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DISCUSSION PAPER SERIES

IZA DP No. 15886

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JANUARY 2023

## DISCUSSION PAPER SERIES

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# Integrating Gender into a Labor Economics Class

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JANUARY 2023

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## ABSTRACT

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# Integrating Gender into a Labor Economics Class

This article argues that a systematic integration of gender into labor economics courses based on standard textbooks is both beneficial and straightforward. An undergraduate course in labor economics presents an ideal opportunity to introduce students to the importance of gender differences in economic outcomes. We provide a prototype of such a course, and we show how gender-aware content and pedagogical tools can complement a course based on a standard textbook or set of articles. We also review the most popular textbooks in labor economics and show how gender issues are mostly contained in a single chapter on labor market discrimination rather than thoroughly integrated throughout the text. In addition to exposing students to more diverse content and methodologies, mainstreaming gender into an undergraduate labor economics class can help cultivate inclusivity and belongingness in the discipline.

**JEL Classification:** A2, J1, O1

**Keywords:** labor economics, gender, women, curriculum, COVID-19

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## **I. Introduction**

Most undergraduate programs that teach about gender equality and women in the economy introduce these topics in upper-division courses that focus entirely on women in the economy, including courses with such titles as Gender and the Economy, Gender Issues in Economics, or even Feminist Economics. However, gender issues should not be relegated to classes that focus exclusively on gender. Nor should gender be marginalized as a brief section in one of the standard sub-field courses such as development economics, public economics, or labor economics. This article argues that a systematic integration of gender into labor economics courses based on standard textbooks is both beneficial for students and straightforward to implement. An undergraduate course in labor economics presents an ideal opportunity to introduce students to the importance of gender differences in economic outcomes.

This article provides a prototype of such a course, and we show how gender-aware content (scholarly readings) and pedagogical tools (classroom activities and assignments) can complement a course based on a standard labor economics textbook or set of articles in labor economics. We also review the most popular labor textbooks and show how gender issues are mostly contained in a single chapter on labor market discrimination rather than thoroughly integrated throughout the text. It is not just content that matters, but also how the content is taught. For that reason, we provide additional insight into pedagogical innovations and examples throughout the exposition.

Integrating gender issues into labor economics courses has taken on greater urgency in the wake of the hardships that people in the U.S. and around the globe have experienced with the COVID-19 pandemic. In the U.S., the pandemic has exposed and worsened gender, racial, ethnic, and class inequities in the labor market. Recent scholarship for the U.S. shows that

women have experienced greater job losses than men given their overrepresentation in industries that faced the most widespread business closures, and these losses were particularly severe for women of color (Holder et al. 2021). Although they existed long before the pandemic, persistent gender gaps in occupational prestige were further exacerbated during COVID-19 (Jennings et al. 2022). In addition, women, Black and Hispanic workers, and immigrant workers were overrepresented in frontline industries and were disproportionately exposed to COVID-19 (Blau et al. 2021). Evidence also shows that school closures and stay-at-home orders across the country resulted in increased care work that fell disproportionately on the shoulders of women (Bahn et al. 2020a). Moreover, countless people contracted the virus and required care at home that was provided largely by women. These gender discrepancies in pandemic-related outcomes were also reported across numerous other countries (Kabeer et al. 2021). Unless labor economics courses include gender dynamics in the labor market and the additional constraints faced by women, students will have an incomplete understanding of the full scale of the pandemic.

In what follows we first present an overview of the current situation with typical labor economics courses, and we introduce key features of a gender-aware approach that can be fruitful for thoroughly engendering a labor economics course. We use this structure in discussing three main sections of a typical labor economics course (labor supply and demand, wage determinants and outcomes, and salient issues in the labor market), and we propose a new section on creating a more equitable labor market. The topics and readings we highlight are not all-encompassing, but they are illustrative of gender-aware scholarship and of the potential topics that could complement standard texts. We also refer to sample resources, exercises, and assignments that instructors may find helpful in adding gender to their labor economics course.

## **II. Overview of Current Situation in Undergraduate Labor Economics Classes**

Courses in labor economics study people and their decision to work (or not) for pay, by participating in the labor market both as employers and employees. Standard labor economics courses also examine formal and informal institutions that affect the functioning of the labor market. Moreover, labor economics examines the processes and conditions that affect workers before they get to the labor market (such as education), while attached to the labor market (such as fertility and unemployment), and after they leave the labor market (such as pension programs). Labor economics includes topics such as unions and collective bargaining, employment discrimination, determinants of wages and wage inequality, and public policies that shape dimensions of work.

In the U.S., undergraduate courses in labor economics are typically offered as upper-division elective courses in the economics major. Based on our search of major publishing houses and VitalSource Bookshelf Online, four labor economics textbooks appear to dominate the undergraduate curriculum: (1) Kenneth McLaughlin's *Labor Economics: Principles in Practice* (McLaughlin 2018), (2) Ronald Ehrenberg, Robert Smith, and Kevin Hallock's *Modern Labor Economics: Theory and Public Policy* (Ehrenberg et al. 2022), (3) George Borjas' *Labor Economics* (Borjas 2020), and (4) Campbell McConnell's *Contemporary Labor Economics* (McConnell 2021). All are written by men.

In order to understand the typical landscape of undergraduate courses in labor economics, we reviewed these four textbooks. In general, all textbooks follow a similar structure. They begin by providing an overview of labor economics, which includes defining economics and labor economics and describing key economic theories, tools, and methods that labor economists use. After this overview, the textbooks introduce the concept of supply and demand in the labor market and then cover supply and demand issues in more detail. The demand-side issues include

employer incentives and behaviors, and the supply-side issues include the decision to work for pay versus home production and trends in labor supply over time. These textbooks also include a series of chapters related to wage determinants and outcomes, with topics such as education, the wage structure, labor unions, labor mobility, and discrimination by gender and race/ethnicity. The textbooks typically close by offering individual chapters on a variety of “special topics” in labor economics. Although these special topics vary somewhat by textbook, there is some commonality in offerings on unemployment, globalization, and inequality.

All four textbooks approach labor economics from a perspective of scarcity, and they depict labor economics as an applied field that focuses on a specific factor of production – labor – and how labor markets operate. Across textbooks, discussions of economic methods describe quantitative methods. For the most part, any in-depth discussion of gender is relegated to the one chapter on discrimination, although two textbooks (Ehrenberg et al. (2022) and Borjas (2020)) are consistent in presenting sex-disaggregated data throughout the textbook on topics such as educational attainment, job training, and unionization, an important first step in engendering course content. Many of the textbooks also include special breakout boxes highlighting key labor economics research, and one textbook consistently includes gender-related research (McConnell 2021); gender dimensions are evident in at least one of the breakout boxes in about a quarter of the chapters. While these are important strategies for centering gender, most discussions in these textbooks do not take the next step by contextualizing or interpreting the differences and none of the books present what we would consider to be an engendered labor economics course. The treatment of gender as a concept also varies considerably across textbooks: one book does not use the term gender at all, and others use the terms gender and sex interchangeably. Notably, none of the textbooks clarify the definitions of gender and sex, nor do they discuss the ways in



which gender may be socially constructed or the role of gendered social norms in the labor market.

Although labor economists primarily use quantitative approaches in their research, students will also gain from an introduction to qualitative research methods. Even the Federal Reserve relies on qualitative data, issuing their Beige Book report eight times a year. It is also helpful to define and discuss key terms, especially gender and sex, at the start of any class in which these topics are introduced and in which students may not have previous coursework on these topics.<sup>1</sup> Although there is no single definition of gender or sex, we use definitions from Trans Student Educational Resources (TSER 2022). This source has a helpful classroom resource called the Gender Unicorn, an infographic clarifying gender identity, gender expression, sex assigned at birth, physical attraction, and emotional attraction. TSER defines sex assigned at birth as an individual's classification as male, female, intersex, or another sex at birth based on physical anatomy or karyotyping. While gender, most broadly, can be considered a social construct related to the societal and cultural meaning attached to being masculine or feminine, individual-level data on gender often refers to an individual's gender identity, that is, their internal sense of their own gender.

We propose a new approach to labor economics, and in what follows, provide discussion and resources on the key areas of a prototypical labor economics course. We also recommend that instructors set the stage for a gender-aware course, which includes starting with a more expansive definition of economics and its methods. We approach economics from a social provisioning perspective, which allows for a broader understanding of economic activity,

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<sup>1</sup> For example, while upper division students in sociology may be familiar with sex and gender, it is less likely that economics majors will be.

including care and unpaid labor. A social provisioning approach also emphasizes measuring economic success using well-being; incorporates discussion of power hierarchies and processes; includes consideration of ethical goals and values; and analyzes differences based on gender, race/ethnicity, and other social identities (Power 2004). Engendering a labor economics course can be achieved by incorporating gender-aware literature into the syllabus as well as using pedagogical tools such as videos, classroom activities, discussion questions, and assignments. We offer numerous suggestions for such pedagogical tools and summarize these suggestions in Table 1, which is organized by the key areas of the prototypical course. Table 2 presents additional resources for locating gender-aware syllabi, videos, and pedagogical resources. Table 2 also provides information on gender-disaggregated data sources that students can use in labor-market data projects and statistical assignments, including data on COVID-19 outcomes.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

[Insert Table 2 about here]

### **III. Proposal for a More Gender-Inclusive Labor Economics Course**

#### ***A. Labor Supply and Demand***

Often considered the “core” of mainstream labor economics classes, the first module in a labor economics class, and indeed across all the textbooks we reviewed, is labor supply and demand. We highlight two areas in particular in which students will benefit from a more gender-aware view: (1) models of household production and bargaining, and (2) perspectives on labor supply in historical context.

#### ***Models of household production and bargaining***

In a standard labor economics course, neoclassical theories of the supply side usually start by introducing the model of labor-leisure choice to examine decisions about whether an individual will work for pay in the labor market, and if so, how much they will work. Yet this model ignores household production—a third category of activities beyond paid labor or leisure. It is notable in its exclusion that such unpaid work is primarily done by women and girls worldwide. To be sure, most textbooks also introduce household production functions and use them to tell a simple story in which differences in market wages among household members determine how they allocate their time between waged labor and household production. This story also lays the foundation for one of the neoclassical rationales for the family: specialization and division of labor which can result in gains from marriage. If the difference in wages is large enough, then household members may decide to specialize in either household production or market work, depending on their comparative advantage, determined by the opportunity cost of household work. The persistent gender wage gap in the labor market may therefore perpetuate traditional gender roles in the division of labor.

This textbook treatment of household production fails to consider the broader social and cultural context in which households are embedded. Feminist economists have long recognized the importance of formal and informal institutions that influence gender norms and condition decisions about the gendered division of labor. For example, Jacobsen (2020) argues that dowries, bride prices, gender age gaps in marriage, and inheritance rules are all examples of societal institutions that can influence gendered division of labor in the household. Further, specialization along traditional gender stereotypes can pose significant economic risks for women. In her canonical 1981 paper, Bergmann details the risks of the “housewife” occupation which includes the possibility that the marriage will end along with her “pay” and the associated

difficulty in securing a new occupation. She also emphasizes that specialization and division of labor can generate and perpetuate power imbalances within the household in which just the threat of marriage dissolution can decrease a woman's wellbeing. A gender-aware discussion of choice-theoretic models must acknowledge how power differentials and gender norms that dictate socially accepted roles for men and women may shape and constrain the "choices" of individuals within households.

The previous discussion hints at the reality that households are sites of conflict in addition to cooperation despite the assumptions in Becker's unitary model of the household (Sen 1990; Becker 1991). According to Becker's unitary model, individuals share the same preferences, or have a "benevolent dictator" as household head who is responsible for optimizing household utility. A fun way to expose some of the fallacies in this model is to ask students, many of whom are living in dorms, to consider whether they share the exact same preferences as their roommates. If not, would they be willing to let their roommate take on the role of benevolent dictator? As nearly all students usually respond 'no' to this question, instructors can use their responses to introduce students to household bargaining models. Bargaining models of the household allow for different tastes and preferences and explicitly incorporate power differentials. Since household members have their own preferences, they must bargain over household decisions. Feminist economists have written extensively about gendered conditions "within and beyond the household" that shape bargaining (see, for example, Agarwal (1997)) and instructors may next ask students to consider some of these conditions before applying them to their own living situations. Bargaining over the division of labor can also have important implications for women's labor supply, in that decisions about who is primarily responsible for unpaid work can affect choices about participating in the labor force and investing in education

and job training, the gendered differences of which are already highlighted in a few of the textbooks we reviewed (Ehrenberg et al. 2022; McConnell 2021).

Conflicts within the household include more than decisions about the division of labor and how to split the gains from marriage. One of the most extreme examples of household conflict, domestic violence, continues to be pervasive and primarily perpetrated by men against women. Insights from bargaining models help clarify possible channels through which labor market outcomes, such as increases in women's relative wages or labor force participation, may strengthen their bargaining power and reduce the risk of domestic violence (Aizer 2010, Bhattacharyya et al. 2011). One of the textbooks we reviewed does cite Aizer's research (Ehrenberg et al. 2022). Nevertheless, women's labor force participation is not a panacea for domestic violence. Social and cultural context, type of employment, and partner's employment status have all been found to mediate the effects of women's labor force participation on the risk of domestic violence. For example, in cases where women out earn their partners or in countries where women's labor force participation violates a social norm, employment can actually exacerbate the risk of violence.

Although incorporating bargaining models into a labor economics class may more realistically describe household decision-making, they too tend to be heteronormative in their narrow focus on heterosexual married-couple families characterized by traditional gender roles. Allowing for a broader range of household compositions and moving beyond the gender binary are important steps in teaching a more inclusive labor economics.

### ***Multiple perspectives on labor supply in historical context***

Contextualizing decisions about labor force participation within their historical perspective can help highlight gendered trends, clarify formal and informal institutions that

affect decisions about working for pay, and introduce measurement issues and challenges. For example, a strength of all four labor economics textbooks is that they introduce gendered trends in labor force participation over time early in the text and discuss the rapid increase in women's labor force participation rates in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in particular. The next step instructors may take is to contextualize the data within their social and historical context. For example, several of the texts (McConnell (2021) and Borjas (2020)) discuss the significance of the birth control pill on women's labor force participation referencing Goldin and Katz (2002) and/or Bailey (2006). Additional context may include presenting hypotheses for the shapes of the trends, interrogating the implications of those findings, and even discussing how the data was collected. For example, this module's Shining Star, Claudia Goldin, famously hypothesized a "U-shaped" curve to describe the relationship between women's labor force participation and economic development in which women's labor force participation was highest in low-income and high-income countries, but lowest in middle-income countries (Goldin 1995).

Goldin used the U.S. as a case study to examine factors that influenced women's decisions to work for pay over time. She argued that the downward part of the U, from the colonial period through industrialization, could be attributed to increasing family incomes which allowed women to reallocate their time from paid to unpaid work. This happened concurrently with changes in the underlying structure of the economy in which waged work shifted from being primarily agricultural to mostly factory- and firm-based. Goldin continued by arguing that the upward sloping portion of the U could be explained by women's increasing educational attainment around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century combined with the rise of the service sector which enticed women back into the labor force. Goldin's model fits well with the choice-theoretic

model of labor-leisure in which labor force participation is primarily a supply-side story in which women make the choice to stay home.

While Goldin's framework adds thorough historical context to the presentation of gendered labor force participation rates, feminist economists have offered alternative perspectives on women's historical labor force participation that emphasize demand-side considerations and data limitations. Instructors may challenge students by asking them to critically evaluate these competing perspectives. Specifically, instructors can assign Humphries and Sarasúa (2012), which introduces a symposium of articles that critique Goldin's U-shaped story by centering demand-side constraints, discussing shortcomings in traditional census data, and offering reconstructions of the data based on alternative sources, including narrative and oral histories. In-class discussion questions for students include asking them to consider the social construct of data (Where does the data for her study come from? How reliable is census data from those time periods? How might data collection be shaped by dominant gender stereotypes in those time periods?). This can also be a good time to introduce students to some of the data sources recommended in Table 2. Instructors can organize students into groups and assign each group one of the eight conclusions Humphries and Sarasúa (2012) come to regarding deficiencies in the mainstream explanations of the relationship between economic development and women's labor force participation.

Alternatively, instructors may also consider assigning each of the articles in the symposium to a different group of students and have them read and synthesize the major findings to present to the class. Introducing multiple perspectives on issues and allowing students to learn from one another is a great way to operationalize feminist pedagogical principles and create more inclusive classrooms. It also allows for a transition into the discussion of the demand-side

of the labor market by re-centering the history of women's labor force participation from being focused on supply-side considerations (women's educational attainment and the growing availability of more attractive white-collar jobs in the service sector) to include consideration of demand-side factors including legal constraints, limited job opportunities, and dominant social norms regarding women's proper place.

A final active learning strategy for this module is to have students graph trends in labor force participation rates for men and women overall, and then further disaggregated by race and ethnicity. Students may find this data using the data sources listed in Table 2 or using the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis's online database, Federal Reserve Economic Data (FRED). FRED allows students to easily search for data and customize graphs and additionally offers a variety of tutorials for instructors (Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis 2022a, 2022b; Medez-Carbajo 2020). To test students' understanding of the material covered in this module, ask students to describe both supply- and demand-side considerations and hypothesize reasons for the differing trends by race/ethnicity within each gender grouping.

### *B. Wage Determinants and Outcomes*

The second key module of many mainstream labor economics classes constitutes topics related to wage determinants and outcomes. Even though the four textbooks we reviewed do not all use this label to classify their chapters, they have considerable overlap in relevant chapters, especially those on education, the wage structure, labor unions, labor mobility, and discrimination. Across the board, the textbooks have the most gender content in their discrimination chapters, and they do a thorough job in covering that topic. All textbooks we reviewed include coverage of multiple theories of discrimination (which vary by text) but generally include taste-based discrimination (employer, employee, and customer), statistical



discrimination, and the occupational crowding hypothesis, among others. Most of the textbooks also include discussion of important papers contributing to economists' understanding of gender discrimination and differences in the labor market, including Goldin and Rouse's (2000) examination of the effect of "blind" auditions in symphony orchestras and Cook et al.'s (2018) research on the gender earnings gap among Uber drivers. For instructors seeking an assignment related to discrimination, they could have students research gender gaps in salary differences among athletes in a sport of their choosing and hypothesize supply- and demand-side explanations in addition to identifying structural and policy determinants of wages.

Students can benefit from a more gender-aware view in the other chapters as well. For example, discussions of education can incorporate the themes of socialization and pre-labor market discrimination, such as the discouragement that girls face in studying and excelling in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields. Discussions of labor unions and collective action can focus on historical examples of women's successful strike efforts, such as the 1881 Atlanta washerwomen strike when close to 3,000 predominantly African American women went on strike to protest their low pay as washerwomen. Two additional examples upon which we elaborate below for adding a gender dimension include: (1) the minimum wage, and (2) women migrant workers and paid care work.

### ***Minimum wage***

Any discussion of the wage structure in labor economics includes a lesson on the minimum wage, and the past three decades have seen a surge in scholarly interest in the impact of minimum wage legislation on labor market outcomes across economies. Much of that research focuses on changes in employment. Critics argue that employment losses from minimum wage-induced increases in production costs are substantial (e.g. Neumark et al. 2014). Advocates,

however, argue that employment losses are small and any reallocation of resources that occurs will result in a welfare-improving outcome through the reduction of poverty (e.g. Dube 2019). In an effort to synthesize this large body of work, Belman and Wolfson (2014) conducted a meta-analysis for a large number of studies of industrialized economies and concluded that minimum wage increases may lead to a small disemployment effect: raising the minimum wage by 10% causes employment to fall by between 0.03% and 0.6%.

If it is binding, a minimum wage increase will raise average wages, with the strongest impact close to the legislated minimum and declining effects further up the distribution. Because low-wage workers experience the strongest wage boosts from increases in the minimum wage, this legislation can be a powerful tool to reduce poverty among employed women and men. Because the female earnings distribution falls to the left of the male earnings distribution in the U.S. and in most other economies, a policy that raises the legal minimum wage should help to close the male-female earnings gap. One teaching idea for the minimum wage is to have students debate the pros and cons of raising the minimum wage. One group argues for, one against, and the third group takes on the role of judges. Resources include Giddings and Lefebvre (2023), who provide an instructional module on the minimum wage informed by feminist pedagogy and pluralist approaches to economics.

### ***Women migrant workers and paid care work***

The four textbooks we reviewed each contain a chapter on labor mobility, labor migration, and immigration. Yet few, if any, highlight the importance of women migrant labor in the employment of domestic workers in the U.S. and around the globe. In the global chain of care, domestic workers are doing the care work that makes other women's paid employment possible. This substitution of paid for unpaid care work typically performed by women applies

not only to childcare, but also to the care of elderly, sick, and disabled family members, and to housecleaning. Domestic workers earn some of the lowest wages among all occupations and chronically experience wage theft, including receiving wages below the minimum, having wages withheld arbitrarily and without recourse, or not being paid overtime. The lack of formal contracts and predictable work schedules are also common problems. The growing use of internet-based technology to hire care workers and housekeepers in the “gig economy” has contributed to the insecure nature of domestic work, and workers without access to the internet have been placed at a disadvantage in access to jobs. Sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and other forms of physical abuse also plague domestic workers, problems compounded by the fact that their work takes place in the private sphere.

Domestic workers are predominantly women. In the U.S., 92% of all domestic workers are women (Zundl and Rodgers 2021). About one third of domestic workers are immigrants, either naturalized or not naturalized, and this share is considerably higher than for non-domestic workers. Also of interest is the relatively high representation of non-naturalized immigrants among housecleaners (51%), one of the least valued and most invisible kinds of occupations (Zundl and Rodgers 2021). A relevant classroom exercise is to show a short video clip on the global chain of care and then ask students to debate the pros and cons of the U.S. having such a high dependence on women migrant workers in providing these care services. Instructors could also supplement the video with a discussion of current events related to domestic workers, such as the power imbalance between domestic workers and diplomats (Thrupkaew 2021) or the move to cover domestic workers with more labor rights (Saldaña 2021).

### *C. Salient Issues in the Labor Market*

The textbooks we reviewed close with a variety of “special topics” in labor economics, usually on topics such as unemployment, globalization, and inequality. While these topics could be engendered with the introduction of gender-disaggregated data and the inclusion of studies on these topics that have a gender dimension, we propose introducing entirely different topics that the textbooks are largely silent on. In what follows, we highlight four special topics that instructors may want to consider adding to their courses: sexual harassment, gender and informal sector work in the Global South, reproductive health and labor market status, and LGBTQI+ individuals and the labor market. Although we are unable to cover them in detail here, there are a multitude of other salient issues that aid in engendering labor economics, such as sex work and trafficking, the gig economy, artificial intelligence and the future of work, and care labor. One way of incorporating a broader selection of salient issues into the course is allowing students to choose a topic themselves based on their own interests or from a pre-made list of salient issues with gender dimensions. Then, students work independently or in groups to research and write a new Wikipedia page on the topic or contribute to an existing one. This allows students to learn-by-doing and additionally, contribute to the social construction of knowledge.

### ***Sexual harassment***

Sexual harassment is pervasive. Anywhere between 25 to 85 percent of all women (depending on sampling strategies and definitions) experience sexual harassment in the workplace (Felblum and Lipnic 2016). The #metoo movement in particular has given voice to these statistics and has shown that sexual harassment cuts across all industries and levels. Sexual harassment also has harmful economic effects for individuals, organizations, and society as a whole. For students, sexual harassment is associated with disengagement from classes and poorer school performance. For individuals in the labor market, sexual harassment is associated

with reduced job satisfaction, increased absenteeism, deterioration in relationships with colleagues, job changes, and even exits from well-paying careers. Women who experience sexual harassment are more likely to leave their jobs to avoid their harasser or because of frustration with their employer's response. Such exits often result in loss of firm-specific tenure, employment gaps, severed professional networks, and financial insecurity. These outcomes in turn interfere with longer-term career advancement, especially if women have trouble finding comparable work. Sexual harassment is thus a contributing factor in the gender wage gap (Folke and Rickne 2022), but it is only explicitly mentioned in one textbook (McConnell 2021).

Not only does sexual harassment interfere with women's economic status, it also hurts the bottom line of organizations through higher employee turnover, lower productivity, more absenteeism, and greater legal costs. The productivity losses occur not only at the individual level but also at the group level as office working environments become more negative and others in the workgroup who observe the harassment experience more stress and lower job satisfaction. One way to introduce students to the impact of sexual harassment on labor market outcomes is to have them read former Uber engineer Susan Fowler's 2017 blog post about leaving the company, and then have students discuss the ramifications for both Susan and Uber (Fowler 2017). Instructors can ask students to consider whether or not sexual harassment represents a form of labor market discrimination, and ask students to consider connections between occupational segregation and sexual harassment.

### ***Gender and informal sector work in the Global South***

A substantial proportion of the poor in countries in the Global South rely on self-employment as a source of income as they navigate a host of constraints that include a lack of affordable loans from formal sources, restricted access to reliable savings accounts, few formal

sources of insurance, insecure land rights, and insufficient access to public infrastructure such as piped water and electricity. Lower-income countries are characterized by “survivalist” self-employment activities – those in the traditional sector that are undertaken out of necessity or are informal in nature – while higher-income countries have created the right conditions for “opportunity-driven” entrepreneurship – activities in the modern sector such as in specialized manufacturing and services (Gries and Naudé 2010). An attractive feature of self-employment is that it allows parents, especially mothers, to combine labor market participation with childcare responsibilities. Proportionately more women than men are self-employed in lower-income countries, with the implication that women have relatively less job security and more unstable incomes. Moreover, in lower-income countries, self-employment commonly takes the form of household enterprise work, and women-owned household enterprises are often smaller in scale than those owned by men (Menon and Rodgers 2018).

In the past few decades, increases in the proportion of the workforce classified as informal is partly explained by the growing tendency of manufacturers to subcontract to smaller-scale, home-based operations (Carr et al. 2000). Home-based workers are predominantly women who work for lower pay (often on a piece rate basis), receive few (if any) fringe benefits, pay their own utility costs, and work long hours. In view of their informal status, most home-based workers remain uncovered by labor regulations that are expensive and impose costs on producers. A large body of evidence has documented poor working conditions, worker abuses, lack of union rights, and gender-based discrimination in these informal sector, small-scale enterprises. These issues lend themselves to potentially engaging discussions in the classroom, with instructors showing a video about working conditions in such small-scale enterprises and having students reflect on policy solutions. Showing a video (such as *Unseen: Informal*

*Garment Workers of Bangladesh*) about ready-made garment workers in Bangladesh and then discussing reforms after the Rana Plaza factory collapse would be particularly informative.

### ***Reproductive health and labor market status***

When women can control their reproductive health, they have more control over their economic health and well-being, with repercussions for the overall macroeconomy as well. Women's ability to control fertility is linked to increased educational attainment, higher labor force participation rates, and greater lifetime earnings for women. A recent study covering more than 100 countries and 48 million women shows a strong inverse relationship between fertility and women's labor force participation (Aaronson et al. 2021). Looking specifically at access to contraception, a famous study by Goldin and Katz (2002) showed that diffusion of the birth control pill among young women led to a substantial increase in age at first marriage and their investment in professional and graduate schools. Greater educational attainment for women in turn contributed to less occupational segregation by gender in higher wage professions. Moreover, access to the birth control pill accounts for 30 percent of the increase in women's relative earnings during the 1990s (Bailey et al. 2012).

This point on the labor market effects of access to contraception also applies to the legalization of abortion, and a number of high-profile studies have examined the economic ramifications of greater access to abortion. For example, Kalist (2004) found that by reducing unplanned pregnancies, legalization of abortion in the U.S. led to increased labor force participation rates for women. Bloom et al. (2009) took this point one step further and found that lower fertility arising from the legalization of abortion increased women's labor supply and contributed positively and significantly to GDP growth. If anything, abortion law liberalization in the U.S. had an even stronger effect than the introduction of the birth control pill on women's

decisions to delay marriage and childbirth (Myers 2017). Not only do abortion regulations impact women's labor supply, but they also affect occupational mobility. In the U.S., Targeted Restrictions on Abortion Providers (TRAP) laws that make it more difficult for women to seek an abortion are linked to increased 'job lock,' such that women living in states with TRAP laws are less likely to move between occupations and into higher-paying occupations (Bahn et al. 2020b).

Abortion is an emotionally sensitive and politically divisive issue, but given the close relationship between women's reproductive rights and labor market status, it is an issue that clearly belongs in a gender-aware labor economics course. With the July 2022 Supreme Court ruling overturning *Roe v. Wade*, decisions about the legality of the medical procedure reverted to state legislators. Ultimately, abortion will be outlawed or severely restricted in 26 states once all of the "trigger laws" take effect. A teaching idea on this topic is for instructors to show the Guttmacher Institute's interactive map on U.S. abortion policies (Guttmacher 2022) in class and discuss with students the health and economic implications for abortion seekers and providers for particular states of interest.

### ***LGBTQI+ individuals and the labor market***

Engendering a labor economics class also entails considering the ways in which individuals that identify as transgender, nonbinary, and gender expansive may have different experiences in the labor market. In addition to gender identity, individuals may face discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation despite *Bostock v. Clayton County*, the Supreme Court's landmark decision in June 2020 that held that the prohibition against sex discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 also prohibits discrimination on the basis of transgender identity or sexual orientation. Regardless, LGBTQI+ individuals are more likely to



face labor market discrimination, occupational sorting, and even a glass ceiling, while gay and bisexual men additionally face negative wage gaps relative to heterosexual men (Badgett et al. 2021). Relative to cisgender men, transgender individuals face worse labor market outcomes; they are less likely to be employed or in the labor force and more likely to be unemployed (Campbell et al. 2022). Moreover, the largest labor market penalties accrue to gender-nonconforming individuals, who face a 23% reduction in labor force participation rates relative to cisgender individuals (Campbell et al. 2022). Transgender individuals also face labor market penalties associated with transfemininity. Hence research focusing solely on sex and gender identity may miss other key channels through which labor market outcomes are mediated for transgender individuals, namely, gender expression and gender perception.

In-class discussion questions to introduce the significance of LGBTQI+ identity on labor market outcomes include asking students to consider why there is such limited data available on LGBTQI+ workers before explaining how the U.S. Census Bureau recently added questions on sexual orientation and gender identity. Instructors may also ask students to recall the discussion focused on reconstructing women's labor force participation rates and have them consider the ways in which this is both similar and different, especially by assessing the innovative ways in which Campbell et al. (2022) attempt to “reconstruct” measures of gender expression and gender perception. Assigning students to work through the data replication files in Campbell (2021) is an additional way to challenge them to apply their understanding of gender, including the intersections between sex assigned at birth, gender identity, gender expression, and gender perception.

#### **IV. Creating a More Equitable Labor Market**

Our prototype of an engendered labor economics course closes with a module that focuses on creating a more equitable labor market. This module goes beyond the special topics on gender issues and encourages students to think about how an equitable labor market benefits not only workers and their families but also businesses and the overall economy. Students will also learn about the role of government policies and employer practices in supporting working parents and promoting diversity in the workplace. Policies that strengthen the care infrastructure can promote greater equity in the labor market. These include implementing paid family leave, providing paid sick leave, offering universal affordable childcare and long-term eldercare, boosting pay equity and job creation in nursing, and improving working conditions and pay for paid care providers. Investing in the care infrastructure can grow employment and reduce women's unpaid work burdens. This lesson has taken on even greater relevance during the COVID-19 pandemic with emerging evidence that countries that prioritized social spending before the crisis did better in terms of limiting the number of cases and deaths (Kabeer et al. 2021).

Research shows that workers who have access to paid leave after a child's birth tend to remain in the workforce, have higher wages over time, and rely less on public assistance and food stamp benefits (Houser and Vartanian 2012). As a result, they contribute more to their own economic security and to the security of the economy as a whole. Employers also benefit when workers have access to paid leave; greater labor force attachment among those with paid leave reduces the cost of recruiting, hiring, and training (Houser and Vartanian 2012). Further, women's long term labor force attachment is an important strategy in shattering the glass ceiling and increasing women's representation at the highest levels of business, government, and academia (Winkler 2022).

Employer practices also matter. In addition to paid family leave policies, flexible work arrangements can help workers better meet the demands of caring for their children and older family members while also staying productive on the job. This includes allowing customizable flexible work arrangements to best fit the needs of the individual, and making them available to all employees of a company, not just women, mothers, or other specific populations. Another policy option to enhance more equitable labor markets is fair scheduling, in which workplaces ensure advance notice of schedules and reject the practice of “open availability,” so that workers can have more power in setting their schedules. As COVID-19 has ushered in the normalization of telecommuting, working from home at least some days each week could become the new normal for a larger proportion of the workforce. Emerging evidence indicates that this feature of telework was particularly helpful for women workers and helped to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic on women’s job losses because they were more likely than men to engage in telework (Hou et al. 2022). The restructuring of many jobs during the pandemic may ultimately make employers more willing to accommodate the need for home-based work. This could also help low-income workers and people of color, who in general are less likely to receive workplace accommodations.

Nevertheless, working from home is not without risk. While it may reduce exposure to physical workplace sexual harassment, the increased reliance on forms of information and communications technology such as Zoom, WhatsApp, and Slack has enhanced the risk of sexual harassment in virtual spaces (Strenio and Roy Chowdhury 2021). The one-on-one side channel communication options on these applications typically come with little to no oversight or bystanders, exacerbating the risk for harassment. Additionally, remote work may be more likely occur in the evening hours and from people’s homes which makes it seem more casual and

intimate. The constant technological connections to coworkers, employers, and customers can also make it feel impossible to get away from harassers. Therefore, policies that allow for flexible and remote work options should be sensitive to how remote work may enhance the risk for workplace sexual harassment and be issued in tandem with clearly defined definitions of online sexual harassment, reiteration of a zero-tolerance policy, and the provision of anonymous reporting options. Managers may consider disabling private chats and regulating newly adopted information and communications technology used by the firm to ensure that it allows workers to work with safety and security, which includes freedom from harassment.

A final term project related to this topic is for instructors to assign an interview project in which students conduct an in-depth interview with someone of their choosing about that person's experiences of balancing work and family. The students each select a respondent (preferably not a family member) who works part-time or full-time and has at least one child at home. They can conduct the interview face-to-face or virtually and ask the respondent a set of pre-determined questions relating to work context, family context, and the work/life balance. Students are then told to type a 2-3 page summary of their interview findings, with prompts to (1) use quotes from the interviews, (2) compare their findings to those in the course readings and discussions, and (3) consider what kinds of policy solutions might allow their respondent to have greater work/family balance. Students should link their proposed solutions to specific problems and explain how the policies might help to solve them.

## **V. Conclusion**

In addition to exposing students to more diverse content and methodologies, mainstreaming gender into the undergraduate labor economics classroom can help to cultivate inclusivity and belongingness in the discipline by allowing women students, specifically, to see

themselves and their lived experiences reflected throughout the course, rather than constrained to a specific module. More broadly, engendering upper-division economics classes allows for breadth and depth in terms of readings and assignments. It is imperative for gender-aware economic content, perspectives, methodologies, and pedagogies to be implemented across the economics curriculum. Mainstreaming gender into economics classes means making gendered content and processes central to the study of the economy, and it also means introducing students to scholarship by feminist economists.

Although we encourage instructors to adopt this prototype of an engendered labor economics course in its entirety, instructors could just select certain articles and assignments, or merely use the prototype as inspiration to reimagine their own courses. Because we focused on labor studies courses as they are commonly taught in the U.S., we acknowledge a limitation of our paper is its centering of U.S. data, policy, and current events. Nevertheless, the gender-aware framing we present is easily adaptable to the context of other countries. Further, we know that not all instructors will have the academic freedom or time to completely revise their courses and syllabi. However, in offering a variety of materials that can supplement rather than replace a required textbook, as well as a variety of activities (ranging from semester-length projects to short pre-class discussion questions), we hope that all instructors are empowered to find ways to integrate gender into their labor economics classes.

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Table 1. Classroom Activities, Exercises, and Assignments by Section of Prototype Course

Questions/Exercises/Assignments for Each Section	Resources
<i>Labor Supply and Demand</i>	
1. Student groups read, summarize, and share with the class one of the articles presenting alternative historical perspectives on women's labor force participation.	<i>Feminist Economics</i> "Off the Record" symposia Vol. 18 Issue 4 (2012) and Vol. 19 Issue 4 (2013).
2. Students graph data on men's and women's labor force participation rate over time by race and ethnicity and discuss legal, social, cultural, medical, and technological explanations for those changes.	Find and graph data using <a href="#">FRED</a> . Sex-disaggregated data sources in Table 2.
3. Monthly 'Shining Star' tribute. For this section of the course: Claudia Goldin's work on women's labor force participation.	Show video: <i>Women in Economics: Claudia Goldin</i> .
<i>Wage Determinants and Outcomes</i>	
1. Students debate the role of the minimum wage on closing the gender pay gap. One group argues for, one against, and the third are the judges.	Discuss Giddings and Lefebvre (2023); Bargain et al. (2019); Roepe (2021).
2. Students research gender salary gaps among athletes in a sport of their choosing and hypothesize supply- and demand-side explanations in addition to identifying structural and policy determinants of wages.	Discuss Giddings and Hauptert (2019) and popular press articles on the U.S. Soccer Federation's 2022 equal pay agreements (e.g. Shaw (2022); Das (2022)).
3. Students view video on global chain of care, debate pros and cons of reliance on paid care workers, and discuss current events about domestic workers.	Show segment from video: <i>Chain of Love</i> and supplement with discussion of Thrupkaew (2021) or Saldaña (2021).
4. Monthly 'Shining Star' tribute. For this section of the course: Francine Blau's work on gender wage gaps.	Show segment from video: <i>What Do We Know About the Gender Wage Gap?</i>
<i>Salient Issues in the Labor Market</i>	
1. Show video about informal sector workers in Bangladesh and discuss policy solutions.	Show video: <i>Unseen: Informal Garment Workers of Bangladesh</i> .
2. Students view the interactive map of state policies on abortion and discuss economic implications.	Interactive map from <i>Guttmacher Institute</i> .
3. Students examine labor force outcomes among transgender individuals by working through a data replication file.	Discuss Badgett et al. (2021), Campbell et al. (2022), and Campbell (2021) data replication file.

4. Student choose a salient issue to approach from a gender perspective, conduct their own research, and contribute to writing or updating a Wikipedia page.	<a href="https://outreach.wikimedia.org/wiki/Education">https://outreach.wikimedia.org/wiki/Education</a> .
5. Monthly ‘Shining Star’ tribute. For this section of the course: Cecilia Rouse’s work on U.S. employment issues.	Show video: <i>Full Interview: Cecilia Rouse on Biden's job plan.</i>
<i>Creating a More Equitable Labor Market</i>	
1. Explore sex-disaggregated data on COVID-19 and document how women across racial/ethnic groups lost their jobs and returned to work.	Assign podcast: <i>In the Gap: Julianne Malveaux “Black-enomics”</i> ; use sex-disaggregated data sources in Table 2.
2. Students create a final video project on creating an equitable labor market and all videos are shown in an end-of-semester mini film festival.	<i>Google Docs Sample Assignment by Jacqueline Strenio.</i>
3. Monthly ‘Shining Star’ tribute. For this section of the course: Nancy Folbre’s work on caring labor.	Show video: <i>The Economics of Care.</i>

Note: URL’s are embedded as hyperlinks in the online version of this table and are also available upon request.

Table 2. Helpful Resources for Teaching Gender and Labor Economics

<b>Sample Syllabi</b>
<a href="#">International Association for Feminist Economics, Course Syllabus Catalog</a>
<a href="#">Exploring Economics: Syllabi and Other Resources</a>
<a href="#">Union for Radical Political Economics, Course Syllabi Catalog</a>
<b>Supplementary Books on Women and Work</b>
<a href="#">Blau, F. &amp; Winkler, A. (2021). <i>The Economics of Women, Men, and Work</i> (9<sup>th</sup> ed.). Oxford University Press.</a>
<a href="#">Berik, G. &amp; Kongar, E. (Eds). (2021). <i>The Routledge Handbook of Feminist Economics</i>. Routledge.</a>
<a href="#">Hoffman, S. &amp; Averett, S. (2021). <i>Women and the Economy</i> (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Bloomsbury.</a>
<b>Film Catalog</b>
<a href="#">Women Make Movies</a>
<a href="#">Videos on economists and their research: A project by the AEA's CSMGEP, CSWEP, and Div.E.Q.</a>
<a href="#">Jacqueline Strenio's "Women in Economics" YouTube Playlist</a>
<b>Classroom Activities and Pedagogical Resources</b>
<a href="#">Hoyt, G. &amp; McGoldrick, K. (2013). <i>The international handbook on teaching and learning economics</i>. Edward Elgar Press.</a>
<a href="#">Salemi, M.K. &amp; Walstad, W.B. (2010). <i>Teaching innovations in economics: Strategies and applications for interactive instruction</i>. Edward Elgar Press.</a>
<b>Gender-Disaggregated Data for Statistical Exercises</b>
<a href="#">U.S. Current Population Survey</a>
<a href="#">American Community Survey</a>
<a href="#">Household Pulse Survey</a>
<a href="#">Data2x COVID-19 Resources: Gender Data</a>
<a href="#">International Labor Organization ILOSTAT</a>
<a href="#">The Economist's glass-ceiling index</a>

Note: URL's are embedded as hyperlinks in the online version of this table and are also available upon request.