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The Price Women Pay:
Women's Attachment to Work

Senior Project submitted to the
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by

Megan Connor

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2020

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Abstract

Since the beginning of the industrial revolution, the world has created institutions that oppress and isolate women. The mother is often the most isolated and confined to the roles of her job- a job not considered productive in the traditional framework of economics. This research explores the structure of family and culture that has impacted the lives of women in the United States. Now education and generations of feminists have created new paths for women, but children have been the barrier to lasting labor force participation. The workforce has discriminated against women for years. As sentiments towards women's participation turns positive, it becomes increasingly hard to ascertain what the discrimination is directed towards. Most of the discrimination in the workplace today is its inflexibility to accommodate mothers. The prospect that United States families have to support themselves financially has diminished in the last forty years and single mothers have faced the greatest burden. United States policy is not sufficient enough to provision for and secure the livelihood of low-income mothers requiring action. All women in order to be emancipated under a capitalist system require the means to provide for their family. To that end, policy must be changed to increase the feasibility of mothers working and provide for low-income families.

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Introduction

The 20th century was an era of liberation for women, but the latter half of the century it became clear that progression had stalled relative to Feminist expectations. The final frontier for women: to attain positions of authority. To achieve emancipation under the current U.S. market system, women must be afforded the right to work. This research will look at the oppression of women's right to work due to the impediment of children. Lisa Belkin's New York Magazine article "The Opt-Out Revolution" created a firestorm of conversation around the progression of women in the workforce. Due to its significance in the early 2000's, Belkin's article will serve as a touchpoint to highlight social institutions of gender as well the discrepancy between women and a market economy. The analysis will question: is opting out a luxury or benefit for women, and should the path of opting out be encouraged? The implications of Belkin's work translate into increased need to look at female emancipation in the last thirty years.

As the education levels of women rise and cracks form in the class ceiling, the world has seen changes in societal ideology and increased disagreement. This research will examine the dichotomy of being a woman both in the culture and in the workforce, while ultimately analyzing if women leaving the workforce in favor of unpaid household work has greater consequences for long term change and gender progression.

Important to any analysis of women today is the privilege to leave one's job in favor of stay-at-home work— a luxury that 25% of women still take to this day. The United States offers little financial support for stay-at-home mothers by way of subsidies and tax credits. This lack of aid stems from an undervaluation of the work a woman does in the home. Completely rejecting

the labor of women in the home created the need for Feminist economics as a field of study. Past economic research considered only the formal labor market, the household was deemed outside the market and of scientific research. Since the establishment of a feminist perspective in economics, the field has taken to showing greater concern for the addition of women's labor. Mainstream policy conversation now considers government aid for women at home, to provide for and recognize work in the home as an integral component of the economy.

Relative to the other industrialized nations, the U.S. offers little governmental aid to mothers. The lack of support mothers receive from the government is merely a piece of the larger concern with stay-at-home mothers. When a woman forgoes her income to raise children, she surrenders her financial freedom from her partner. A lack of income poses detrimental effects on women in abusive relationships. Further than the immediate harms of being a housewife, the unintentional harms consist of a continuation of cultural ideology that prefers women taking care of the family. The United States celebrates the mother and uses rhetoric that praises the sacrifice women make to raise children. Their praise is an overt acknowledgement of sacrifice, yet there remains a lack of compensations for women's contribution. The terms stay-at-home mom, housewife, and mother all carry specific connotations that allows the listener to conjure an image of a woman or who she should be. These iconic images of mother are harmful to the economic welfare of women. Continuing to encourage mothers to stay at home hurts the emancipation of women and undermines the progress of feminist movements.

While the icon of women as homemakers is diverse among racial and socioeconomic lines, oppressive views of woman exist for all. Financial security and freedom greatly dictate the image of women as homemakers. African American women have always had far greater labor force attachment than white women, 60.2-56.4% respectively in 2018 ([U.S. Bureau of Labor](#)

[Statistics, 2019](#)). African Americans in the United States historically have earned lower incomes relative to Whites and Asians. A black woman's income is lower than black man's and significantly lower than a white man.¹

Feminist economist, Barbara Bergmann offers a counter opinion to the idea of subsidies to women at home, by raising issues of equity among American families. (Bergmann, 2000) Bergmann's ideas shift the analysis, to how stay at home mothers will never be compensated and potentially should not be. The opportunity to stay-at-home has hurt women and will continue to in the long run, specifically those who are the most vulnerable. The rise of just the idea of a "new traditionalism" and the growing power of the conservative right has re-instilled gender norms. Since the turn of the 21st century women have left careers because of children and welfare has decreased in the United States. The importance for viewing women's work at home as valuable and the emancipation of women are complicated dichotomies: in achieving one the other must be sacrificed. To enforce that women must have a right to work, the luxury of being a stay-at-home mom consequently must diminish.

By looking at women's choices in the labor market of the 21st century, what one sees are the characteristics of the market, not the preferences of the woman. Women in the labor force today have fought against gender discrimination and rigid market structures and work outside the home has constituted decades of subverting society's idealization of woman.

The question that women have: "can I leave the workforce and raise my children?" is not financially realistic for women of all races and socioeconomic backgrounds. Women from lower socioeconomic classes have worked far more than women from high socioeconomic classes. Black mothers' high labor force participation has created a rhetoric that they are poor mothers;

¹ White Men \$1,002; Black Men \$735; Black Women \$654

their commitment to work is viewed as abandoning their children. The rhetoric has been transferable among all races. Mothers simply face a lose-lose situation when it comes to work and children in public acceptance. Being a stay at home mother is a luxury: one with an intense pressure to not abandon the family.

The ability to account for women in economic research was aided with the rise of Feminist economics in the 1980s. Birthed as a criticism of conventional thought, feminist economics today serves as an addition to economic analysis, aiding in correcting the ill-fitting frame of former neoclassical models when accounting for women. The lens is attributed to Marilyn Waring and her book *If Women Counted* (1988). Feminist economics criticized the established framework of economic research and policy provision. For much of economic history and the world's engagement in a capitalist society, women have been placed on the backburner, so to speak. They were relegated to tasks that, in the eyes of the economist, were menial. The history of capitalism and the thought processes that were created to study it serve as important beginnings for the institution of gender in a capitalist society. This analysis moves forward from the argument that women must be counted and finds fault with the "professions" designated for women as a whole: stay-at-home mother, or nursing and other feminine pink-collar jobs.

As the prospects available to women have changed and more young women enter college, enter careers, and run for president the world becomes increasingly more egalitarian. The progression of women has been an important topic of debate for the last two decades, particularly the hardship they continue to face. A concern that deserves more focus is the number of low-income women who leave the workforce due to the high cost of childcare. As average income in the United States for the bottom 90 percent fails to grow relative to the top 10 percent, more are struggling to support their families and barriers to the workforce have become more detrimental.

Pew found that the expenditure-to-income ratio has widened for a typical family of four from 71% in 1996 to 75% in 2014. (Pew, 2016)² The 2000's have seen the rise of vocal progressive feminist ideas and challenges to the institutions of gender, but a number of women still put their careers second to men's.

This paper will aim to explain the complexity in the idea of a woman's choice to stay at home or work, stemming from workplace inflexibility and traditional market structures. It will also explore how the financial crisis affected women's labor force attachment, how U.S. women's attachment has changed since the beginning of the century, the large financial burden of childcare which has resulted in women leaving the workforce to care for their children, and understand the sticky gender allegations and potential harms of being a housewife. If women do not go to work and never leave the positions allocated to women, will gender stereotypes ever change? A question to be answered is how must the government provision for low-income women who cannot bear the burden of childcare and how can the government provide for what should be the right for every woman to work?

Methodology

The analysis in this paper was conducted using a feminist perspective. An intersection of Thorstien Veblen's work on institutionalist thought informs how this research views gender. Claudia Goldin's work on the history of women entering the workforce was chosen as the foundational history of women's labor force attachment. Goldin's work uses history and data to show the acceleration of women entering the workforce. Her lecture provides an ideal framework and differentiates the empowerment that propelled every phase of movement. Goldin's work

² Low-income renters spend about 50% of their income on rent, and a greater percentage of their income on housing than middle and high income households, 40% to 25% and 17%, respectively.

considers expanded horizons, identity, and decision making as important growth factors in the next generation of women. Her analysis treats the progression of women as an evolution that morphed into a revolution. (Goldin, 2006) Lisa Belkin's *The Opt-Out Revolution* serves as an opposition to the revolution Goldin says was occurring in the mid-2000's, and explores the concept of opting out of the workforce.

Family structure and the demographics of U.S. families data was taken from the U.S. Census Bureau. This data was used to examine the dominance of families with children under 18 in the United States, and the frequency of female heads of households living with children³. The Census Bureau's data breaks down which members of the family are participating in the work force. From the data one can see the percentage of married women who are stay-at-home mothers and the number of married women who are sole earners while their husband stays home. Data from 2019 shows that 23% of married mothers with children under the age of 15 stayed at home and less than 1%⁴ of married fathers did. Longitudinal data was used when available to ascertain the changes in stay-at-home mothers over time.

The Census Bureau's data, unless otherwise stated, treats the distinction of married-couple as solely an opposite-sex couple. Data that counted same-sex married couples was often coupled with data on absent parents and the specific intersection of female same-sex couples was never provided as an option in the data.

The examination of neoclassical discrimination provides a groundwork for understanding conventional thought regarding labor market discrimination, and the writing of Michael Levin was referenced as an insight into dominant ideology on the difference between genders.

³ U.S. has highest rate of children living in a single-parent home, (Kramer, 2019)

⁴ Percentage of married fathers at home .89%; US Census Bureau

Pamala Stone and Meg Lovejoy's research on why women leave the labor force was used to help examine the reason why women choose to leave work. Their work focuses on educated career women and centers on interviews regarding their decisions to leave. Their work translates to more universalized findings as well: roughly 2 million parents in 2016 left, did not take, or severely altered jobs because of childcare issues. (Schochet & Malik, 2017) Many women from broad socio-economic levels have cited the high cost of childcare as why they leave the workforce.

The US Bureau of Labor Statistics offered data on women's earnings, labor force participation, and median weekly earnings. When discussing the intersection of single mothers who live in poverty USBLs provides data showing that weekly earnings have increased for women from 1979-2018, except for women with less than a high school diploma ([U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019](#)).

Governmental programs such as Women, Infant and Children (WIC)⁵, Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) as well as the National School Lunch program were considered when analyzing U.S. federal policy that aids women (U.S. Department of Agriculture). As single-mother households constitute the largest segment of homes which have food insecurity, national programs such as these disproportionately aid single mothers.

Taking into consideration the need to emancipate women, this research proposes a policy that accounts the emancipation of women through work while not blockading women from receiving welfare benefits. This research relies on institutional thought and inductive research to expands the possibilities for women and the economy.

⁵ WIC targets pregnant, breastfeed, postpartum and children up to the age of 5. More information in chapter 3 section on welfare.

Outline

This research will examine the birth of Capitalism and the subjugation of women, while focusing on the creation of feminist economics from the merger of feminist literature and economic principles. Particular attention will be given to economics as a discipline of men with a long history of subordinating women and how women in the 20th century moved outside of the household in four phases outlined by Claudia Goldin. It will also examine the institutions of discrimination imbedded in society, many of which are invisible therefore hard to subvert. What emancipation could mean for women and the obstacles encountered by women when they enter the workforce. How the social trends and attitudes of society help one's inference about the changes in United States culture and trends of women in the workforce. As well, the demographic makeup of families in the U.S. and how the family is struggling under a sexist market structure, culminating in an examination of U.S. policy that deepens family struggles. Finally, concluding with a policy recommendation that focuses on women right to work and children's inextricable relationship to that right and how the government must create policy that is discrete in its alleviation of mother's burden, to emancipate the woman without a stigma of female.

Chapter 1 Capitalism and The Feminist

Culture in the United States has influenced the operation of the market, and market has influenced societal structures. This chapter will discuss the cultural changes in the world that lead to capitalism, discrimination in the workplace, and feminist thought as a lens in economics. It will help solidify the differences between neoclassical and heterodox thought, showing the significance of feminist explanations for discrimination towards women. The first section will start by going through the changes in society with the rise of industrialization. While industrialization is not the birth of gender inequality, it is where we see the shift of gender inequality manifest in the “formal” economy and in scientific research. With the end of feudal systems and the birth of the industrial age, economics as a formal discipline started to materialize in the minds of academics. Industrialization changed the roles of men and women in some subtle and some grand ways.

For years, economic analysis left out a large sect of the world population: 49% of the world population, to be exact (Bank, 2018)⁶. Women continue to be undervalued in the formal market and not counted as productive in the unpaid market. For years, women in the eyes of economists simply did not rise above the level of importance as a group to be studied. That was until thinkers pushed back and economists started to critique classical models and fix the error of their ways and indulge feminist economics. Feminist economics as a unique contribution to the discipline has been enveloped by neoclassical economics. Gender economics aimed to bring the picture of women into the framework of neoclassical economics. Gender economics challenged neoclassical economists to contend with the lack of provision and accounting for women and make changes to analysis. Gender economics moves the conversation forward by trying to

⁶ In the US population, women makeup 50.8% of the country, according to the US Census Bureau (2020)

integrate the dummy variable into the established framework. Thus, accounting for females, without contending with the stark differences between the sexes. The field of feminist economics serves as the break from gender economics. Many mainstream economists still tend towards the side of the orthodox, but progress has and must be made to illuminate the use of a dummy variable to count women.

In counting women only as a dummy variable economic research is handicapped by the assumption that women are no different than men. Integral to examining the women is the need to integrate the unique differences and challenges faced by women. In accounting for women, one sees that the harms they face fall outside of the harms men face, and that the social norms which foster discrimination are something not easily solved by a market system and the concept of market equilibrium.

Inequality exists within the establishment of institutions themselves and economics is not left unscathed. Economics suffers from suppressing, perhaps unconsciously, the important roles and lives of women as productive members of our world. Feminists offer the structure by which to view the labor market, household tasks, and policy when considering the unique position of women.

Capitalism

“Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,
The proper study of mankind is Man...”

Alexander Pope

The proper study of Man is anything but Man;
and the most improper job of any man, even
saints (who at any rate were at least unwilling
to take it on), is bossing other men. Not one in
a million is fit for it, and least of all those who
seek the opportunity.” J.R.R Tolkien

Karly Polanyi, economic historian, attributes the rise of capitalism to a determination of the government in *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. A shift in political will and sentiments in the eighteenth century moved labor away from the home and into a market center. The beginning of the Industrial Revolution⁷ fundamentally changed how civilization operated. The creation of markets was revolutionary in terms of how societies structured their economies. The economic system became the bedrock of social relations (Polanyi, 1944). Production increased, and the roles of men and women were altered. With the changes in work, namely its proximity to home, an idea of women solidified for the new era. Women in the times of feudalism and during the slow rise of industrialization were viewed as integral members of the family in terms of their production capacity. Women were seen as providers for the welfare of the family. As landowners saw that greater valued could be received from land that was enclosed, work moved from feudal land to a central market. Men moved outside of the home to earn an income, while women stayed to continue caring for their families. This shift, while not birthing gender disparity, helped solidify it in scientific research

⁷ First Industrial Revolution; 1760-1840

and society. Capitalism and economics were a dual birth: one informing the other and formalizing knowledge around productivity and usefulness. Capitalism, because of its incitement of economics, formalized the oppression of women. The study of markets that became necessary ended up leaving women behind.

The study of capitalism and its focus on the economic man was furthered by the research and writings of the great “fathers” of economics: Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and Alfred Marshall. At the creation of economics, women were non-market: the labor they performed did not contribute to the market. Women did not work for the owners of capital, they worked to support men. In addition to their support of home life, women’s productive contribution has long been considered their reproductive function. But, the reproductive function of a woman has never been something for which she was monetarily compensated. The creation of capitalism gave rise to new social order and social classes.

The decisions of the past still reverberate through the realities of the present and it is imperative that economics as a discipline analyze and criticize the structures of lasting oppression undiscussed by early thinkers.

As men were leaving the home to work, the idea of money and freedom of choice was changing. Women were not included in the new sections of life that constituted engagement in work farther away from the home. Society had always seen the oppression of women: the female body as an object, dowry systems, and women as social prizes. Yet, economics served to oppress women financially. Capitalism exacerbated the division between the sexes by compensating men’s labor with wages, and women’s labor with nothing.

Young women were and continue to be socialized to participate in the institution of femininity and in the even greater institution of motherhood. All the while, the capitalist system

and the theory backing its running fails to consider the direct interdependence of motherhood and production.

Goldin's Four Phases

Claudia Goldin, a Harvard economist, has focused her research on understanding the entrance of women into the market economy and capitalist spaces. Goldin organizes women's entrance into the workforce in four phases: Phase I, late nineteenth century to 1920s; Phase II, 1930-1950; Phase III, 1950-late 1970; and Phase IV, late 1970s-present. Phase I was the slow emergence of women, which Goldin classifies as the "Independent Female Worker". Women of this phase were "poorly educated, often from low-income households and those headed by a foreign-born individual" (Goldin, 2006). Goldin notes that historian and economist, Edith Abbott always "reminded her readers that lower-class women had always worked," something that was true of this era. This generation was the beginning of revolutionary thought. In tangent with the first wave of feminism, phase I was the spark of change for the next 100 years. The early 1900's saw the first wave of women graduating from college, which started the movement of women. Uneducated, poor, and unmarried women were those most likely to work throughout history, but Goldin focuses on the rise of married women's employment as the achievement in women's labor force participation. The employment of married women, and particularly educated married women, signaled changes in culture as well as the labor force.

Phase II started to erode the pressures on married women to remain outside of the labor force. The 1930's to 50's saw greater labor force participation by the end of the period, particularly by married women. Increased "demand for office and other clerical work..." was one of the greatest exogenous forces that lead women to the labor force in the second phase

(Goldin, 2006). High school enrollment was increasing among women. For this time and as history will show, education will be one of the greatest backers for women to enter the workforce. Changes in demand for female labor rendering the labor women could access more “respectable” meant that more women were inclined to enter the workforce. Young women also entered the workforce. Goldin still finds that most young women during this time did not remain employed after marriage. It was not until the 1940s that married women had stability in the labor market. Married women in the 30’s and 40’s had low labor force participation because of marriage bars. Marriage bars, which were set by firms and school districts, stipulated that employers were going to fire young women when they were married and not hire married women (Goldin, 2006). By the 1950’s marriage bars were eliminated, but it is hard to reason that marriage bars did not stifle the expansion of women’s employment. Marriage bars show a form of market discrimination towards women, presumably created as a reaction to more women entering the workforce. Labor economists who have analyzed this period find that married women’s employment during phase II has a relation to their husband’s income.

Phase III, the phase before the revolution, is when older women started to enter the labor force, and later younger women between 1950-1970. By the end of the period more married women were in the workforce, and for the first time the married women in the workforce “were more educated than the average married woman” (Goldin, 2006). Many women in the third phase underestimated how many years they were going to spend in the labor market, for the children of this era an example was available for female participation. Young girls in the latter half of the 20th century were planning for a future of prolonged employment. Because of this, more women considered and entered college. The rate at which women were being educated was the bedrock for the fourth and final phase.

Phase IV, the revolution, is the final phase Goldin classifies by the rise in labor force participation of married mothers with children under the age of one. Goldin asserts that revolutionary was the growth of women with young children in the labor market. The late 1970's to the present has been the logical progression of women's elevation in society.⁸ Women could plan for careers and not just jobs. Longevity expanded the horizons of women. What women were planning for helped them choose their college major and increased their career prospects. What women did not plan for was being a mother and having a career. During this time, the median age of marriage increased by 2.5 years for college graduates. Married women aged 20-44 with children under one increased their employment from .20 in 1973 to .62 in 2000. (Goldin, 2006)

Goldin examines the impact of children on women leaving the labor force, and finds that for women, children increase the time away from work, but the opposite remains true for men. Goldin's regression data shows that "children were the most important factor related to out-of-work spells for women". For women with one child their total time out of work: .36 years, two children: 1.41, three or more: 2.84. By the fourth phase, a woman's husband's income was far less connected to her employment. Although in the 1990's there was a plateau in married women entering the workforce, Goldin examines the idea that there has been backwards momentum as mentioned by Belkin. Goldin found that evidence was not sufficient to believe that a regression had occurred.

⁸ Goldin gave this lecture in 2006

Opt-Out Revolution

In 2003, Lisa Belkin's article *The Opt-Out Revolution* caused a media discourse which weaved together an almost two-decade story for educated women. Belkin spoke to Princeton-educated women living in Atlanta, all of whom had children and worked in professional jobs. These women all expressed a sense of calm with their decision to leave their stressful and demanding jobs for the joys of raising a child. "I don't want to be on the fast track leading to a partnership at a prestigious law firm," says Katherine Brokaw... "Some people define that as success. I don't." (Belkin, 2003) Belkin's women played into workplace discrimination by outwardly attesting that they had a greater commitment to their children than they did their jobs.

Mired in the criticism of a "new traditionalism" movement and questions of "can a woman have it all?" was the lost analysis of why these women faced the barriers that led them to exit the traditional workforce in the first place. Belkin's sub-section of women were educated at elite institutions, most had professional degrees and middle to high incomes, but still exposed the overt challenges they faced in the workforce after children.

Belkin's work interviewing women about the "intersection of life and work" as she calls it, has revealed to her that women have been turning an eye to work. (Belkin, 2003) In particular, the women the world never expected to backed away: elite educated women with professional degrees and strong career prospects. If the workplace is a source of difficulty to mothers, and those with the greatest resources are leaving, Belkin concludes it is because these women are "rejecting the workforce". (Belkin, 2003)

When women present such a clear pedigree and still choose to leave prestigious jobs many people are left confused. These women, for the most part, have mounted the hurdles of discrimination in the labor market, with their education and dedication to success. So what is it

about our culture that does not strengthen the necessity for women to work? The feminists of the past, Belkin acknowledges, would be thrilled with the progress women have made. Modern feminists on the other hand, are disappointed with the lack of progress since the end of the 20th century. Embedded in our social framework must therefore exist structures that have stalled the elevation of women to the top levels of society. One of the largest barriers women have faced has been access to positions of authority. The United States, in particular, is unique in never having a female head of state and many U.S. institutions are seemingly resistant to female leadership.

Opting-out for many women is not an option. For the women that choose to leave the workforce their path helps to show the challenges women face in the labor market. Labor in the neoclassical sense lacks an evaluation of women's labor and, consequently, the market does not encourage the participation of mothers. These women show that a woman will spend much of her adult life reconciling the dichotomy of mother and capitalist. Highly educated women have socialized themselves through education to participate in an economy that views their identity outside of labor and therefore fails to create arrangements for it.

Feminist Economics

Alfred Marshall described the field of economics as the study of man in 1890 (Marshall, 1890). It was not until the 1980's that the discipline had a formal language to implement an analysis for women. Feminist economics changes the isolation in economic research. Females and constructions of gender are interconnected to women's participation in the economy. Neoclassical economics operates as if the system is isolated, theory exists on a level different from man, and scientific research happens detached from accountability to people. Feminist

economics grounds analysis in social relation of women, particularly when using an institutionalist framework.

Ann Mari May writes that the challenges that feminist economists face, as the discipline is overtly political and interest-motivated, are as great as the challenges feminist economics focuses on: “categorical assumptions, theoretical constraints, and the policies that flow from them...”. (May, 1996) May recognized the uphill battle feminist economics would have to climb to find respectability, not just in the field but with the wider public.⁹

The use of feminist economics as the base to examine the economy developed far behind the pioneering work of first wave feminists. Two-hundred years before the creation of feminist economics as a reputable paradigm, Mary Wollstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. This time lag has contributed to an information deficit and insufficient scientific findings. As women began to enter the workforce the labor carried out by women (care and reproductive labor) had to become marketized. The marketization of labor assigned a feminine pejorative was undervalued, perpetuating the second-tier nature of women’s labor outside of the formal economy.

Economists William Waller and Ann Jennings’ work provides necessary assessment and radical exploration of feminist literature of the mid-1990’s. Their use of institutional theoretical frameworks to create a new unique framework and build a theoretical core that uses intersection to understand the boundaries of economic research. Their furthering of feminist economics provides the greatest resources to analyze women, therefore doing away with dualism. (Waller & Jennings, 1990)

⁹ For all the good feminist economist hoped to do for women May says: “Perhaps like any good deed it will not go unnoticed or unpunished... defined by the challenges it presents— a formidable one to be sure.” (May, 1996)

Institutionalism and Class

Many of the prejudices women face are embedded within the world culture. Much of the western world views and treats women in largely similar ways, and the culture's treatment of women informs the knowledge of that society. Thorstein Veblen wrote about the subjugation of women. His acknowledgement of women's struggle within the world is incredibly important and his perspective is one of the most attune to including women. While Veblen's work may not be pioneering feminist thought for the late 19th century, his position and application of a feminist lens to the patriarchy, as it directly and inextricably relates to the structures of the economy, are important. Looking to Veblen's work can help bridge a gap between the female, discrimination, and emancipation. Economic freedom cannot be achieved for men or women without the total relaxation of the subjugation of women. Modern feminist literature speaks about the trap of the patriarchy hurting both men and women. The confines that the institutional structure of patriarchy puts upon the people creates an environment where none are free, but all are merely controlled by the structure of an oppressive institution. Using scientific reasoning outside of the cartesian model is the only model that offers research the ability to subvert the subjugation of objective reasoning, instead using dialectic reasoning.

Joan Acker, a prominent second wave feminist sociologist, analyzing class and gender writes that the "political-economic climate" shifted perspective, as such class dropped from analysis. (Acker, 2003) Acker aims to put class analysis on its head and derive a way to analyze class outside of a male-constructed vision. Many women who are among the same class as men face drastically different realities. But as gender is an institution entrapping women, it is important to analyze the stark differences between women in the U.S. Women making the choice to leave the workforce are doing so because they can afford to leave the workforce. Low-income

mothers have less of a choice, and when a choice must be made, families typically sacrifice.
(Belkin, 2003)

Class must be considered in the analysis of women's labor market attachment. Acker's reimagined view of Marxist class ideals provides a basis for lessening socioeconomic and occupational factors of Marx, in favor of "social relations constructed through active practices". This notion of active practice serves as the basis for her analysis of class. While Acker uses reimagined Marxist theory, there are limitations to Marx's work. Marxist theory favors class analysis (capitalist/work) over gender issues, thereby not giving them their due time. Using an intersection of feminist economics and institutionalism helps to account for activity that occurs not just in the market but in the family. The contention of the dualism of economy/family is diminished when using Veblenian categories. (Waller & Jennings, 1990) (Waddoups & Tilman, 1992) Using Institutional framework and accepting the idea that knowledge is socially constructed helps ward off research that is inherently not recognizing women, because of the language (also socially constructed) surrounding scientific research. (Waller & Jennings, 1990)

Discrimination

Economists study labor market trends and try to extrapolate from them how and where discrimination plays a part in wages. The neoclassical lens of economics set up discrimination in three distinct categories: human capital, taste for discrimination, and statistical discrimination. Discrimination is pervasive, and at times can be hard to discern. Much of the discrimination women face today come from the worlds societal structure, an invisible discrimination that is hard to qualify and therefor hard to research and mitigate.

Feminist economists hold a belief that does not rely on market equilibrium as a means of stabilization or correction for discrimination, which highlights a reversal of the traditional belief

that discrimination can be solved in the market. Feminist economics builds upon the heterodox framework, dispelling the belief that the market will solve for the prejudice and discrimination which is an arbitrary and outdated mode of thinking. The cultural fabric of the United States allows for its citizens to exist in a framework of discrimination. So, engrained within the formal construction of our society, discrimination takes its roots in the foundation of all practices.

Knowing this to be the case, the task is to look at solutions to the established structure to account for and alleviate what now has become so ingrained in the way people think.

Michael Levin, philosopher, argues that feminist's argument that a wage gap is proof of society's oppressive nature is misleading. Levin's arguments center around neoclassical theories of discrimination, particularly human capital. He argues that "...the average full-time working woman is not the economic equivalent of the average full-time working man." (Levin, 2003). He argues that women gravitate to secretarial work, and the crowding in decreases the income employers are willing to pay. The argument substantiates that employers have no incentive to offer competitive pay because there are far too many applicants, therefore the lack of scarcity decreases wages. Levin fails to contend with how men crowding into an occupation does not seem to decrease wages relative to females within the field. Key to ideas about human capital is the belief that there are "...innate psychological differences between the sexes." (Levin, 2003) While Levin's paper may profess sexist ideologies that have largely faded to outside the politically correct discourse, his beliefs reflect what was once thought to be true.

Segmentation theory provides a logical framework for an employer or employees to discriminate. Segmentation divides, believing that the division will benefit all. The theory reinforces prejudicial ideas, such as people will flock to people who are like them. Assuming that

all operate under the assumption that “all who are like me must think as I do.” This entrenches people to not search outside of their gender, race, or class.

Prescribed in division is the establishment of insular bubbles: the community one chooses to isolate themselves in further establishes their way of thinking. This compounds into greater isolation, group mentality, and superiority. This alienation pits two against one another and engrains within the systems of society a history of cordoned-off sections of people. Women group with women, but even more specifically: high-income white women with high-income white women, and so on. Society’s history of “clicks” has invaded our popular culture and turned into a cliché. But in terms of the labor market, its reality hurts those who it pretends to help.

A separation along gender lines has led to an incredible decrease in earnings for women. The nature of our market deeming some occupations as “female” has created sectors of less value within the market and established lower wages as a result. As women entered the labor force en-masse in the 1960s, they entered jobs that had been historically held by women, such as nursing, education, or work with children and within the home. Before the 1960’s, there was also a new establishment of jobs that transitioned from what used to be dedicated to men. For example, clerical work has, in recent history, been associated with women, but before women were the major gender in the field, the work was done by men. Clerical jobs, when dominated by men, held far greater power and value, containing work that included managerial tasks and demanded a higher wage. When the gender associated with the job changed and the aspects that were managerial exited, separating previous clerical work into new managerial positions, the value of the job decreased. These new managerial positions were held by men and highly paid, while women took on the more “menial” tasks and were compensated less. Because of the work and responsibility they had, as well as because of their gender. The new gender of the occupation

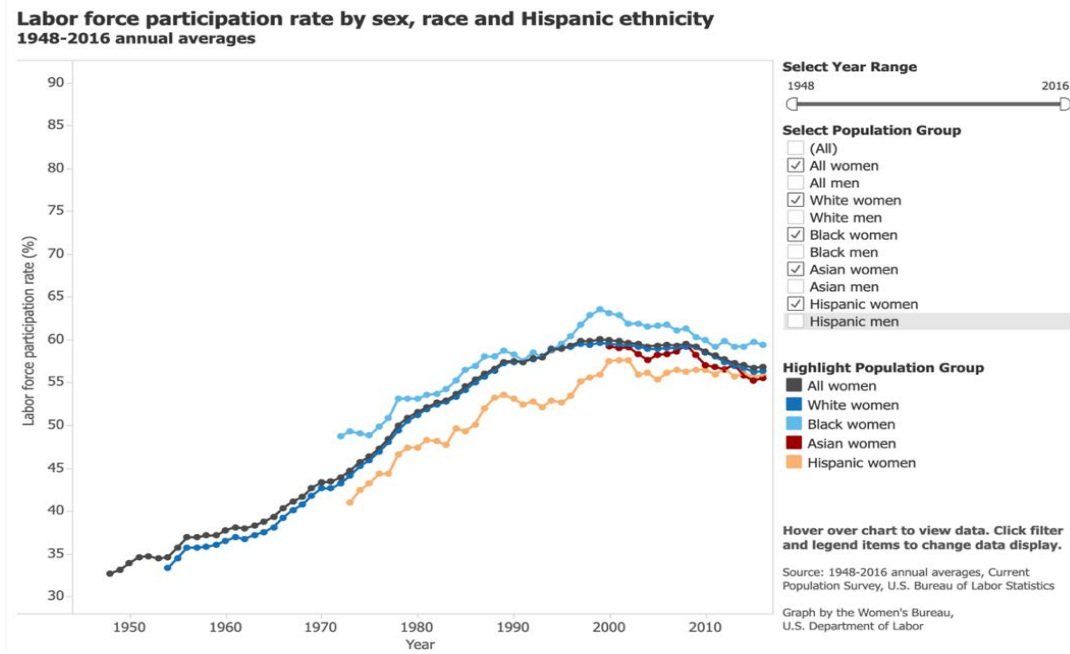
reflected what salary could be demanded, and women were not seen as those who needed a salary.

Men have always been considered the primary earners or “breadwinners”. Men have, historically, been considered in greater need of a salary. This assumption is based off the socialized belief that men must provide for a family; and therefore, men were offered preference for higher-paying roles. (Goldin, 2006) (Shulman, 2003)

The example that then translated into a phenomenon so great it was given a name is Ford Motor Company. When a new industry was born, Ford Motor Company’s focus was on establishing a deep and rich culture that engendered the workers to the company. In the construction of a company culture, Ford professed morals that they hoped their workers would adhere to. Part of this included making it clear that men were favored, and that women were not to be hired— especially not women who were married to Ford employees. They wanted to create pride among their workers, and appealing to the responsibility of one’s ability to provide for their family did just that. The gendered idea of “breadwinner,” so closely linked to the Fordism ideals that are centered in industrial life in America, is a discrimination that marginalized women.

Women at Work

To analyze changes in the labor force participation rate, many researchers prefer using labor force composition, considered the foremost indicator. The composition of women's labor force rose in the last fifty years, in the revolutionary period Goldin outlines.



Graph 1

As more millennial women enter the workforce, the age in which highly educated women are having children is increasing. In a study done by economist Caitlin Myers for the New York Times, she found that the average age at first birth for women with a college degree or higher was 30.3. For women without a college degree, 23.8 was the average age. (Bui & Miller, 2018)¹⁰ When these women who have prepared for the corporate world become mothers, they encounter a choice. This “choice” is whether they should stay in their current job and with grueling hours,

¹⁰ A contributing factor to the rise in age of mother at first birth started around the expansion of birth control and the rise of IUDs

or if they should leave to raise their children. This has been viewed as a rise of new traditionalism, but for these women, while it may be a luxury to be able to choose, research shows us that this is not a choice, and more of a constraint placed upon them by the workplace. Their employers/companies do not allow for them to work part-time and have low work flexibility. The reality is that women cannot have it all: they cannot have both high-powered careers and children.

For women in low-income jobs, the world is much different. Barriers such as childcare costs have forced low-income women to leave the labor force. Low-income jobs are not well-paid enough to support a family, and these women must rely on welfare to subsidize their incomes¹¹. In the 1990's, women on welfare received the stereotype of being "welfare queens." Negative sentiment towards welfare led to initiatives to decrease the burden to the U.S welfare system. The inherent structure of the policy the United States set up to help low-income women often has prerequisites that only hurt these women's ability to provide for their families.¹²

Research done using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY79) found significant inequalities between women from different socioeconomic, racial and educational backgrounds. Damaske and Frech find that women are likely to fall into three different categories in their labor force participation: steady continuous full-time work, continuous unpaid work, or pulled back intermittent work. (Damaske & Frech, 2016) Findings show that women who come from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to be engaged in continuous full-time work. Women who find jobs early on in their career, and who have support

¹¹ Low-income families spend more on housing, rent, and transportation. In 2014 households had less "financial slack than 2004, with the lower third having an average of \$-2,339. (Pew, 2016)

¹² Current United States policy will be analyzed in chapter 3.

at home for their work, are more likely to stay engaged in the workforce. (Damaske & Frech, 2016)

The support a woman has and the education they receive by age 25 helps reveal the future they will have in the workforce. (Damaske & Frech, 2016) With the age being so young, education earns a spot of being one of the greatest influences in a woman's future working life. Education or human capital is often used in neoclassical studies as the justification of the gender wage gap, but women are steadily closing that gap by entering college at higher rates than men. College majors are large contributing factors to the wage one commands after school, and for employers it can serve as a show of human capital. It has become necessary for women to close the human capital gap, by focusing on majors that have greater market "investment" (Goldin, 2006). Women and men choose similarly high wage majors with more men in science and math and more women in professional majors, such as nursing (Bui, 2014). While both majors garner high wages, with science and math being higher, women in professional majors often lead into jobs that can be deemed "feminine," such as nursing (Corbett & Hill, 2012). This label of a "feminine" job translates into less overall earnings for the profession and between the sexes (Carnevale, Cheah, & Hanson, 2015).

Women are put in paths that are pre-determined and that have barriers even before a woman has a child. When a woman has a child, insult adds to injury as those women have far less time and more responsibilities. Women are assumed to have less of a commitment to work when they have a child, even when there is no evidence to prove that assumption. In fact, studies show just the opposite. In reality, women and all people who have children are more productive after they have a child, and have a greater attachment to work. Regardless of this fact, women take a pay cut after having children (Mutari & Figart, 2003). Studies of students just out of

college with no children show that men and women, when controlling for human capital, start off with different wages. Women earn less than men from the start, and as time progresses, the gap just gets larger. Because women are not less skilled, this results in a gender wage gap that is termed as “unexplained” (Corbett & Hill, 2012).

The moniker “unexplained” is how neoclassical economists discuss gender pay gaps that cannot be rationalized away. The gap between men and women who hold the same job with the same responsibilities, educational background, and attachment to the workforce is seen as unexplained because the neoclassical framework lacks the language necessary to explain socially imbedded discrimination. Feminists and Institutionalists on the other hand have language that recognizes social oppression and elevates the significance of social oppression to analysis of the pay gaps. Neoclassical economics believes that when economies are perfectly competitive, that the discrimination will have to dissipate because it will not be advantageous for the employer. Gary Becker’s theory of an employers, taste for discrimination sought to explain that discrimination existed simply because there were those who had a “taste” for it. What Becker also believed is that this would not, in the long-term, be advantageous for the employer, and therefore the employer would have to change their ways. (Mutari & Figart, 2003)

The persistent gap between men and women in the work force has diminished over time but not congruent to the closed gap in terms of human capital by women. While Becker argued that long-term discrimination was not advantageous the market has yet to self-correct. In fact, a taste for discrimination does not lack advantage but, as a policy, can be capitalized on by employers. The benefit employers see is that they receive highly educated and dedicated workers at a discounted rate, due to their gender.

Females' ability to stay within the workforce has deep challenges, and there is a continued pervasive sexist nature in the workplace. The workplace is a space where women exist in a capacity that has been mandated by men. This is evident in the large and growing movements such as Me Too and Time's Up in 2018. These movements exemplified the subordination and attitudes women face in their working lives.

The workplace, on many levels, is not structured to best provide for the female worker. This is evident in a sociological study by Pamela Stone and Meg Lovejoy. In their research, they ask if women, namely career women, really have a choice after children. The findings show that women are stuck and forced to choose when their workplace fails to provide flexibility for them. (Stone & Lovejoy, 2004) On the one hand, a provision among firms of workplace flexibility could be viewed negatively, as they would have to provide an aid to women so that they can work and take care of their children. On the other hand, providing women with children the opportunity to change their hours after the birth of a child, or having more flexible workspaces, allows women to continue in their careers. The aid engenders within employees a sense of loyalty to a firm. Studies show that women who have more workplace flexibility are more productive and have a higher commitment to the labor force. This becomes a net-positive for firms, as they achieve a higher retention rate of women in their companies.

Provisions provided by a firm to women may seem like a handicap not taking into consideration that men will also benefit from greater flexibility. But changes are necessary to allow women the opportunity to remain in the workforce and rid them the confining choice. These provisions remain necessary for the simple fact that women are still overwhelmingly viewed as the ones who should stay home and take care of the children. Men are not viewed as the primary caregivers, only the primary breadwinners. This role has not reversed in the ethos of

our society. This stagnation of opinion renders it imperative that women have the barriers to their choices widened. Women face inflexibility in their career situations that arise because the challenges faced by mothers have not been thought through, as women were not significant members of the labor force or actors of study in economics.

In the 1960's and 70's with a cultural revolution and an influx of women in the workforce, concepts of flexible work hours for women had lower attention. The women entering the workforce were white, upper-class, educated women because the lower-class, less educated, and black women already had high labor force participation rates (Mutari & Figart, 2003). The influx of women was a way to gain independence and changed the tides of the labor force. But these women were never expected to enter careers, have children, and stay within the workforce. They were still expected to raise their children and be stay-at-home mothers. As the decades have gone on, women's attachment to the labor force has grown and modern researchers are trying to answer questions of the consequences, felt by children, of having a mother who works.¹³ Research has only recently focused on the actual implications of a working parent on children, now that the situation occurs within white, educated, wealthy families. As women stay in their careers and become mothers, the stigma is shifting slightly, and it is becoming more normal to be a working mother. Regardless, the workforce has not taken strides in comparison to the number of women in the workforce, to help make the realities women face a smaller burden.

¹³ U.S. sentiments towards what is better for children is discussed in Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Data Overview and Attitudes

DATA

Social Trends

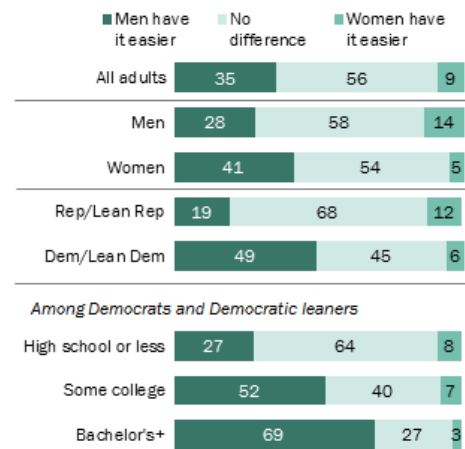
With the help of Pew Research, NPR published data showing political affiliation over the last 20 years as it relates to income brackets. The survey shows that when Americans are asked what political party they are most aligned with, the answer has largely been independent for the past twenty years. Along income levels, those with high incomes are, as of the mid-2010's, slightly more likely to be a democrat than they are a republican. Middle- and low-income individuals are also more likely to be a democrat when the choice is binary (does not including independent/other). (Vo, 2012) Political lines determine how Americans view women, their equality, and their ease of access to the workforce (Morin & Wang, 2009).

[Pew](#) tracked social trends and found that among the republican-leaning, 26% believe the U.S. has not gone far enough in terms of gender equality. Comparatively, 69% of democrat and democrat-leaning Americans believe the U.S has not gone far enough in terms of gender equality. 18% of republican/republican leaning individuals believe the U.S has gone too far in terms of gender equality. The far more shocking data comes from how the

republican/republican leaning respondents view women's struggle. 12% believe women have it easier than men, two times greater than the rate among Democrat/Democrat-leaning respondents. Broken down along generational lines, 52% of millennial women believe men have it easier,

Republicans and Democrats don't agree on who has it easier these days

% saying ___ in our country these days



Note: Share of respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown. "Some college" includes those with an associate degree and those who attended college but did not obtain a degree. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 8-21 and Sept. 14-28, 2017.

"Wide Partisan Gaps in U.S. Over How Far the Country Has Come on Gender Equality"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 1

while only 37% of female Boomers do. (Horowitz, Parker, & Stepler, Wide Partisan Gaps in U.S. Over How Far the Country Has Come on Gender Equality, 2017)

Pew's study, done in 2017, makes salient the beliefs of Americans that seep into policy and attitude. Political affiliation, educational attainment, and generational divides directly impact how one views women. The average age of a member of congress was 61 in 2017. As of the 116th congress, almost half of US Senators are over the age of [65](#). Meanwhile, the median age of U.S. citizens in 2018 was [38.2](#) (Duffin, Median age of the resident population of the United States from 1960 to 2018, 2019). Tension naturally exists within a society when the beliefs of the largest generation (millennials) and that of the ruling class are drastically different. In most of history, when the people and the power have been so far apart it has often led to revolutions. Many of the shifting ideological gender ideas shake the foundational understanding many older Americans have about gender roles.

Most Americans believe that the best way to succeed in the U.S. is with an education. 73% of those surveyed believed the best way to get ahead was college. A 1978 survey done by the New York Times, asking the same question, found that 49% believed college was the best way to get ahead. (Morin & Wang, 2009) Since then, there have been drastic changes to higher education: namely the number of females enrolled and graduating. In the 1980's women overtook men in the percentage of those enrolled in higher education (U.S. Census Bureau). More women than men in the U.S will attain a bachelor's and master's degree. While women have become increasingly more educated, and as the societal sentiment shows that most view education as the greatest access to success, women have not seen a closure in the pay gap. In fact, data shows that a degree increases the gap in earnings between men and women. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019) The human capital between men and women has tilted in favor of the

woman, but the salary and position of power within companies has not. Education, while most Americans believe it will lead to a better more financially stable life, has not worked for women with the same success it had on men's financial security. Women, more than men, believe education is a necessity for success.

When asked why they work, 87% of those in the labor force answered that they work because they have to support themselves or their families. Only 6% of respondents said they did not consider this a motivation for their work. (Morin & Wang, 2009) The median household income in the United States is \$60,293 (2018). Per capita, that comes to \$32, 621 in a two-income household ([2018 dollars](#)) (U.S. Census Bureau). 27% of women unemployed or outside of the labor force cite family and childcare as the reason for work. Conversely, only 3% of men identify these same reasons. Family and childcare responsibilities are the third-leading reason why women are not employed or outside of the labor force— only behind focusing on school and can't find a job. Mothers who are employed full-time with children under 16 greatly prefer the option to work part-time. 61% of those polled has this preference. (Morin & Wang, 2009)

Attitudes

When asking Americans where they stand in terms of mother's involvement in the workforce the answer is clear: women with young children should not hold full-time jobs. When asked what is best for the mother, 38% believe not working outside of the home is best. When looked at from the perspective of the child, that number increases to 42% believing staying home is best. In a study 5 years later, 60% responded that children were better off with a parent at home. (Morin & Wang, 2009) (Cohn, Livingston, & Wendy, 2014) Nearly half of respondents believe that a new mother should not hold a full-time job because it is better for her and the

child. Within low-income communities, both men and women are far more likely to believe that women should stay at home with the children. The average cost of childcare is \$11,420¹⁴ or about a third of the national median household salary and half of the salary of a single person. (Economic Policy Institute) The cost of childcare is far too high for low-income families to afford to send their children to childcare so that both parents can work. This results in mothers being the ones to forfeit their jobs on the basis that they make less money than their spouse, making the decision to stop working a practical one.

Many people say they work because of the financial, social and psychological benefits it rewards them. Holding a job offers more than just a meager income; it offers adults outlets and social lives, which is something research has shown to be greatly important for people.

With changing social views toward women, and a rise in the number of educated women, families still hold onto the traditional structure. More often than not, women are the ones to take care of children and more women are sole caregivers than men. In more traditional family structures women are far more likely to stay home with children than a husband is. (U.S. Census Bureau) Coupled with lasting political fights targeting a women's reproductive rights, there remains large possibility that traditional values surface, even despite a woman's best effort. 14% of women said they do not work because they face pressures from their family to stay home, while only 3% of men do. (Morin & Wang, 2009) There is an imbalance in how family structures in the United States view the burden of household work.

¹⁴ This number was derived by averaging the cost of childcare in all 50 states and D.C.

Dynamics of Choice

Neoclassical economists promulgate the belief that labor force participation is predicated on the labor–leisure trade-off. If an individual is not in the labor force, neoclassical economics makes one believe this is due to the individual not deeming the income sufficient to compensate for their lost leisure time.¹⁵ For single mothers, the price of leisure or not taking any job at any wage is an inability to support their children.

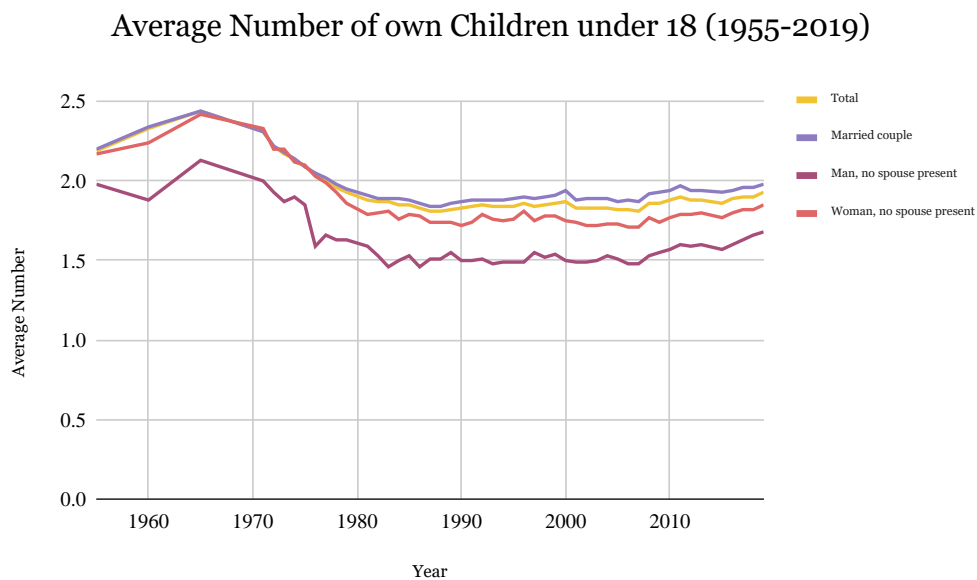
Further, stagnating income has made the power of the dollar diminish. Mothers spend more money to raise their children than they did twenty years ago. The government has, historically, been weak in its aid to those who are unemployed, and seeing their job as one that encourages job creation. The 2008 Global Financial Crisis decreased the number of female workers, and they were slow to return (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). This translated to a larger number of women who made the “choice” to stay at home, raise their family, and take care of their children.

For some women, the recession caused them to leave the workforce, but for many working part-time in work that is full-time, or worse, working for a firm that has little to no flexibility leaves many women feeling inadequate. 62% of the women in Stone and Lovejoy’s study “cited workplace inflexibility as a major factor in their decision to interrupt their careers.” And a third of women “characterized their work ‘as all or nothing’”. (Stone & Lovejoy, 2004) The women in Stone and Lovejoy’s study were middle to high income, professional, married women. The dynamics of the choice a low-income mother must make has far greater consequences, such as food insecurity and a reliance on welfare.

¹⁵ Only 17% of men and women say the “big reason” they don’t work is because they can afford not to. (Morin & Wang, 2009)

Important for an increased standing of women is their ability to stay in the workforce past children and achieve positions of authority. In order to do so, the concept of a choice must change. The number of women making the choice to stay hat home hurts the greater expansion of female emancipation.

United States Demographics



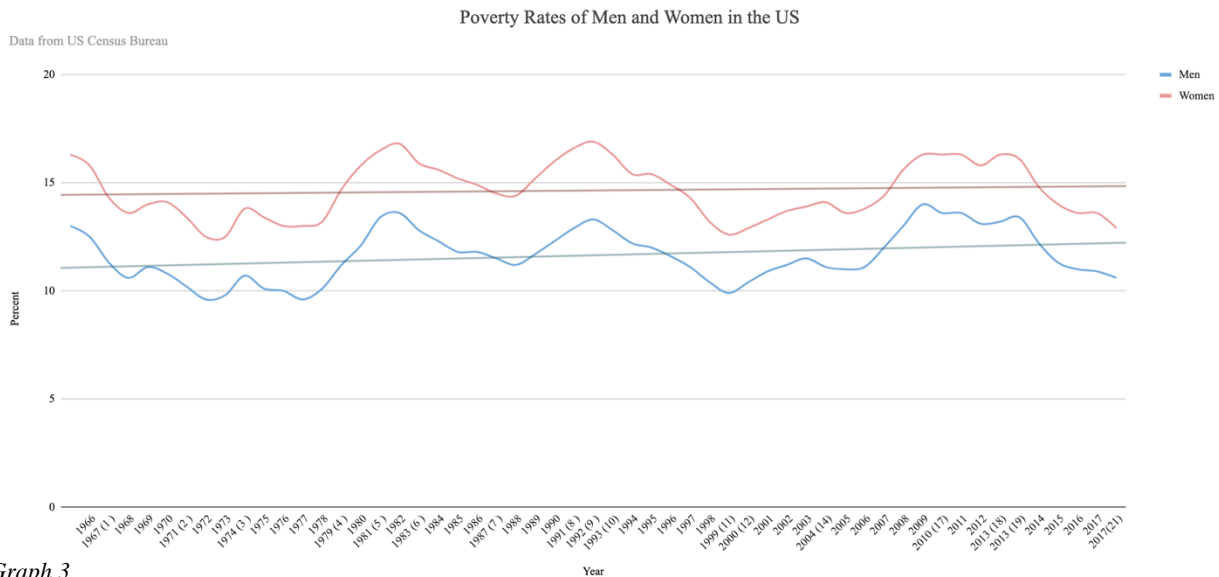
US. CENSUS Bureau
Graph 2

Family Structure

In 2018, the average U.S. family size was 3.14 people per household (Duffin, 2019). In the United States, the number of children a family has has gone down since 1955, but in the last decade, the number of children has started to increase among all family structures. At the end of the baby boom, a married family had an average of 2.44 children. By the 1980’s, the number of children families were having was down to below 2, with the all time low being 1.84. Since 2010, the total number of children for a married couple has gone up to 1.98. Single women have fewer children than married couples (1.85 in 2019) (U.S. Census Bureau).

The United States family exists under a culturally-ordained attitude, and the legislation that is put forth has long perpetuated the ideas of a traditional family unit. Marriage equality only received federal legislation in 2016. The demographics of the United States help clarify the picture of life in the US. When it comes to statistics of personal feelings, like those gathered by Pew research, it can be hard to have full confidence in the validity of the claims. One must ask themselves whether the responder will freely admit their biases. Tracking bias is nearly impossible, but understanding the demographics of the US can be far more digestible and help show the starting point that women are facing as they enter the workforce, and the ground they must make up.

The second most common family structure or household makeup in the United States is single parent, female head households. The percentage of female-headed households that are in poverty is one of the most unifying statistics for women across racial lines. The percent of single mothers who on average live poverty is 26.8%. For white women: 20.6%, black women: 31.77%, and Asian women: 19.5%.¹⁶ When the fastest way to poverty in the U.S. is being raised by a



Graph 3

¹⁶ US Census Bureau

single mother (regardless of race), the barriers that women face in the workforce put countless families and children in poverty. There are 91,319,000 parents in the United States who reside in a home with children. Women in the United States are the caregivers to 12,479 million more children than men. Roughly a third, or 30%, of all women in the United States who live with their children have no partner present in the home. The national average of all children in the U.S who live in a household where no partner is present (male or female head) is 21%. For mothers, that number increases to 30%, and for fathers that number drastically drops to a mere 9.1%.

When looking at the data, it is important to not just look at the percentages of the group that breaks down mothers and fathers, but it is important to know the numbers that derive the percentages. Of women in the United States, 51,899,000 of them are mothers caring for children while 39,420,000 men are present fathers caring for children, these numbers reflect all possible family structures. 12,479,000 more mothers care for children than fathers do, and women are more likely to be in poverty than men. On average, a quarter of all households headed by women live in poverty, historically these households have always maintained a higher poverty rate than male-headed households.

It is young women who are the most impacted by a lack of partner they are more likely to be a single parent at the point in a woman's life when guidance and help prove to be the most beneficial to her lifetime financial well-being. Women with children 18 years or younger between the age of 15 and 24 are the most likely to not have a partner present, with 44% living with no partner, or about 795,000 mothers. That number drastically declines in children between the ages of 25-29, where only 28.6% of mothers live without a partner, or about 1,183,000 women. For mothers, those who are married and not in the labor force are the largest of all cohorts with 74.9% of married mothers not working. Meanwhile 17.1% of women with no

partner who have children living in their homes are not in the labor market. Unlike the women who are married and have the income of a spouse, women with no partner are the second-highest percentage of those who are unemployed. That means that of single mothers, 17% of them are not working and do not have a steady stream of income for their dependents. For fathers, those who live with children and no partners present, 13.1% are not in the labor force. Marriage is the single greatest factor propelling women to stay home.

Children are two times more likely to have both parents in the labor force than any other breadwinner structure as of 2019. But, of the children who only have one parent in the labor force, it is still disproportionately fathers who are the breadwinners, with 15,584,000 children living in households where the father works, and the mother does not. Meanwhile, only 2,393,000 children live in households where mothers work and fathers do not. When looking at breakdowns of income gaps, black women face the second largest pay gap of any population in comparison to white men's earnings, 65.3%, and Hispanic women face the largest: 61.6%.¹⁷ Black women are the highest percentage of women living with children under the age of 18 who have no partner present.

The demographics paint a bleak picture of the situation for families across the U.S. and show how the lives of women, and in particular, single mothers, are infinitely harder than the lives of married women and men. While the majority of women in this country are married with children, the second largest population are single with children—divorced, widowed, or simply left—both have unique but equal difficulties in the labor market. Single mothers find it hard to secure and maintain work, the hours in the workplace are generally not flexible, and single mothers are more likely to only have a high school diploma or some high school than to be a

¹⁷ Hispanic women could be any race in the US Census Bureau's data

college graduate. Mothers in this position need external help to make sure the needs of their children are fulfilled.

Of the 51 million mothers, who live with children, 9.8 million of them are not in the labor force. The majority of mothers who are not in the labor force are women who are married with their spouse present. Of the 39 million fathers living with children in the US, only 1.8 million are not in the labor force. 18.89% of mothers are not, as of 2019, in the labor force. Comparatively, only 4.7% of fathers are not in the labor force. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019)

Regardless of what research could tell us about the attitudes of the public towards women in the workplace or the conditions faced by women in the workplace, these numbers show that in 2019 there still exists a 14% gap between men and women who participate in the labor force. Women in the status quo are far more likely to not work than men are. This reality has only fallen for women in the last 50 years, but for reasons that exist outside of the data, the margin persists: discrimination. Asserting the particular reasons why women stay home is an question many feminist researchers have tried to answer. Examples include a rise in traditionalism among educated women, simply too many barriers within the workplace for women, and the social mores of the country which relegate women into the home. Often, systemic discrimination is not used as the answer to why women would leave the workforce.

The changing attitudes that the data Donnelly et al. refers to in their paper show change in the attitudes of twelfth graders and adults from 1970-2012. Their research shows generational changes in views towards women. It also finds differences between the reality of women who go to work and the growth of criticism of women in the workforce. Despite “backlash”, they find that the population is becoming more egalitarian. (Donnelly, et al., 2016) As the U.S. has become more egalitarian, policy has largely stayed the same or gotten worse. In the 1990s, a time

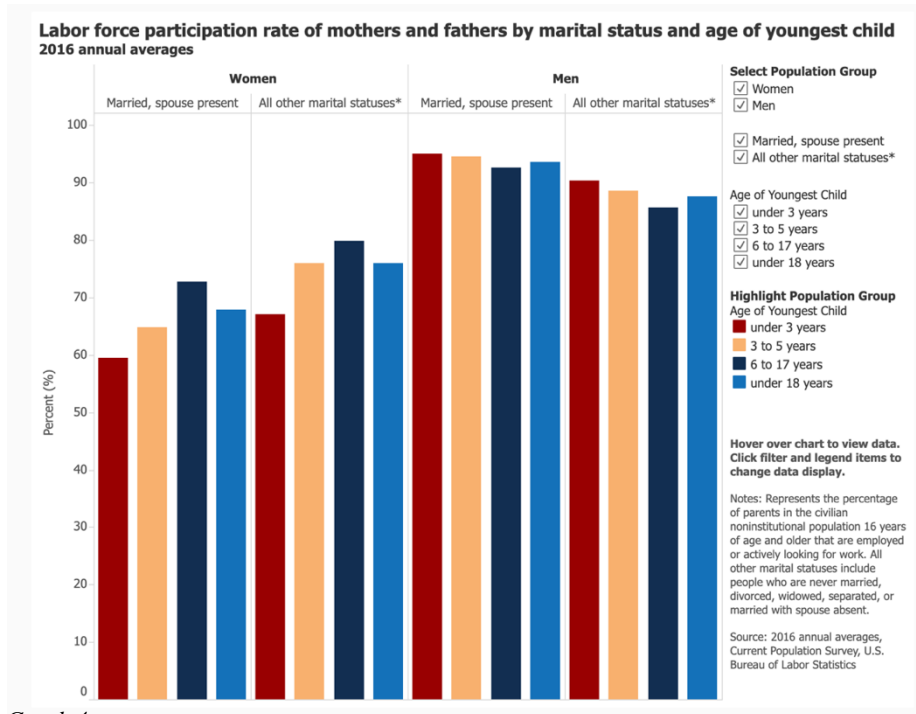
at which the data shows there was a slowing in acceptance and forward progression of thought, pertaining to women working outside of the home, there was a rise of rhetoric concerning welfare queens, and massive cuts were made to programs for mothers in the under President Clinton.

Data is always subjective, and an individual's reading of data can help form the beliefs they have towards a certain subject. Many of the questions asked in surveys about attitude can be misconstrued. It is deeply important to remember that the data collected about the attitudes towards women may not be a full and complete representation of the treatments of women outside the data or the engagement of women in the workforce. Despite rising egalitarian attitudes over the last forty years, the gains made by women in the workforce may be entirely incongruent. Attitudes the population has towards women in the workforce change in terms of the number of women in the workforce when those women become mothers. For example, it is possible that employers and colleagues can view women as less dedicated to their work and unable to handle time-intensive tasks when they are married or have children.

Much of the data about women and the public attitudes towards them working, is always centered around the work of mothers. The data shows that the major concern for women working arises when those women are mothers. The attitude the United States society has is not towards women as they exit college, but more as these women become, and are assumed likely to become, mothers. Over the last 40 years, the number of women who have children has steadily dropped for women between the ages of 25 and 29, nearly 50% were childless. (U.S. Census Bureau) The U.S. Census Bureau started tracking the number women who are mothers in 1976. Since then, the percentage of women in the U.S. who are mothers has changed as fertility rates of

women drop. Fertility rates measure the number of children women have from 15 to 44. The rate in the U.S. has fallen to 1.86 as of 2013.

The labor force participation rate of women in the United States is 57.7 as of December



2019, and the labor force participation rate for mothers with children ages 6-17 is 76.4%. As the numbers of women in the workforce have continued to climb, the landscape of work stays the same. It is now far more likely for a mother to be working full-time than it

Graph 4

was pre-1940.

We see that work is difficult for mothers to stay in when they have young children. The largest participation rate of women in the workforce are young women aged 25-34, at 75.9%. Prime working age in the U.S. is 24-54 years of age, of that age group, 75.3% of women participate in the workforce. The most common age range of parents in the US is 35-39, which holds when separate and looked at for mothers and fathers. Of all parents, roughly 5.9 million parents living with children under the age of 18 are 35-39. The mean age of first birth in the United States is 26.9. It is most likely a woman will have a child in her prime working years,

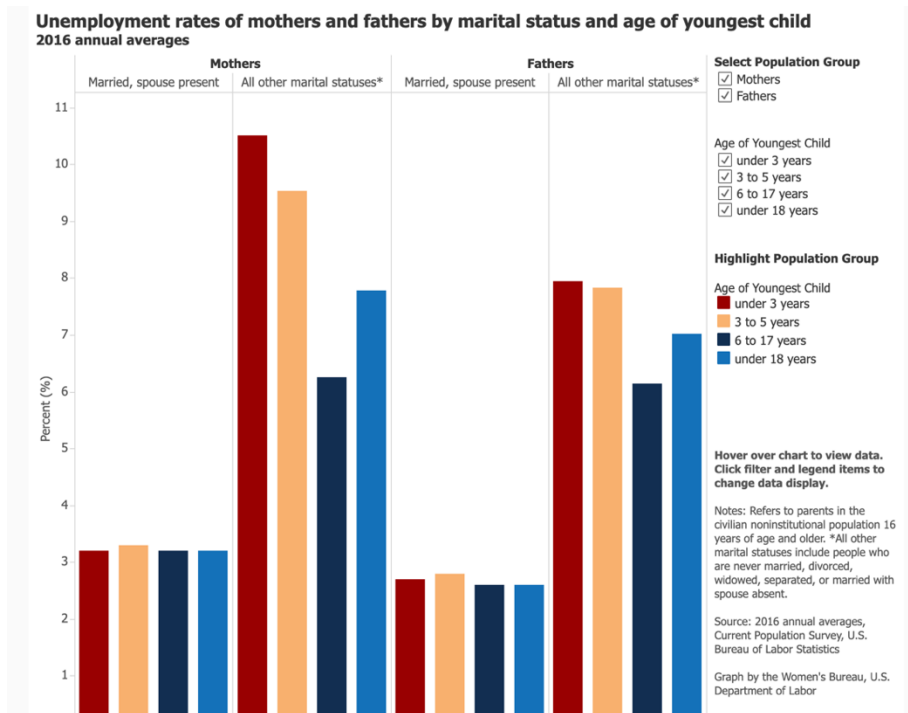
which could have an impact on her income and the reputation she maintains at work. (CDC, 2017)¹⁸

While we find it more likely for mothers and fathers in the same household to hold jobs, we also see that employed full-time mothers spend more time per day taking care of household activities, spending an average of 2 hours versus an employed full-time father's 1.3 hours. (Allard & Janes, 2008)

The present and future, present different landscapes for women in the workforce. Baby boomers, who for decades held the mantle as the largest percentage of people in the labor force, have been recently usurped by millennials. The social relations of each generation are very different, as are the percentages of mothers who are in the labor force. What was true then is no longer true now, and what is true now will change in the future. More women are going to enter the workforce and more mothers are going to enter the workforce.

¹⁸ 7.776% of the world population is between the ages of 25 and 29

Mothers who are not married are far more likely to be unemployed than married mothers; unmarried mothers with children under 3 have an unemployment rate of roughly 10.5% (nearly 3 times higher than married mothers with children under 3, with a 3.2% unemployment rate). We



see that for married mothers, unemployment rates stay relatively steady outside of very small movements when their youngest child is between the ages of 3-5. This begs the question: are these numbers skewed because the women simply cannot find jobs, so they resign to being full-time

Graph 5

mothers because they have the luxury of a spouse? Once children reach the ages of 6-17 (typical school age for children in the United States), unmarried mothers' unemployment rate drops to 6.3%, falling by 5.2%. Comparatively, unmarried fathers are less likely to be unemployed than unmarried mothers. Unmarried fathers' unemployment rate reaches a high at around 7.95% when they have children under the age of 3. Despite their high unemployment rate, unmarried mothers are more likely to work than married mothers.

Most women in the labor force work in jobs that are dominated by women. With the four most common jobs among mothers being: elementary or middle school teacher, registered nurse, secretary or administrative assistant, and nursing home health aide. In three out of four of these

professions, mothers are overrepresented, and in one they fall in the middle. These professions are looked at as “feminine” and often garner lower wages.

Men are more likely to be unemployed than women, but fathers are 1.4% less likely to be unemployed comparative to mothers. This statistic correlates to the social ideals popularized by Ford, and seen as early as the 1820’s in the family wage. Fathers were more likely to be hired than unmarried men and men were always more likely to be hired than women. While history has flipped the latter, the former remains true as the social construction still prescribes the woman’s place to be at home.

While the gender pay gap still exists, studies have found that 60% of women would be paid more if they were paid comparative salaries to men. The lower income that women make becomes a problem not just in their prime working (young) age, but also as they get older. Family pressures do not subside with children growing up, and most women in the United States are caregivers. The average age of caregivers in the United States is 49.5, and the majority are women. Women who have to care for a family member are more likely to leave the workforce than men are. Research shows that by 2030, 1 in 5 Americans will be 65 years of age or older. Family attitudes towards housework and care responsibility are not just associated with children, but with parents and disabled family members. Caring for an elderly family member, typically, is taken on by an older female worker. (U.S. Census Bureau)

Over their lifetimes, women will earn less than men. The implications of this fact affect their Social Security checks, and their ability to save and have sufficient retirement. Most women make less money, receive smaller Social Security checks, and yet live longer than men. In their older age women are, therefore, more likely to need to work than men, but even at the “end” of their working age, women face anew pressure to stay home and take care of the family. The

income gap translates to a wealth gap that does not close as people age but becomes more protracted.

This problem does not just impact older workers today; it will continue to impact generations of women. As our population's average age increases and the largest generation, Boomers, become older and older, their millennial children may leave the workforce to care for them. We have already started to see this happening but with Millennials taking over Boomers as the largest generation ever, and as life expectancies rise, women could face an increased financial burden of having to take care of their parents.

Even though the number of people getting married is decreasing, it remains the most common family structure. For women, the financial implications of marriage are often seen as positive: one household, one mortgage, expenses are condensed, tax breaks for spouses. What also comes is higher taxes, as the lower or secondary earner experiences higher tax rates within a marriage. While more often than not, the lower salary is the woman's. Women are losing greater portions of their salaries to the government because of marriage. While there is the added benefit of a spouse's support, the higher tax percentage limits a married woman's financial freedom. Families typically make decisions for one to stay home when calculating childcare costs versus extra money from a second salary. When it comes down to families having to make decisions about childcare costs being worth the high expense, an even further decrease in women's take-home salary could factor into the calculus families make.

The benefits of financial freedom should not be discounted for women's safety and healthy relationships. Married women are more likely to not be in the labor force, therefore sacrificing a salary and the freedom that comes along with making one's own money.

When it comes to taxes, not just married women are impacted, low-income mothers are affected by low Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC). Since 1996 EITC have not increased or kept up with inflations. EITC has become increasingly insufficient, and low-income families spend more and more of their wages, leaving very little savings behind. (Pew, 2016)

Global and Domestic Labor Force Participation

Since the early 2000's, the United States has seen a decrease in the number of women in the workforce. When compared with other OECD countries the U.S is the only nation to see this trend; all others have seen plateaus in women entering the workforce, but not declines (Dvorkin & Shell, 2015). International data shows that a strong positive factor for a nation's GDP is the entrance of women into the workforce. When women, 49%¹⁹ of the world population, become “production” members of the labor force, the production capacity of a nation expands. From a purely financial point of view, it is in the best interest of a nation to encourage the labor force participation of women. Governments should see women as vital to increase their national output and income. The United States currently is losing out on two fronts: while women's labor force participation rate has been declining, so have men's for the last 20 years— and at a pace even greater than the women's.

The global labor force participation of women has stagnated. In OECD countries, most have seen increases in women's participation in the last 20 years, and while growth has slowed, it is still increasing. Except in the United States, women's labor force participation has decreased

¹⁹ Women make up 49% of the world population according to data collected from the World Bank. In the United States women are 51% of the population.

since the early 2000s. Data from around the world shows that there is a strong correlation (.63) between women entering the workforce and GDP growth.

Women are twice more likely than men to work part-time, decreasing women's access to health care, employer contributed health insurance, and set schedules. While this has become an increased norm in the labor market, studies have analyzed the impact part-time work has on corporations and employee's production. Without set hours and expectations, workers are less likely to be productive or loyal to a company, and thereby decrease the profits companies earn. A single mother with children under 18 is twice as likely to be unemployed as married mothers. In 2013, 6.1% of women were unemployed compared to 6.3% of men. In the coming months due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, we are going to see drastic unemployment levels. The lasting effects of COVID will not be known for months and years, but they will drastically change the labor market, economic production and mothers' ability to care for their children. Single, low-income mothers are likely to feel great hardships as their children are taken out of school, and they are potentially laid off or furloughed for the unforeseeable future.

Chapter 3 Policy

Overview

The United States is “mother expectant” but jobs are not “mother-ready,” resulting in many of the issues surrounding welfare benefits and the system in place, as well as employer’s ability to provide for female workers.

Barbara Bergmann’s writing is formidable when it comes to her work on governmental policies that pertain to and provision for women. Bergmann’s work often bucked current feminist sentiments to create policy that best serves the average working woman. United States’ policies for women are lacking compared among all industrialized worlds. There is currently no federal program mandating paid family leave or comprehensive subsidies for childcare. The majority of the world will have a child and the financial burden of the child is great, but U.S. ideologies lead us to believe that children are the responsibility of the family and not the government. Passing off the bulk of responsibility to the family and not the system creates a unique challenge in the presentation of legislation to help families. On average, childcare costs \$11,420 a year. The U.S. real median income in 2018 was \$63,179 18% of the national income is spent on childcare each year. (Economic Policy Institute, n.d.) (Bureau & FRED, 2018) A woman’s median income is \$31,887 for full-time, year-round work. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011)

Welfare

The current state of welfare in the United States is an entangled web of government programs that reflect how we treat women and children: and particularly how the government provides for low-income children. Programs that hinder the amount of time a single mother has

to spend on acquiring child services have decreased food security among children. Caring for children is a full-time job, and for many families, food insecurity poses a large threat to the health of children. Nationally, 11.1% (2018) of Americans are food insecure, and 4.3% have very low food security. 2018 marked the first year food insecurity levels dropped to pre-recession numbers. Households headed by women differ from the national average with 27.8% of single-mother households being food insecure 9.4% have very low food security. Food security for single mothers, specifically low food security, is the highest among all household compositions recorded. Second among single mothers are Black, non-Hispanic households, 21.2% of which are food insecure. Roughly 56% of food insecure households participate in programs such as Women, Infants and Children (WIC), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and National School Lunch Program (USDA and Department of Defense).

In 1996, President Clinton created Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) that replaces Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), created in 1935. TANF decreased cash assistance to families in the most sweeping reversal of Depression-era welfare. Since the implementation of TANF, the wealth of the bottom 90% has steadily decreased, and average income growth has declined. The wealth of a low-income US family in 2018 is less than in 1983; \$11,300 and \$12,300 respectively (2018 dollars). (Horowitz, Igielnik, & Kochhar, 2020) The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) signed into law by President Clinton gave greater power to states which were given discretion to create time limits and restrictions for receiving assistance. The bill included incentives for states to decrease out-of-wedlock births, and the increases in the ratio of abortions to live births are rewarded every year, with the five lowest states given additional funds to the tune of \$20 million.

Since PRWORA, federal government spending targeted at reducing poverty in America has skyrocketed to roughly \$1 trillion in combined efforts. However, little has changed in terms of poverty numbers and the reduction thereof. (Tanner, 2016) The welfare reforms of the 90's were ineffectual in changing the real circumstances of families and alleviating the system it believed to be overworked. The drastic increases in women who went to work due to the new time requirements to remove women from welfare demonstrated a flawed system that believed women were able to find work that translated to stability for families. Many women found jobs, but childcare became a greater conflict with little consideration paid to the quality of care a child would be able to receive.

Childcare Subsidies

A conversation in our culture exists today that is drastically changing gender roles: feminist economists are asking whether we should provide for stay at home mothers. These questions are convoluted and muddled with deeply personal beliefs. The privilege one may have to stay at home and raise a child, without great financial harm, poses two major complications: if women stay at home are they undermining decades of progression that women have fought for and died for, therefore embedding traditional and harmful gender roles. Also, if we do not provide subsidies for these women are we inherently hurting and undervaluing the work that they do?

Separate, but always in coexistence with each other, are the institutions of gender and motherhood. These two confines define a woman's life and inform how she interacts with the world and how the world engages back— in both the labor market and in her choices. While they greatly impact women and their lives, the strong conservative ideology that some hold towards

women hurt the passage and mere entrance of family legislation into the national conversation. The 116th congress is the most diverse congress ever elected in U.S. history; of the 544 bills that were introduced in congress, 57 made it to floor consideration, and 7 became law. One of the bills was about families, and it only passed the house, never being heard on the senate floor. It was to strengthen laws on the abuse of children. Of the seven bills that made it into law, none targeted gender issues. When almost half of the country believes that a woman's place is in the home with her children, it becomes incredibly hard to surmount a debate and propose legislative change that offers provision so that woman can work. With money in politics and

The solution and aid needed so that all women have equal access to work must be considered, while also understanding some of the proposed legislation may harm progressive gender ideas. Paid leave may see women disproportionately taking time off comparative to men, but the alternative world is that women and families do not have the freedom to take time off to care for a newborn. What is sure about paid leave: it must be issued to all and be genderless. A government program that ensures all people who have a child enter their lives have the ability to take time off with their salary is required. To discourage protracted leave time, an individual should have a six-month eligibility for paid leave benefits

Childcare is one of the costliest items in a family's budget, with many women citing the cost of childcare as a reason they leave the workforce and a barrier to work. Government programs that are in place to aid families distribute federal money to states. From there, individual states have discretion to create a program and stipulate guidelines to provide childcare subsidies to low-income families. The national average family size in the US is 3.14, (2018) for New Jersey to initially qualify for Tier A childcare assistance, a family of three cannot make more than \$31,995 annual gross income. To qualify for Tier C, a family of three cannot make

more than \$42,660. Median household income in New Jersey 2014-2018 is \$79,363 (State of New Jersey: Department of Human Services, 2019). The average annual cost of infant care in NJ is \$12,988 16.4% of an average New Jerseyan's household salary goes towards infant care. In the federal government's program Head Start, created by Lyndon B. Johnson, qualification is 100% of the federal poverty index, which many experts consider far too low, resulting in leaving many out of the level of aid. The creation of the United States federal poverty line was created in 1963 by Mollie Orshansky. Her model derives a poverty threshold relative to what a family would presumably spend on food. In the 57 years since the creation of her model, US households spend far more on housing and childcare than they do on food contributing to the criticism that the poverty level fails to take into account important challenges of millions of families in need.

Paid Family Leave

The United States is the only industrialized nation that does not federally mandate paid family leave. The United States, on a federal level, offers workers access to leave through, the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA). The FMLA, offers workers up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to: care for ill family members, care for children or care for their own health. The act ensures job-security, allowing employees the freedom and choice to take time off.

Employee's with FMLA have the option to take leave but it is in sacrifice to their pay. As such, this leave fails to support those who financially have no means to survive when not receiving a paycheck.

Paid maternal leave policies receive bipartisan support, 88% and 60%²⁰ of Democrats and Republicans, respectively favor them (Ekins, 2018). Despite bipartisan support for public

²⁰ This number is driven by Republican women 72% of whom support paid leave, 50% Republican men

legislation, there have been no federal changes. While there have been no changes on the federal level, seven states and D.C. require paid sick leave, and three states require paid family leave: California, Rhode Island and New Jersey. While paid family leave has broad political support, when mothers were asked what they believed would be the best way for them to balance work and family, a quarter (24%) of mothers with children under 3 said, more affordable childcare. The second most important aid to mothers with young children was, flexible work schedules. (Ekins, 2018)

Research conducted on the benefits of paid maternity leave and its effect on maternal and infant health further stress the importance of taking leave. Paid leave has been shown to reduce the number of infant and child deaths, and reduces the likelihood that women, will be re-hospitalized following birth. Research has also shown that an association exists between paid leave and a reduction in neo-natal mortality, low birth weights and premature births. Post-partum depression has seen to be decreased among women who take paid leave (Jou, et al., 2018). Although access to leave, which for most women is provided by the employer, is unequal between races and ethnicities and income lines— resulting in fewer women taking any type of leave.

Most Americans believe that mothers specifically should have access to paid leave, but less believe fathers should have the same access, 61% and 52%, respectively. While more people support paid leave for mothers the harms of gendered paid leave continue the tradition of ostracizing women in the workforce. Paid leave policies that are constructed as gender specific and favor maternal leave are not only exclusionary to LGBTQ+ communities, but works as a further socialization of gender stereotypes. Creation of policy that mandates paid family leave

must be gender neutral, to ensure broad access and that the tradition of homemaker as female, does not perpetuate with the backing of federal policy.

Recommendation

In order to ensure that society moves forward in a progressive manner, with the aim of emancipation for women, policy that supports women working, is of the greatest importance. In order to ensure access and increase the livelihood of millions of women and children in the United States, comprehensive new policies must be put in place. A federal program, that provides paid family and medical leave for all parents should be implemented, to increase the health of parents and infants. A broad paid leave program, in opposition to a gendered program, aims to decrease the stigma associated with family leave and maternity leave. In reduction of the stigma surrounding motherhood, improvements may be made in, not just the health of mothers', but the culture surrounding birth in the U.S.

In addition to paid family leave, there must be a creation and expansion of family care policies that provide free infant and childcare up through Pre-Kindergarten (3-5 years old). Current policies exist on many state levels for such care, which should be expanded with increased government spending on early childhood education. The lottery systems that exist for most states' for Pre-Kindergarten must be done away with and replaced by equal access programs. Childcare should operate as an entitlement with Americans coming to see access to quality and free childcare as a social benefit that they deserve. As women with children cite childcare as a main reason for leaving the workforce, the best way to alleviate the harm of woman leaving to workforce due to childcare costs, is to provide services that offer high quality, free care.

As participation is the greatest contributor to women's emancipation, is it vital that childcare have broad-based access. Increased ability for women to remain in the workforce without the hinderance of children, serves as a revolutionary and long-term initiative to reducing discrimination towards women.

To provide for the welfare of American families, the welfare policies of the late 90's must be reversed. As one of the main goals of President Clinton's policy was to reduce the number of individuals on the welfare payroll, the policy itself fails to support and provide for all that are in need. New policies main objective must be to secure the housing and nutrition of children, and not to reduce the spending of a federal program. The programs created to help alleviate the harms of poverty must succeed in doing so. The federal government program must be updated to account for the slow change in market incomes over the last twenty years, and the rising cost of living. As such, updates must be made to the calculation of the federal poverty line. In order to properly see, and therefore provide, for families living in poverty, the metrics for poverty lines must be in alignment with what puts families in poverty. To that end, welfare must be expanded, work requirements lifted, and mandates that hinder women's freedoms (such as incentives to reduce abortions) must be stricken from law.

Conclusion

Consistent with the aims of feminist agendas, the main goal of any new policy must be to emancipate women from a culture with invisible discrimination—reinforcing gender stereotypes. Legislation that continues to vilify women and subordinate them under the burden of children,

continues the tradition of oppression in U.S. culture. If there is any hope of a reduction in gender disparity, efforts to decrease women's rights must be eradicated. Childcare must be a right for all people. The increase in U.S. sentiments around the right to childcare will fundamentally change the equitability of employment in the United States.

The field of economics, legislation, and the workforce suffer under the institution of discrimination. In order to fundamentally change how the world interprets women, knowledge and the language used to discuss women, must be considered carefully. Inherent in the construction of the market were ideologies of women's and men's work, which has left economics and the market system at a disadvantage to conform to changing societal views. The discipline must continue to take radical steps to ensure the inclusion of intersectional views. The increased prominence of feminist perspectives in economics cannot be understated, as economists hold the reins on research that could create a more equitable world. Conducting research that views women's unique market struggles provides greater conclusions to attain inequitable treatment. Further arguments must be made among economists to combat exclusionary gender ideas in the language of economics. Biases and prejudices are never far from any economic analysis, and inform many of the ideas presented in formal literature. An acknowledgement of such is vital to ensure a more ethical scientific discipline.

In 2003, Belkin's work sparked endless conversation about the aptitude of women to a "formal" workforce. Literature concerning "women having it all" surfaced, which reinforced the sexist nuclear family ideal. Since the 90's, and the plateau of women entering the workforce, there has been a lack of progression of feminist agendas. Since then, there has been little in the way of policy that could progress female emancipation. Public discourse and new traditional conversation have placed fault on women. This is a misplacement of fault, which very often rests

with the employer and the flexibility of work. The mountain modern feminists must climb is the need to change, not just the policy that is provided to women, but to help the public completely reimagine how a workplace should be structured. In doing this, feminists may change the reluctance to have female authority figures. The next phase in the women's revolution must ensure all women have access to financial freedom.

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