Women and Employment Policy

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Fall 2010 764-9517
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Office Hours: Tuesday 11:00-12:00
1:15-2:15
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CONTENT: This course is in 2 parts. In Section 1 (Topics I to X), we review and outline the major arguments and evidence about women’s work in the feminist theory, economics, sociological, psychology, and policy literatures. We pay particular attention to the following set of questions. How do men and women allocate time between the family and the household? What are possible explanations for male/female differences in employment, occupation choice, and earnings? How much has gender-based labor market inequality declined over time? How well do we understand the causes of gender-based labor market inequality? Has the progress against gender-based inequality stalled in recent years? Did male/female differences in pay and prestige within formerly “male” professions such as law, college teaching, finance, and medicine drop as women increasingly entered these professions? Did women reach parity with men as formerly “male” professions were integrated? Did “male” professions become more family-friendly?

In Section 2 (Topic XI) students will give short in-class presentations using concepts learned in class to analyze a relative’s work history.

Organization and Requirements

No laptops permitted in class.

All required readings are marked with an “*”. All other readings are recommended.

Section 1: (10 class meetings, Topics II to X, September 15 to November 17). Each student is required to write eight 2-5 page papers that review and evaluate an assigned week’s readings and comment on the implications of these readings for employment policies. One of these papers must review and assess the human capital model. One paper must review and assess The Second Shift and one paper must review and assess Competing Devotions. These papers are due September 22, November 2, and November 9. Papers need not cover all assigned readings. Papers are due on the day readings are assigned. If you wish to do two separate papers on a Topic’s readings, this is allowed. The second paper can be turned in one week later than the first paper. In the first 10 class meetings, 1, 2, or 3 students will be chosen to outline and critique the readings for the next week’s class. These students will distribute copies of their paper to the class. Presentations should last only 10 minutes. Other students should be prepared to amplify and critique these presentations.

Section 2: (4 class meetings, Topic XI, November 24, December 1, December 8, and December 15). Each student will prepare and submit a work history tree for their family. Trees must include all siblings who are not in school, parents, aunts and uncles. If it is possible to get the information, include any information you have about grandparents and their siblings, and great
grandparents and their siblings. The work tree should indicate who worked, what types of work they did, and whether they were in the United States or another country.

Next choose 2 individuals from the tree to focus on. Compare a man or woman in your, your parent’s or your grandparents’ generations. (If you want to focus on non-family members – high school classmates, neighbors, friends, etc. – check it with one). You will pass out copies of your family tree in class, and you will give a 10-minute presentation on these two family members’ work histories in class on November 24, December 1, December 8, or December 15. For these two individuals, create a fuller economic history that provides some or all of the following information.

- The individual’s human capital: years of schooling, educational credentials, etc.
- Did this individual ever work for pay? Did he/she ever interrupt work or quit working entirely? Does he/she plan to interrupt work in the future?
- Was labor market discrimination a factor in this person’s labor market choices and experiences?
- How do this person’s labor market experiences compare with the experiences of the typical individual of their age, race/ethnicity and gender at that time period?
- What was the general labor market like in the area/country at the time? Ie, was it the Great Depression, an economic boom, etc? Did this affect these individuals’ choices/experiences?
- How much responsibility for child-rearing, family, and housekeeping did/does this person assume?
- What was going in this person’s workplace? How good was the pay? Were there chances for promotion and wage growth? Was the workplace family-friendly?
- Did this person change fields? Why? Did they ever migrate/immigrate for job reasons either for themselves or their spouse? How did this affect their labor market experiences?
- When comparing the two individuals you should focus on similarities/differences between the individuals’ human capital, family, and work decisions

The easiest way to collect this information is by interviewing the individual or from family records. You should apply relevant theory and models studied in class. We will have in-class presentations on November 24, December 1, December 8, and December 15.

**Discussion Requirements**

Students are expected to arrive on time, have read the assigned readings prior to class, and to attend class regularly. Listening to others’ argument carefully is as important as making arguments in class discussion. Students who are uncomfortable with speaking up in class but who attend class regularly and do their in-class presentations will receive full credit for class participation. If students do not attend class regularly, their grades will automatically drop a letter grade.

**Readings**

Two books are required for the course. Both are paperback books. The books have been ordered from Michigan Book and Supply:

Mary Blair-Loy. 2003. *Competing Devotions*

**Grading**

Short papers count for 64 percent of the grade, discussion counts for 11% of the grade, and individual family trees and presentations for 25 percent of the grade.
I. **Employment Rates and Pay of Women in the U.S. (lecture) (Sept. 8)**

Women’s employment and male/female gaps in employment dropped sharply from 1950 to the mid-1990s and then plateaued. The male/female earnings gap was large and constant until 1978, dropped sharply 1979-2000 and then plateaued. Sex-based occupational segregation dropped 1960 to 1990 primarily due to educated women moving into traditionally “male” professional and management fields. Male/female gaps in employment, earnings and occupation are still high today.


II. **Perspectives on Gender Inequality (Sept. 15)**

One class presenter will summarize Goldin (2006), and one will summarize Heilman and Parkes-Stamm (2008).

A. **Feminist/Legal Perspective on Gender**

MacKinnon argues that neither the straight equality approach nor the difference approach provide useful directions for women’s legal treatment. She contends both approaches are rooted and reinforced by socially constructed views of gender and that we need to begin to analyze/dismantle the socially oppressive legal structure before we can know what sex-blind justice might be.


B. **Historical Economic Perspective (lecture)**

Claudia Goldin uses the economic terms “income elasticity” and “substitution elasticity” when analyzing women’s labor supply. What does she mean by this?

When the *income elasticity* of female labor supply is high, this means that women’s work choices are very responsive to family income, the higher the family income, the less likely a woman is to work. When the *substitution elasticity* is low, this means that women are unlikely to substitute market work for nonmarket (i.e. family) work. When income elasticity is high and substitution elasticity is low, increases in jobs and increases in available wages are unlikely to lead to increases in women’s employment. Women will only work when family incomes are very low.

Other key economic terms:

- exogenous – external and independent
- endogenous – internal and dependent
- heterogeneity – variability/differences


C. **Social Psychological Perspectives**
Heilman et al review a decade of social psychology experiments on gender stereotypes. They argue that unconscious descriptive and prescriptive gender stereotypes distort how employers process information about and evaluate men and women with identical credentials and identical performances. *Try to think of an example (or counter-example) from your personal experience or that of acquaintances of one of the processes Heilman et al. list under descriptive stereotypes and of one of the processes they list under prescriptive stereotypes. Do you buy Heilman et al’s reasoning about how stereotypes inhibit women’s chances of success in “male” jobs?*


**III. Neoclassical and Human Capital Economic Models of The Sex Division of Labor at Home and Work (Sept. 22)**

One student will summarize the economic model of the family and the human capital model (Blau, Ferber, and Winkler, ch 3, 6). One student will present a critique of the models.

**A. Work in the Home**

The neoclassical model of the family assumes that the traditional division of labor in the family – woman as caretaker and man as breadwinner- is a strategy for maximizing efficiency. Each spouse specializes in work in which he or she has a comparative advantage.


**B. The Human Capital Model of Gender Pay and Occupation Differences**

Women earn less than men because of sex differences in work commitments and in skills/training and because of compensating differentials. Women typically assume the bulk of family responsibilities and many interrupt work careers or work part-time to care for children. Women and men take different courses of study in school – English vs. Engineering – and men’s training has a higher payoff in the labor market. Men are more likely than women to enter dirty, physically demanding or dangerous jobs and are rewarded accordingly – “compensating differentials”. Women prefer “care” work and men prefer management work.


IV. Statistical Discrimination and Preference Theory (Sept. 29)

Professor Corcoran will summarize the statistical discrimination model. One student will summarize preference theory.

A. Statistical Discrimination (lecture)

Employers assume either correctly or incorrectly that, on average, women will be less productive than men. So as a result, employers are less likely to hire women and employers pay women less than men. This is illegal, but if employers’ assumptions about women’s average productivity are correct, this makes sense from an economic perspective. Employers who underpredict women’s productivity will lose money.


B. Preference Theory

In the last half-century women’s lifestyle and work options have increased dramatically. According to Hakim, once these choices were opened up, women typically choose one of three different work-lifestyles. Women choose to focus primarily on the home (home-centered), to focus primarily on employment (work-centered), or to combine work and family responsibilities (adaptive). Men, in contrast, overwhelmingly choose a work-centered lifestyle. Since women voluntarily choose their work-lifestyle, sex equity policies are unnecessary. One question is how, if at all, preference theory differs from neoclassical standard economic models that focus on sex differences in skills and in tastes.

http://stevecasey.net/publicsafetyleadership/files/PSLDC-WIL-3-BJGC%20-2006%20article.pdf


V. Structural/Discrimination Models (Oct 6)

Structural models attribute sex differences in labor market attainments due to differences in how employers treat men and women workers. These differences can arise from historical institutional practices that favor men, overt discrimination, unconscious stereotypes, and conflicts between motherhood ideals and worker ideals. Professor Corcoran will describe the queuing and revolving door models. One student will review Correll et al’s motherhood penalty paper.

A. Cumulative Discrimination
VI. Evidence for Discrimination/Dealing with Unconscious Discrimination (Oct 13)

NOTE: STUDENTS WILL BE ASSIGNED A DATE (NOV. 24, DEC. 1, DEC. 8, or DEC. 15) FOR PRESENTATION OF FAMILY WORK HISTORIES ON OCTOBER 20.

A. Evidence on Discrimination

It is well documented that women earn less than men, on average, and that when sex differences in work history, work hours, occupation, and college major are controlled, sex-based earnings differences drop a lot, but often are still sizeable and significant. It is also well documented that two major predictors of sex-based wage gaps are occupational segregation (“female” jobs pay less than “male” jobs) and mothering (some mothers work part-time, take time off….) But key puzzles remain.

One question is how to interpret the unadjusted and residual male wage advantages. Is the residual wage gap due to “unfair” differences in how men and women are treated in the labor market or is it due to unmeasured differences in how men and women behave at work? For example, are women less productive than men with similar credentials, work histories and occupations because of unmeasured family duties?

A second question is whether controlling for work history, occupation, and college major is over-controlling. For instance suppose women are systematically steered away from high paying fields by educators and employers. Or, suppose some women respond to workplace discrimination by interrupting work to care for children.
A third question is why do women enter “female” occupations if these occupations pay less than “male” occupations. Do women enter such occupations because of early sex-role socialization, because of employer and co-worker discrimination, or because of social controls that push women and men into gender-appropriate activities (“doing gender”)? Evaluate the evidence presented in England (2005), Goldin & Rouse, and Correll et al. about sex discrimination.

One student will summarize England (2005) and one will summarize Goldin and Rouse (2000).


http://sp.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/reprint/12/2/264


B. Unconscious Discrimination and Remedies: Two Views

Legislative and legal approaches to employment discrimination typically assume that discrimination is conscious. Employers intentionally treat women less favorably than men either (1) because employers are hostile to women (animus model) or (2) because employers consciously assume that women will be less productive than men (statistical discrimination). But recently, some analysts have argued that laws and courts have reduced “conscious” discrimination, and that today, discrimination results primarily from unconscious cognitive processes. Proponents of this view cite recent research on unconscious bias by cognitive scientists. This research often consists of undergraduate student experiments and large-sample computer experiments.

Reskin argues that theory and policy should address “unconscious” discrimination. Petersen disagrees. One student should present and assess Reskin’s and Petersen’s arguments.


VII. The Time Bind and Opting Out (October 20)

NOTE: STUDENTS ARE ASSIGNED PRESENTATION DATES (NOV 24, DEC 1, DEC 8, OR DEC 15).
Professional careers are becoming increasingly demanding at the same time that two-career marriages are becoming increasingly common. One result is that professional women and men who try to have it all – careers plus children – are caught in a time bind.

How do marriage and children affect women’s and men’s work hours and work commitment? Do employers view mothers as unproductive and unmotivated? How do career concerns affect men’s and women’s decisions about having children? Are women “opting out” of careers to accommodate family needs or are they being “pushed out” by family unfriendly work places? Does taking a family leave or working fewer hours permanently damage women’s career prospects? Do women who go “off-ramp” ever get back “on-ramp”? If children do damage women’s careers perhaps women who want careers should forgo children, marry down, or have only one child.


VIII. The Second Shift (Oct 27)
What shapes how women and men negotiate the division of labor at home? What does Hochschild mean by family myths? What are the strategies men and women employ to deal with the allocation of family work? Do husbands and wives’ attitudes about gender equality matter? If yes, how? If no, why not?

One student will summarize the key themes in *The Second Shift*.


**IX. Competing Devotions (Nov 3)**

Career women on the fast track have multiple options dealing with family. Some do not have children. Others drop out or work part-time. Others continue careers full speed while raising children. What choices do the women in *Competing Devotions* make and how do they explain these choices? What roles do these husbands play in these choices? Is it “fair” that women, but not men see themselves as forced to choose between family and career? Do you think that young women today have more options than the women Blair-Loy interviewed?

One student will summarize the key themes in *Competing Devotions*.

*M. Blair-Loy Competing Devotions.*

**X. Women in the Professions (Nov 10-17)**

Students can write on any one of the six topics. On November 10, one student will present the required readings by Babcock & Laschevier, by Babcock (2008) and by Fels (2005). One student should present Epstein et al. (1999). On November 17, one student will review the required readings on family-friendly policies. I will present the Goldin and Katz (2008), Corcoran et al (2010), Bertrand et al (2010), and Ginther and Kahn (2004, 2006) papers.

*In this section, we will examine analyses of women’s positions in the professions. In recent decades, women have entered formerly “male” professions in large numbers. How have women fared in these professions?*

**A. General Issues (Nov 10)**

Some argue that women do not reach the very top of their profession because they do not negotiate for top jobs or because they are not ambitious. Others argue that women who work part-time or interrupt work are stigmatized.

L. Babcock and S. Laschevier. 2003. *Women Don’t Ask: Negotiation and the Gender Divide*

*L. Babcock and S. Laschevier. Women Don’t Ask “Interesting Statistics.”*  
[http://www.womendon TASK.com/stats.html](http://www.womendon TASK.com/stats.html)

*L. Babcock. 2008. “Women Repeat This: Don’t Ask, Don’t Get!” NY Times*  
April 6, 2008.  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/06/jobs/06pre.html?_r=1&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/06/jobs/06pre.html?_r=1&oref=slogin)


B. Law (Nov 10)

Women lawyers’ earnings are similar to the men lawyers in the first year after law school. Fifteen years later, women’s mean earnings are 63-64 percent those of men and women are less likely than men to be partners in firms. Wage and partnership gaps are smaller, when we control current labor and past labor supply. Controlling job setting also reduces pay gaps. But there still remain large unexplained male/female gaps in wages and partnership rates even with extensive controls.


T. O’Brien. 2000. “Why do so Few Women Reach the Top of Big Law Firms?”
N.Y. Times 3/19/06.
http://www.nytimes.com/2006/03/19/business/yourmoney/19law.html

*M. Corcoran, P. Courant, and M. Noonan. 2010. “Cohort Changes in Male-Female Earnings and Partnership Differentials among Lawyers. (Ctools)


C. Business (Nov 17)

Women with MBA’s start out earning roughly the same as men with MBA’s. But 10 years or more later, women’s earnings are roughly 60% those of men. Three factors “account for” 85% of this gap. Women are less likely than men to take finance courses in business school; women’s GPA’s are lower than those of men (3.3 vs. 3.4), women are more likely to have career interruptions than men, and women work fewer hours per week than men do. Interruptions of 6 months or longer are associated with large drops in earnings.

D. Science (Nov 17)


E. Academics (Nov 17)

Ginther and Kahn find that differences in the probabilities that men and women with similar characteristics are hired into tenure-track jobs, receive tenure, and become full professors varies across fields. The male advantage in promotion to tenure among “comparable” men and women is largest in economics, next largest in other social sciences, and non-existent in physical sciences, life sciences, and engineering. Motherhood tends to hurt women’s chances while fatherhood has either no effect or positive effects on men’s chances. Whether this is a “motherhood penalty” or whether parenthood reduces women’s but not men’s productivity in academia remains an open question.


F. Family Friendly Policies for Professional Workers (Nov 17)


XII. Work History Trees and Reports (November 24, December 1, December 8, and December 15.)

Each student will be assigned to one of four dates. Each student in the first group will turn in their Family Work History Tree and give an 8-10 minute oral report on
the work history of two individuals in their family in the 1st class hour on their chosen dates. Students will pass out but not discuss their family tree. In the second half of each class, we will discuss these student reports from the perspective of the economic and sociological models we have examined in the previous class sections. The format for this assignment is presented on pages 1 and 2 of this syllabus under Organization and Requirements, Section 2. There are no required readings for these weeks.