gender and racial wage gaps for women of color result in a "double gap" (Holder, 2020).

NH Asian women earned more than NH Black or Hispanic women on median here but also less than nationally (\$47,435 in Harris County vs. \$53,064 nationally). NH White women earned more than nationally in Houston (\$53,127 vs. \$46,021), but less than the same group in most major urban areas, where the median for NH White women reflects a tendency for metropolitan wages to be higher for that group (see Figure 5 and Figure A, in the Appendix).

Racial wage gaps are informed by the wide variation in higher education levels within the state by race/ethnicity, suggested by the far fewer NH Black and Hispanic adults relative to NH White and

Figure 5: Median annual income of full-time workers in 2019, by gender and race/ethnicity and by geography.



Data Source: Ruggles et al. (2021); UH IRWGS analysis. <https://www.bea.gov/data/prices-inflation/regional-price-parities-state-and-metro-area>.

Table 3. Prevalence (percentage) of population aged 20-69 with a BA or higher in 2019, by race/ethnicity and gender.

	Harris County (Houston)	US
NH White Men	50.4%	34.7%
NH Black Men	20.5%	18.7%
NH Asian/PI Men	52.5%	55.6%
Hispanic Men	12.7%	15.0%
NH White Women	50.0%	39.3%
NH Black Women	28.8%	25.2%
NH Asian/PI Women	55.5%	54.7%
Hispanic Women	16.0%	19.2%

Data Source: Ruggles et al. (2021); UH IRWGS analysis.

NH Asian/PI adults, across gender, receiving bachelor’s degrees or higher levels of education (see Table 3), as well as by immigration dynamics, history of bias in employment, and other factors. Variation in higher education outcomes is in turn informed by the state’s overall low investment in early childhood and K-12 education (in 2018 the state ranked 41st, investing \$9,606/per student/per year, vs. first-place New York’s \$24,040 [Hanson, 2020]), and its wide variation in provision of educational resources to different neighborhoods.

Higher education degrees were most prevalent across gender/race-ethnicity groups for people in their 30s.

## The Undocumented Effect

The low median wage among Hispanic women is related to the large presence of undocumented women in Houston (among an estimated 1.6 million undocumented men and women in Texas in 2016 [Pew, 2019]), competing for a less well-paid set of jobs than are available to undocumented male workers. Undocumented wages are unregulated, and competition with lower-paid workers can pull down the wages of documented workers of all races/ethnicities as well (Koussoudji and Cobb-Clark, 2002), even as undocumented workers may do tasks others are unwilling to do for so little, often paying taxes without recompense (Gee et al., 2017). Houston may have a somewhat lower cost of living,<sup>5</sup> but the low wages also create an economy fueled by desperation and result in deep poverty for many (Table 1, Figures 6 & 7).

Depressed wages here have been exacerbated by the absence of a minimum wage hike in Texas since 2009 (Parrott, 2019) (\$7.25/hour at 40 hours per week equals \$15,080/year). A minimum wage hike would be gender and race blind and could transform the structural wage gaps, especially if coupled with immigration reform that regularized legal status for those here, and that created fair programs for future workers from abroad and real oversight to avoid labor exploitation. The particulars will require debate, but putting higher wages in the pockets of Texas workers and regularizing the full workforce would lead to more expenditures and new markets and would expand the economy for all, while improving the lives of millions (Hinojosa-Ojeda et al., 2021).

<sup>5</sup> The Houston Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) is relatively lower in goods and rental price levels than Chicago, LA, NYC, and Seattle MSAs, but has relatively higher prices for other services than Chicago and Seattle MSAs (US Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2020).

## RIPPLE EFFECTS OF LOW WOMEN'S WAGES

### Domestic Violence

While unregulated wages may ensure poverty for many, they may also actively create particular misfortune for women. As noted, when the gender wage gap is wide and women are highly dependent on men economically, it increases women's vulnerability to domestic violence—since they often can't afford to leave their abusers, especially if they have children (Barnett, 2000; Aizer, 2010; Nouer et al., 2014). And a man who might not otherwise be violent may become so if it becomes clear that his partner cannot afford to leave and has limited social resources for aid – a structural situation in which society's failure to protect her from reduced wages in effect may make her “beatable” and may raise his likelihood of violence, especially if he himself is subject to stress and perceived disrespect outside the home (Farmer & Tiefenthaler, 1997; Gregory, 2007; Schwartz, 1994).

Exacerbating the cultural problem of DV itself, rates of DV are difficult to track: such crimes are highly underreported due to victims being dependent on or otherwise controlled by their abusers. The National Coalition against Domestic Violence (n.d.) estimated that in 2015 roughly 1 in 4 US women and 1 in 10 men experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetimes. During the 2020-21 Covid-19 pandemic such dynamics became more complex, with rising rates of reports to the police, while shelter workers have reported rises in the viciousness of attacks. In addition, some of those locked in with their abusers may have been less able to call for help than previously, and some have feared catching the virus in shelters. Shelters have had fewer spots due to social distancing, but the City of Houston has provided additional space in hotels.

In 2020, the UH IRWGS began working with community stakeholders, including DV shelters, police, and the district attorney's office, to develop reliable DV data streams. While these are underway, for now we can report that shelters here have long been regularly full but have not had the means to track their data consistently.

### Sex for Sale

Unusually low wages and low status for women and unusually high wages and status for men may also create a predatory environment where women are viewed as less than, heightening objectification of women and demand for paid sex. It also creates a pool of women workers who either have no better economic option than to supply it (Edlund & Korn, 2002; Rosen & Venkatesh, 2008) or who are trafficked in a context of limited protection for women. Houston is known as a sex trafficking hub, and the suspected locations of sex for sale are highly correlated with the affluence of the

neighborhood (Children at Risk, 2018). Greater wage equity should improve women's status and lower both demand and supply.

## LOW WAGES AMONG MEN OF COLOR

Although this report focuses on the gender wage gap as it disadvantages women, this data also reveals a notable wage gap among men of various races/ethnicities in Harris County (also both a race effect and a gender effect). Hispanic, NH Black, and NH Asian/PI men made substantially less than NH White men here (Figure 3), and less than men in those groups made nationally (Figure 5). Greater equity across race/ethnicity among men would also lessen poverty and violence. These intersectional wage differentials are informed by a combination of education inequities (see Table 3), occupational segregation, intersectional racial/gender bias, and other causes. These factors, as well as low state health and educational funding overall and gender role limitations, also inform the high proportion of men, especially men of color, who make up the County prison population (91% male; 48% NH Black, 26% Hispanic, 25% NH White, 2% Other [Jail Population Statistics, 2020]).

## GENDER, RACE/ETHNICITY & POVERTY

Harris County provides a magnified example of a common pattern of gendered difference in poverty, by which women tend to experience greater poverty, due to their lower wages and higher likelihood of caring for children on their own. In Harris County in 2019 there was a larger gender gap in poverty rates between women (15.1%) and men (10.5%) than in comparable major urban counties in the US (see Figure 6). Although New York City had larger percentages of both impoverished women (16.4%) and men (12.4%), its gender gap was smaller.

Poverty in Harris County also varied substantially by race/ethnicity (see Figure 7), and the double gap accounts for most of the overall gender gap.

Harris County poverty rates among Hispanic women (21.1%) and NH Black women (18.6%) were approximately twice those among NH Asian/Pacific Islander women and men (10.4%/10.5%) and approximately threefold the poverty rates among NH White women and men (6.6%/6.2%). Hispanic women were also almost twice as likely to live in poverty as Hispanic men, whereas NH Black women were 16% more likely than NH Black men to do so.<sup>6</sup> The gender poverty gap among Hispanic women and men seems to correlate to women's low median wage (Figure 2) intersected with motherhood including single motherhood with limited supports,

<sup>6</sup> Most groups' poverty rates increased from 2017 to 2019, with NH Black men's increasing most (13.6% to 15.6%), with the exception of Hispanic men's rate (whose poverty rate fell 0.4%) and NH White women (whose poverty rate fell from 8.9% to 6.6%)—reaching near equivalency with NH White men (6.2%).

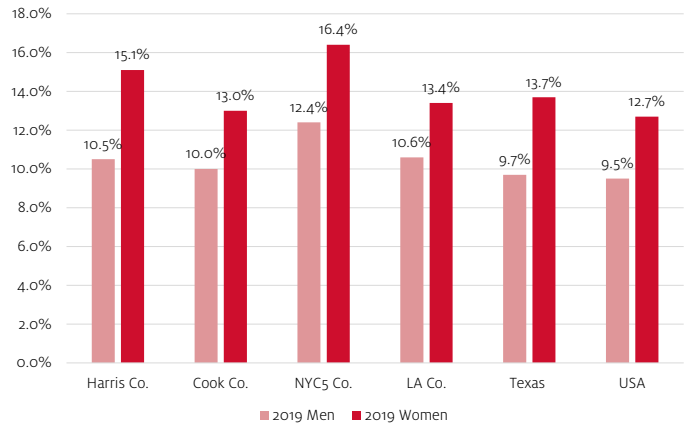
and to Hispanic single moms’ high proportion of poverty (43.6%; see Tables 4 & 5 below). Lack of access (real or perceived) to unemployment insurance, SNAP, TANF and other state and federal benefits among undocumented workers is likely a factor as well (Hanson et al., 2014).

## SINGLE MOTHERS IN ECONOMIC PRECARITY

Single parents raising minor children in Harris County, particularly single mothers, experienced high levels of economic precarity as measured by median household income and poverty rates (see Table 4).<sup>7</sup> In Harris County the median income of single mothers was lower, and the poverty rate higher, than among those in comparable areas. Though the median income for single fathers in Houston was substantially higher than for mothers, it was also substantially lower than in the other locations.

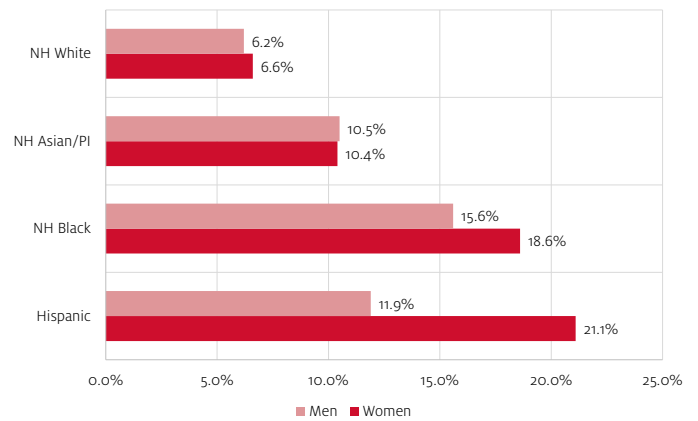
Table 5 breaks out the Harris County data for single mothers by race/ethnicity and, to give a clearer sense of how many families we’re referring to, includes the weighted sample size (effectively an estimated total number) for each group. The proportions of single mothers varied widely by race/ethnicity and are understood to link conversely to the level of wages available to men in each group, since a man without a job or adequate income and limited by gender stereotypes from doing much care work often becomes a burden upon his family (Edin & Kefalas, 2005). Single mothers would benefit from greater social support as they raise one third of the next generation in difficult circumstances, and arguably, society would benefit too.

Figure 6: Prevalence of adult poverty rates in 2019, by gender and geography.



Data Source: Ruggles et al., (2021); UH IRWGS analysis.

Figure 7: Prevalence of adults in Harris County living in poverty in 2019, by gender and race/ethnicity.



Data Source: Ruggles et al., (2021); UH IRWGS analysis.

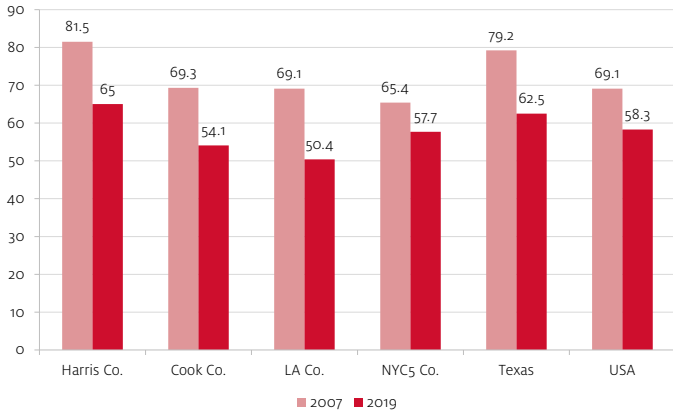
Table 4. Prevalence of parents who were single, living with minor children; their median family income; and their prevalence in poverty in 2019, by gender and geography.

2019		US	Texas	Harris County (Houston)	Cook County (Chicago)
Single Mothers (SM)	% of all mothers	26.0%	27.6%	28.9%	31.3%
	SM median income	\$38,800	\$37,400	\$35,000	\$40,000
	% SM in poverty	29.2%	31.8%	34.2%	25.1%
Single Fathers (SF)	% of all fathers	8.5%	8.5%	8.6%	9.1%
	SF median income	\$59,300	\$61,000	\$52,000	\$61,000
	% SF in poverty	14.3%	13.8%	19.1%	14.2%

Data Source: Ruggles et al. (2021); UH IRWGS analysis.

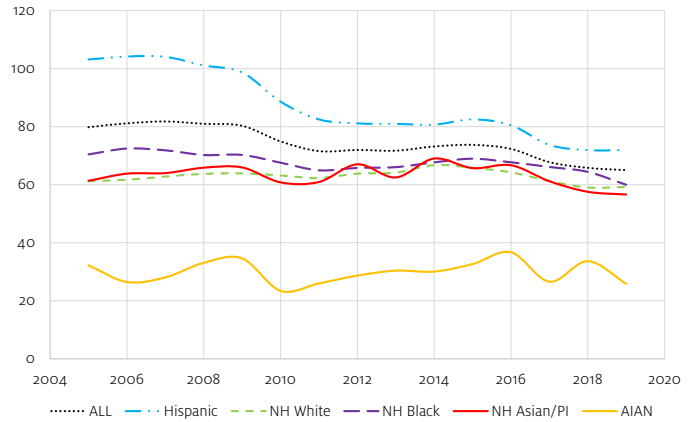
<sup>7</sup> Single persons were defined as those who were never partnered, those who were currently unpartnered, and those who were separated, divorced, or widowed.

Figure 8: Births per 1,000 women aged 15–44, 2007 and 2019, by geography.



Data Source: Centers for Disease Control, Wonder Database (n.d.).

Figure 9: Harris County births per 1,000 women aged 15–44, by race/ethnicity, 2007 and 2019.



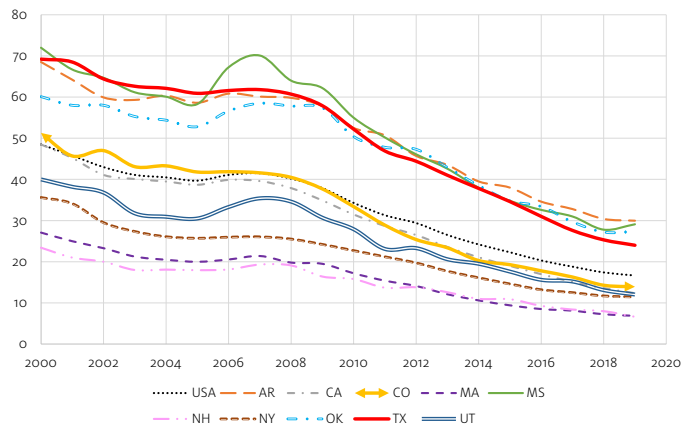
Data source: Centers for Disease Control, Wonder Database (n.d.). NH = nonHispanic; PI = Pacific Islander; Hispanic includes all races.

## LACK OF INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT WORKING PARENTS

As we noted in our 2020 report, Harris County like much of the US supplies very little public childcare and early childhood education for children under 5,<sup>8</sup> meaning that most parents have to pay for care (often expensive) or stay home themselves with their kids. Additionally, once children are in elementary school, school hours do not mimic the workday (kids are in public school only 37% of work hours between ages 0 and 18 [Gregory & Miller, 2020]), so working parents must often seek and fund afterschool and summer care, or leave work and put their careers in jeopardy. For both cultural and economic reasons that person is the mother 83% of the time (Livingston, 2018).

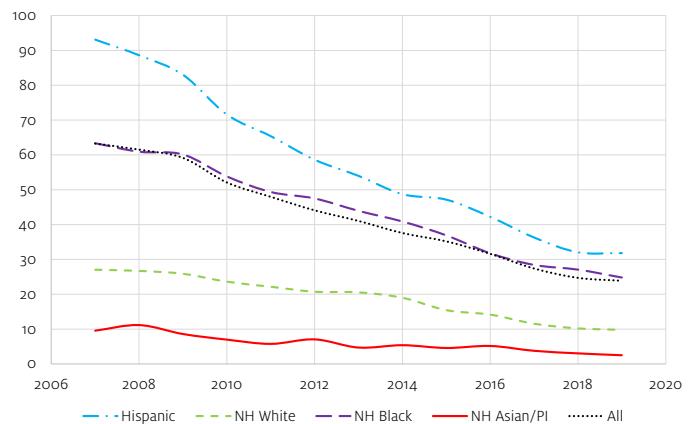
Given that the school buildings are available, it would be possible to develop a good, on-site public after-care program for all children whose parents so chose, which could also serve as a public summer school, with separate tutors and activities. The additional taxes (payroll, sales and property taxes) brought in from the increased wages earned by the women who return to or never leave work once this schedule starts, could cover some of the additional costs, and the community and/or business could invest in the rest. Parents do donate huge portions of their time and energy to raise the next generation of workers on whom all businesses and the community at large depend, so some compensation could be considered warranted.

Figure 10: Teen births per 1,000 women aged 15–19, 2000-2019, in selected geographies.



Data Source: Centers for Disease Control, Wonder Database (n.d.).

Figure 11: Harris County teen births per 1,000 women aged 15–19, 2007–2019, by race/ethnicity.



Data Source: Centers for Disease Control, Wonder Database (n.d.). NH = nonHispanic; PI = Pacific Islander; Hispanic includes all races.

<sup>8</sup> In 2019, Texas began offering full-day Pre-K for some 4-year-olds (those eligible include children under the poverty line, those in foster care, and in dual-language or military families).

Table 5: Prevalence of mothers who were single, living with minor children; their median household income; and their prevalence in poverty in 2019, by race/ethnicity and geography.

Single Mothers 2019 by Race/Ethnicity		US	Texas	Harris County (Houston)	Cook County (Chicago)
SM NH Asian	% all NHA mothers	10.4%	7.4%	6.7%	10.4%
	SM median income	\$56,100	\$41,000	\$58,000	\$77,500
	% SM in poverty	21%	29.1%	32.4%	18.8%
	# SM (weighted N)	254,908	15,535	2934	5202
SM NH Black	% all NHB mothers	57.1%	53.5%	57.8%	66.6%
	SM median income	\$32,000	\$33,000	\$33,000	\$35,000
	% SM in poverty	34.9%	32.7%	30%	30.3%
	# SM (weighted N)	2,531,899	208,704	59,229	75,446
SM Hispanic	% all Hisp mothers	29.9%	30.7%	27.9%	31.8%
	SM median income	\$36,000	\$33,100	\$29,800	\$41,200
	% SM in poverty	32.2%	37.5%	43.6%	19.7%
	# SM (weighted N)	2,263,567	460,564	77,743	51,292
SM NH White	% all NHW mothers	18.8%	19%	16.3%	14.8%
	SM median income	\$45,000	\$50,250	\$66,000	\$71,000
	% SM in poverty	23.6%	20.8%	11%	23.2%
	# SM (weighted N)	3,596,530	231,990	22,300	27,674

Data Source: Ruggles et al. (2021); UH IRWGS analysis.

## SHIFTING FERTILITY RATES

Continuing a more than decade-old pattern, overall fertility rates declined in 2019 at the local and national levels. In Harris County, births per 1,000 women aged 15-44 numbered 65.0 (vs. 65.8<sup>9</sup> in 2018), and nationally the rate was 58.3 births (vs. 58.9 in 2018). See Figure 8 for change in fertility rates by geography, between 2007 and 2019.

Whereas we previously reported marked declines in fertility rates among Hispanic women between 2007 and 2018 (locally and nationally), this rate did not change in Harris County between 2018 and 2019 (71.9 births per 1,000 women aged 15-44). However, fertility rates fell here among NH Black women (64.4 to 60.0), American Indian/Alaska Native women (33.7 to 25.8), and NH Asian women (57.6 to 56.6), and saw a small increase among NH White women (59.0 to 59.3) (see Figure 9).

The teen fertility rate (births per 1,000 women aged 15-19) also declined during 2019 in Texas, from 25.3 to 24.0. While the downward trend also held for the US overall, it contrasted with at least two nearby states—Mississippi, Oklahoma—where teen fertility rates modestly increased during that same period (see Figure 10).<sup>10</sup>

Packham (2017) found that with reduced funding for family planning services in Texas between 2011 and 2013, teen birth rates increased by approximately 3.4% in the counties that lost all clinics. While the teen fertility rate decreased in Texas for each of those years, it would likely have decreased at a greater rate if teens had had consistent access to birth control and abortion. Likewise, more recent policy changes that have reduced funding for reproductive health clinics if they offer abortion and that curtail access to confidential sexual and reproductive health care for teens in Texas (Coleman-Minahan et al., 2020) may continue to keep the teen fertility rate higher than it would have been had access to abortion and birth control at those clinics been maintained.

<sup>9</sup> Adjusted by Centers for Disease Control (n.d.) since our last report of 65.6 in 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Rates also rose in some states not on the chart, including neighboring Louisiana.



### Policy and Poverty

In Texas, policies at the state level contribute to systemic poverty, suggested by the following indicators:

- Failure to build and fund an equitable, good education system for all Texans (ranks 42nd in the nation on education investment) (Education Week, 2020)
- Active undercutting of poor women's access to birth control, abortion, and overall reproductive self-control (raising unplanned births) (Packham, 2017)
- No Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act (Texas ranks 50th in percent insured) (Grubbs & Wright, 2020)
- No state income tax to fund state services
- Minimum wage \$7.25/hour
- Failure to develop a fair immigration and work verification policy, in concert with federal officials (Hinojosa-Ojeda et al., 2021)
- Limited access to good, free childcare and preschool (NIEER, 2021)
- Failure to create an equitable criminal justice system (Atkinson, 2016)

Texas was sued for underfunding schools in 2011: The State Supreme Court found the funding mechanism flawed but constitutional, urging but not mandating that the state reform the system. No change followed. In 2020 Texas met just 4 out of 10 quality benchmarks for preschool (NIEER, 2021), while just 42.9% of Texas children attended any preschool, thus many students arrived in kindergarten unprepared. Texas ranked 42nd in the nation on state investment in education, receiving a grade of C-minus (71.1) overall for students' chance for success, school financing and K-12 achievement (Education Week, 2020).

State policies that deny poor women access to reproductive autonomy precipitate many into having more children than they would have had otherwise (Packham, 2017), before they feel personally or financially ready. Unplanned childbearing often creates an impoverished, low-skilled workforce (Sawhill et al., 2014)—including both the parents, who often must take multiple jobs for low pay to support their kids, and the children, who receive limited educational investment from the state. On the health insurance front, in 2019, 18.4% of Texans had none, double the national average of 9.2%. The Texas comptroller's office notes that lack of insurance involves both great personal toll and economic losses for the state economy (Grubbs & Wright, 2020).

Texas's failures to date to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, to raise the minimum wage, or to put in place a state income tax to adequately and equitably fund services like foster care, wage equity enforcement, health care, environmental quality, education and childcare, criminal justice, reproductive health care, protections from bias, violence and trafficking, etc., compound to negative effect for many. These decisions combine to support the state's self-promotion as a haven for businesses seeking low taxes and cheap laborers, trading Texans' welfare for those of external business interests—a quasi-colonial model. Another model could view higher wages and state support services for Texans as a source of more spending by the wage earners—energizing the economy. Current policies together ensure that often only already-well-to-do Texans do well.

Failing to provide the state's poor with the human capital infrastructure to allow them to move up (education, health care, etc.) reproduces misery. Though charity is a helpful and necessary stopgap in the context, it cannot provide the full and consistent services that a strong state tax structure would. This policy backdrop illuminates the dynamics of gender, poverty, and violence documented herein and provides a basis for envisioning change.

Teen fertility and poverty are intimately linked: Teen mothers more often come from impoverished backgrounds, with limited access to birth control. Additionally, becoming a teen mother may necessitate that women cut short their educations, pushing them and their children into poverty that they might not otherwise have faced. Only 38% of mothers who became mothers before age 18 completed their high school diploma or GED by age 22, and 78% of those children whose mothers did not complete their diplomas or marry lived in poverty (Zweig & Falkenberg, 2017).

Like the overall fertility rate, the teen fertility rate in Harris County also continued to decline between 2018 and 2019, from 24.7 to 23.9, and across women of all racial/ethnic groups (see Figure 11). But the rate of decline lessened markedly for White and especially Hispanic teens in 2019.

The size of state populations also affects the actual number of births. New Hampshire, with the lowest teen fertility rate at 6.6 in 2019, saw 275 teen births, where Arkansas, with the highest rate at 30.0,

saw 2,882 teen births. California, with the largest population and a teen fertility rate of 12.4, saw 15,356 teen births. Texas, the second most populous state, with a teen rate of 24.0, saw by far the largest total number of teen births at 24,109 in 2019, of which 3,775 were in Harris County.

## WOMEN'S INCREASING POLITICAL PRESENCE

The number of women candidates for the Texas Legislature continued to increase in 2020, with 11 more women running and five more women winners than in 2018 (see Figure 12).

As Figure 12 shows, the number of Republican women candidates increased by 8 (to a total of 23), while the number of Democratic women candidates increased by 2 (to a total of 68), building on widely variant base numbers from 2018. Of the 44 women winners, 34 were Democrats and 10 were Republicans. Of the total 181 positions in the Texas legislature, 167 were up for election in 2020,

and women won 26.3% of them. Along with the four women Texas Senators whose positions were not up for election in 2020 (out of 14 total such positions), that means a total of 48 women were part of the 2021 Texas legislature (26.5%—13 R; 35 D) (Ballotpedia, 2021; Texas Legislature Online, 2021).

The number of women in the Texas delegation to the US Congress increased by one to seven in 2021 (adding Beth Van Duyne, R-Irving). The others were incumbents: five Democrats (Eddie Bernice Johnson, Dallas; Sheila Jackson Lee, Houston; Veronica Escobar, El Paso; Lizzie Fletcher, Houston; and Sylvia Garcia, Houston), including three from Harris County, and one Republican (Kay Granger, Fort Worth). There have been no women senators representing Texas since the retirement of Kay Bailey Hutchison (R) in 2013. See Figure 13.

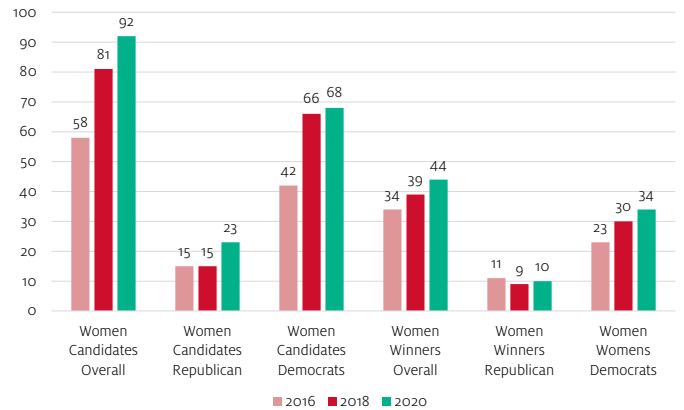
As of January 2020, the Houston City Council includes a majority of women (9 out of 16), the Mayor is an African-American man, Sylvester Turner, and the County Judge is a Latina, Lina Hidalgo, who just turned 30.

The historic absence of women from policy-making roles in business and government provides context to current intersectional gender inequities, and the increasing numbers of women of diverse race/ethnicity in these roles has spurred movement toward both discussion of and efforts to fix these problems. Addressing inequities brings a wider variety of people and insights to the policy tables and to market and technology innovation.

## LGBT IN THE COMMUNITY

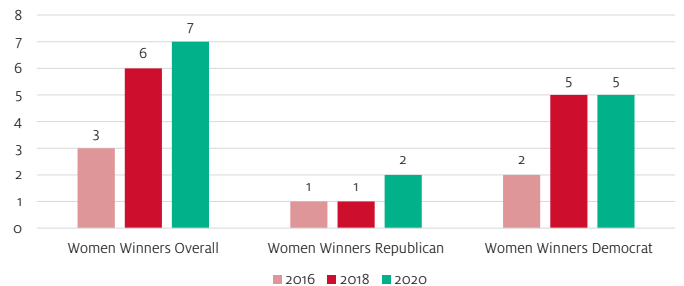
Gallup poll national data has reported an increase in the prevalence of Americans identifying as LGBT in 2020 to a new high of 5.6% (6.4% of women and 4.9% of men), from 3.5% in 2012 (Jones, 2021).

Figure 12: Women candidates and winners, Texas Legislature, 2016, 2018, 2020.



Data Sources: Astudillo (2020); Ballotpedia (2021); Texas Legislature Online (2021).

Figure 13: Women candidates and winners, Texas Delegation to Congress, 2016, 2018, 2020.



Data Sources: Astudillo (2020) @ Ballotpedia (2021).

Figure 14: Gallup Poll data on Americans' self-identification as LGBT, by generation.

	LGBT %	Straight/Heterosexual %	No opinion %
Generation Z (born 1997-2002)	15.9	78.9	5.2
Millennials (born 1981-1996)	9.1	82.7	8.1
Generation X (born 1965-1980)	3.8	88.6	7.6
Baby boomers (born 1946-1964)	2.0	91.1	6.9
Traditionalists (born before 1946)	1.3	89.9	8.9

GALLUP, 2020

Source: Jones (2021).

Increased prevalence in LGBT identification nationally could reflect several factors, whether bona fide increases in LGBT identity, decreased stigma about identifying as such in society overall or with each generation, or other considerations. Underscoring this, the 2020 Gallup survey found the highest rates of LGBT identification (15.9% - 1 in 6) in Generation Z adults (those aged 18 to 30 in 2020) (see Figure 14) (Jones, 2021; Schmidt, 2021).

Changes in assessment methodology also may have affected the shift.<sup>11</sup> In particular, new phrasing appeared critical to clarifying a wider prevalence of bisexuality than was previously understood. In the new Gallup data more than half of LGBT adults (54.6%) identified as bisexual (4.3% of women overall, vs. 1.8% of men overall) (Jones, 2021). This suggests an imperative to research bisexual identity in at least equal measure with other sexual minority identities.

## COMPLEXITIES OF COMMUNITY-BASED DATA

The inadequacies of current measurement of LGBT identity exemplifies the complex enterprise of documenting precarious populations for whom sharing information might create risk of violence, job penalties, stigma, or other harm. Populations at risk of DV, of deportation, of arrest, and other dangers also often don't want to share data, and researchers seek not to collect information in a way that would put people at risk. But lack of data makes delivery of empirically supported services impossible and means we do not understand critical aspects of our community. This lack of understanding may in turn fuel the kind of legislative action that has occurred in the 2021 legislative session, in which multiple anti-trans-health bills have been introduced that particularly negatively affect transgender youth.

Additionally, there are many challenges to accessing and validating data with state and local government providers and nonprofit community partners in the Houston/Harris County region, due to lack of adequate technical support and up-to-date equipment, overwork among service providers, training issues, and underfunding. Community-based training about research methods could bridge gaps to working with community agencies (see Peacock et al., 2011). The State of Texas and local jurisdictions must make larger investments in data collection efforts and software, to adequately track the community's needs, develop policies to responsibly address those needs, and to effectively provide services.

## CONCLUSIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Analysis of Harris County data reveals deep inequities by gender and race/ethnicity here, inequities which often cascade and compound, especially for those in poverty, and especially for women of color. While the nation as a whole faces related wage gaps, Houston has particularly big gaps. The combination of the oil and gas and ancillary industries disproportionately populated by NH White men and an unregulated, low-paid immigrant labor market is peculiar to Houston and creates huge disparities for all.

We can begin to address these by documenting them, tracing their interconnections, discussing them as a community, and ceasing to take them for granted. In the context of low state human capital investment and limited service provision to state residents, one step toward addressing inequities would be for businesses to join community members in advocating for equitable, nonexploitative policies.

While the Covid-19 pandemic has had many negative effects, especially for those already disadvantaged by inequity, efforts at ameliorating them offer us a chance to address underlying problems. For example, the American Rescue Plan (ARP)'s expanded support for childcare and its Child Tax Credit expansion for 2021-22—which will put an additional \$2.3 billion into the pockets of Harris County families, mitigating poverty for many. The ARP also incentivizes Medicaid expansion for Texas; will our legislators take this opportunity to invest in their own citizens and economy?

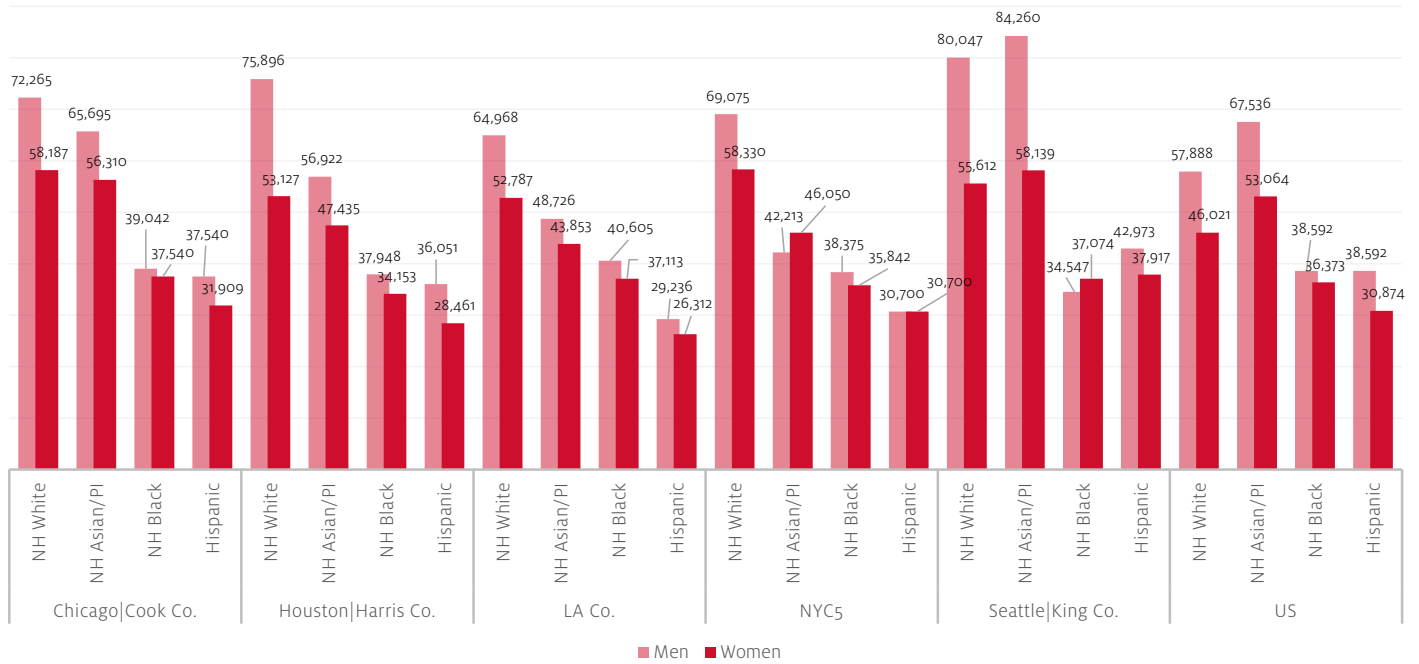
A lot has changed since the 2019 ACS data reported here was collected. Pandemic job losses, increased poverty and hunger, and school closures have burdened many families, often in gendered ways. We will supplement this report shortly with analyses of data centered on the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly its effects on economics and health as linked to identity factors including gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity, income-level, and age. See also our ongoing Pandemic Gender reports on Houston/Harris County Covid-19 Fatalities (8 issued to date), and additional reports to follow. Further projects underway include tracking and integrating regional DV data, investigating the interconnections among stigma, violence, health and mental health matters faced by LGBT Houstonians, and assessing and addressing the workforce difficulties for women and their families brought on or exacerbated by the pandemic.

As the region's first gender-and-sexuality-focused think tank, the UH IRWGS aims through empirical research to amplify discussion of the social and economic forces linked to intersectional gender and sexuality that have long gone unexamined here. And to engender positive change.

<sup>11</sup> Through 2017, Gallup assessed LGBT identity with a single, yes/no, forced-choice item: "Do you personally identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender" (Meyer, 2019). Whereas, the revised method, employed in the 2020 Gallup, assessed gender identity via a 2-step approach: first asking, "What sex were you assigned at birth, on your original birth certificate," with the response options of female and male, and second asking, "Which of the following terms best describes your current gender identity," with the response options of woman, man, trans woman (male-to-female), trans man (female-to-male) and non-binary/genderqueer. The revised method to assess sexual identity asked, "Which of the following do you consider yourself to be," with non-exclusive response options including straight or heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer or same-gender loving (Meyer, 2019).

# APPENDIX

Figure A. Median income of full-time workers in 2019, by gender, race/ethnicity and geography.



Data Source: Ruggles et al., (2021); UH IRWGS analysis.

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