

Working Woman in American Society

Instructor: Amy Tracy Wells (she/her)

Email: Please use Canvas email

Calls/Texts/Emails will be returned within 24 hours.

In this course we will examine a specific segment of Americans – working women. We will explore ideas/concepts such as:

1. what do we mean by paid and unpaid work;
2. what is meant by gender, equality and, conversely, inequality;
3. what are the historical and current trends (quantitative data) in work;
4. what is the contextual history of women's work by industry and profession; how have women's experiences varied by class and race;
5. through worker experiences, what issues and reforms affect women's work;
6. and consider how your own thinking about gender creates inequality.

Assignments/grades will include participation in Discussion Forums, Brief Response Papers, an Autoethnographic paper, Exams and one extra credit option.

This course includes readings, media, and discussion around topics such as sexual harassment and assault and online violence. I acknowledge that this content may be difficult. Feel free to reach out especially when developing your autoethnography or when we reach Class 11. I also encourage you to care for your safety and well-being.

Rutgers University Core Curriculum Goals addressed and to be assessed through short items on exams:

- Analyze the degree to which forms of human difference shape a person's experience of work (Contemporary Challenges goal CCD-1)
- Analyze issues of social justice both in the U.S. and globally (Contemporary Challenges goal CCD-2)
- Demonstrate an understanding of perspectives, theories, and concepts (Social analysis goal SCL-1)
- Apply those concepts, along with substantive institutional knowledge, to contemporary developments (Social analysis goal SCL-2)
- Assess and critique relevant evidence and research findings (Social analysis goals SCL-2)
- Access high-quality historical, qualitative, and/or quantitative evidence (Social analysis goal SCL-2)

Labor Studies and Employment Relations Department:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the perspectives, theories and concepts in the field of labor and employment relations (Goal 1)
- Apply those concepts, along with substantive institutional knowledge, to contemporary developments (Goal 2)
- Analyze the degree to which forms of human difference shape a person's experience of work (Goal 6)

School of Management and Labor Relations:

- Demonstrate an understanding of perspectives, theories, and concepts (Goal IV)
- Analyze the degree to which forms of human difference shape a person's experience of work (Goal V)

- Apply those concepts, along with substantive institutional knowledge, to contemporary developments (Goal VI)

Instructor:

- Discuss differences between employment law and policy, and workers lived experience.

Subject to change

Unit I. Introduction

Class 1: Introduction to Working Women in American Society

Become familiar with the web site that has the on-line course. This is called the “course shell.”

1. Kessler-Harris, A. (2018). [Women Have Always Worked: A Concise History](#). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois (pp. 1- 49)
2. Kingsberry, J. (2021). [U.S. women are largely dissatisfied with how they're treated. Most men don't see a problem](#). The Lily, Washington Post. (5 pgs.)

Assignment:

1. Meet the other Students
2. Read, sign and upload a copy of "How to Get an A Writing an Essay".
3. Complete the (ungraded) pre-course quiz.

Unit II. Paid & unpaid work

Class 2: What is work?

1. Ferrant, G, Pesando, L.M. & Nowacka, K. (2014) Unpaid Care Work: The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes, Issy-les-Moulineaux: OECD Development Centre. (pp. 1-11)
2. Swiebel, J. (1999). [Unpaid Work and Policy-Making: Towards a Broader Perspective of Work and Employment](#). New York: United Nations. (Introduction & pp. 1-10 & pp. 15-30)
3. Grose, J., Holzknecht, E. & Westbrook, A. (June 25, 2025) [Motherhood Should Come with a Warning Label](#), New York Times (Video, 5:02 & text 4 pp.)

Assignment:

Brief Response Paper: In the context of this course, how do people and organizations define work? What are the ramifications of this definition for women?

Unit III. Gender equality & inequality

Class 3: Gender

1. Crash Course. (2017). [Gender Stratification: Crash Course Sociology #32](#). (10:49 min.)
2. Barres, B.A. (2006). Does Gender Matter? *Nature*, 442. 133-136 (3 pgs.).
3. England, P. (2011) [The Gender Revolution: Uneven and Stalled](#). Clayman Institute. (12 min.)

Assignment:

Discussion Forum: Answer either one of the two following questions:

1. Identify and discuss 3-4 ways in which the concept of gender influences everyday life such as education, training, work, health care, wealth etc.
2. How do gender stereotypes affect your own thinking?

Class 4: Equality & inequality

1. Correll, S. (October 21, 2010). [How Gender Stereotypes Influence Emerging Career Aspirations](#). (47.09).
2. Frye, J. (2020). [Centering Equity in the Future-of-Work Conversation Is Critical for Women's Progress](#). Washington, DC: The Center for American Progress. (18 pgs.)
3. [Plunkett, S. \(2018\) When Meritocracy Blinds us to Gender Discrimination](#). Delve.

Assignment:

[No assignment this week]

Unit IV. Now & Then

Class 5: Pay

1. [Majumber, A. & Mason, J. \(March 2024\) America's Women and the Wage Gap](#). National Partnership for Women and Families. (pp. 1-7)
2. Shaw, E., Hegewisch, A., Williams-Baron, E., & Gault, B. (2016). [Undervalued and Underpaid in America](#). Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research. (pp. 1-41.)
2. Chang, M. (March 21, 2011). [Shortchanged: Women and the Wealth Gap](#). Clayman Institute. (7 min.)

Assignment:

[No assignment this week]

Unit V. The history of women's work

Class 6: Background

1. Hesse-Biber, S. N., & G.L. Carter (2005). "[A Brief History of Working Women](#)." *Working Women in America* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Ch. 2, pp. 20-45)
2. Graves, S. (1941) [Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States](#). Washington, DC: Library of Congress. (11 pgs.)
3. Davis, A. (1983). "[The Legacy of Slavery: Standards for a New Womanhood](#)". Women, Race & Class. New York: Random House. (8 pgs.)
4. Dublin, T. (1975). [Women, Work, and Protest in the Early Lowell Mills: "The Oppressing Hand of Avarice Would Enslave Us"](#). *Labor History*, 16, 99-116. (18 pgs.)

Assignment:

Discussion Forum: Answer either one of the two following questions:

1. What is the myth of womanhood and what has been the reality or the trends?
2. Many believe that the issues we've covered to-date are now historical while others believe many of the issues are ongoing. What do you believe and why?

Class 7: 1900-1970

1. Cornell, (n.d.) [Sweatshops & Strikes before 1911](#) (Includes sections on Fire, Mourning & Protest, Relief Work & Investigation & Work, Cornell University .(6 pgs.)
2. Williams, C.L. (1995). The Rise and Fall of the Women's Profession in *Still a Man's World: Men who Do Women's Work*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press. (Ch. 2, pp. 23-49)
3. Gazit, Chana. (Director) (2003). [The Pill](#). Boston, MA. WGBH. (56 min.)

Assignment:

1. **Autoethnographic paper** – draft due

Class 8: 1970 to present

1. Criado Perez, C. (2019). *The Henry Higgins Effect* in Invisible Women: Data Biases in a World Designed for Women. New York, Abrams Press. (17 pp.)
2. Guynn, J. (June 29, 2023) [White Women Benefit Most from Affirmative Action. So Why do They Oppose it?](#) USA Today
3. Carnegie, M. (May 8, 2023) [The Gig Economy Is Much Worse for Women](#). Wired. (7 pp.)

Assignment:

Midterm Exam # 2: (Covers Classes 1 through 8)

Unit VI. Issues & reforms affecting women's work

Class 9: Wages

1. Imbriano, R. (2010). [A Call to Act: Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co.](#) Annenberg Classroom. (22:48 min.)
2. Burkus, D. (2016) [Why Keeping Salaries a Secret May Hurt Your Company](#). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review. (4 pgs)
3. Gordon, S. and Mathu, D. (July 29, 2022) [How To Negotiate Salary After Job Offer - Everything You Need To Know About Salary Negotiation](#). Steph & Den. (11 min)

Assignment:

[No assignment this week]

Class 10: Sex-segregation, Tokenism & Institutional Constraints

1. Zhavoronkova, M., Khattar, R & Brady, M. (March 29, 2022). [Occupational segregation in the America. Center for American Progress](#). (pp. 1-18).
2. McGrew, W. (2016) [Gender segregation at work: "separate but equal" or "inefficient and unfair"](#). The Washington Center for Equitable Growth. (pp. 1-8)
3. National Partnership for Women and Families. (2019). [Know Your Rights: Experiencing Sexual Harassment at Work](#). (3 pgs.)

Assignment:

Discussion Forum: Answer either one of the following:

1. Define and discuss the significance of institutional constraints?
2. Is sex segregation diminishing, why or why not?

Class 11: Sexual Harassment & Cyber Violence

1. Fowler, S. (2017). [Reflecting On One Very, Very Strange Year at Uber](#). Blog post. (4 pgs.)
2. Lowen, Cynthia. (Director) (2018). [Netizens](#). New York, NY: Fork Films. (1 hr. 37 min.)
3. Jankowicz, N. (May 2022). "How the Threat of Abuse Silences Women Online". [Literary Hub](#). (3 pgs.)
4. National Partnership for Women and Families. (2019). [Know Your Rights: Experiencing Sexual Harassment at Work](#). (3 pgs.)

Assignment: Respond to one of the three following questions.

Brief Response Paper:

1. What are the implications if professional women are threatened, doxed, subject to revenge porn or Cyber Mobs on social media? Identify and discuss 2-3 issues general issues (e.g., workplace, economic, career etc.) or those faced by female actors (e.g., [Leslie Jones](#) or [Ashley Judd](#)), female politicians (e.g., [Kamala Harris and AOC](#)), female

journalists ([The Chilling: A global study of online violence against women journalists](#)) or female students ([Brittan Heller](#)), etc.

2. What is the status of sexual harassment in the workplace-are the number of incidences rising, decreasing or can we even know?
3. ~~From your own perspective and in your own words, what is the importance of learning the history of working women in the U.S.?~~

Class 12: Race, Nationality & Work

1. Sue DW, Capodilupo CM, Torino GC, et al. (2007). [Racial microaggressions in everyday life: implications for clinical practice](#). American Psychologist. 62(4):271. (pp. 271-279)
2. IWPR (2018) [Status of Women in the States: The Economic Status of Women in New Jersey](#). (IPWR #R511) Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research. (pp. 1-4)
3. Javaid, S. (May 2025) [Attacks on the Federal Workforce Target Women and People of Color](#). National Women's Law Center. (10 pgs.)

Assignment:

Discussion Forum: This forum has two parts:

Complete and submit [Workbook: Work, Home and Life](#) and then share specifics and/or observations in the DF.

Class 13: Career Advancement

1. Rodgers, Y.V., Logue-Conroy, R., & Lancaster, D. (2024). [The Motherhood Penalty in New Jersey. Center for Women and Work](#). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University. (pp. 1-15 excluding Data and Methodology)
2. McGinn, K. (2023). Cross Generational Gains from Women's Employment in [Sons and Daughters of Working Mothers: Successes and Challenges](#) (1:14-29:30).
3. Peterson, A.H. (2020) "[Other countries have social safety nets. The U.S. has women.](#)" Culture Study. (10 pgs.)

Assignment:

[No assignment this week]

Class 14: Collective Action

1. Shaw, E. & Hartmann, H. (June 2019) [A Woman-Centered Economic Agenda: 8 Policies that Boost the Economy and Work for Everyone](#) [Links to an external site.](#). IWPR # I928 (pp.1-6)
2. Ibarra, H. (n.d.) [Building Effective Networks](#). VMware Women's Leadership Innovation Lab, Stanford University. (15:07 min.)
3. Collins, C. (2020). [Mothers Don't Need Balance. They Need Justice](#). TEDxUniversity of Nevada. (13:50 min.)

Assignment:

Autoethnographic paper due

Class 15: Final Assignments

Assignment:

Final Exam (Covers Classes 9 through 14)

GRADING CRITERIA AND COMPONENTS

Grading Criteria:

A	90-100%
B+	85-89%
B	80-84%
C+	75-79%
C	70-74%
D	60-69%
F	59% and below

Grades are based on the following components:

- #1 – Discussion Forum: Classes 3, 6, 10 & 12
20% of the grade
- #2 – Brief Reading Response: Classes 2 & 11 (Two-page paper)
20% of the grade
- #3 – Autoethnographic Paper: Classes 7 & 14 (Four-page paper)
30% of the grade
- #4 - Exams: Classes 8 & 15 (Exams are True/False, Multiple Choice, and Brief Answer Questions)
30% of the grade
- #5 – Extra Credit Exam: Class 2
Can be used to increase lowest test score by up to 15 points (=> 90 then 15 points, =>80 then 10 points & =>70 then 5 points)

AI tools may not be used in this course and their use will represent a violation of Rutgers Academic Integrity policy as they do not support Core Curriculum Goals.

Each Discussion Forum is worth 5% of one's grade, which is based on content and timing. That is, readings etc. as well as instructor and other student posts will provide the basis of content and all postings/responses should be provided during the week within which the topic/issues are examined.

Brief Response Papers are worth 10% of one's grade, which is based on content, persuasiveness and readability. Papers must be double-spaced throughout and 2 pages in length, each numbered with standard one-inch margins and 12-pitch font. In addition, papers must include a "References" section of sources cited.

The Autoethnographic Paper is worth 30% of one's grade. For more specifics, see "Autoethnographic Paper" below.

Each Exam is worth 15% of one's grade and is composed of true/false, multiple choice and brief answer questions. Content will cover the classes specified (i.e., tests are not cumulative). Exams must be completed in 1.5 hours. Though you may consult class materials to complete an exam, you may *not* consult with another student in any way.

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a

student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>.

Autoethnographic Paper

Your grade on this assignment is determined by (1) the content you present, (2) technically how well you present it and (3) the supportive data, which **MUST** be from your own life or the life of a sibling, parent or grandparent.

Autoethnography is a form of narrative writing that views the author's own experience as a topic of investigation. Key to this experience and hence the paper is clarifying how culture and social structure (e.g., the sexual division of un/paid labor, sexual harassment, gendered use of communication styles & tools, gendered attributes of leadership, etc.) shapes employment.

Using **comparative** data that you collect (e.g., quotes, pay rates, social security income, numbers of employees, length of employment, retirement savings, wealth differences, etc.) frame or contextualize your experience around one (or more) issues we have discussed (or will discuss) in the course. You will produce and provide a draft for review along the way. Papers must be double-spaced throughout and 4 pages in length*, each numbered with standard one-inch margins and 12-pitch font. Late papers may be downgraded. Data does **NOT** include academic references but is from your experience.

Students in the past have written about:

- sex-segregation in their home and/or workplace (e.g., females perform more unpaid work, managers are predominantly male, etc.);
- wage gap (e.g., a parent's experience or your own experience)
- sexual harassment (e.g., a parent's experience or your own experience of harassment or as a bystander);
- wealth gap (e.g., a parent's experience or your own experience);
- difference experiences in their own home (e.g., parental expectations for male vs. female children);
- differences at work that can be directly tied to sex/gender and race or nationality; and/or
- their personal experience of having a child and returning or not returning to work and how this affected them financially and professionally.

Though you are not obligated to submit a draft for my review, students who do so have traditionally earn much higher grades than those who do not. The major reason why students earn lower scores is because they do not include all the required personal data.

Examples of autoethnographic writing:

- See Files then "Autoethnography Examples" for past student papers.
- Fowler, S. (2017). [Reflecting On One Very, Very Strange Year At Uber](#)

* I will only read to the end of the 5th page in papers longer than 4 pages, pages after that will not be read/considered when assigning a grade.