



Working Woman in American Society

Professor: Amy Tracy Wells (she/her)

Email: Please use Canvas email

Calls/Texts/Emails will be returned within 24 hours. Zoom on request.

Course Overview

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, 1 Brief Response Paper, an Autoethnographic paper, and Exams.

This course includes readings, media, and discussion around topics such as sexual harassment and cyber violence. I acknowledge that this content may be challenging, uncomfortable, or distressing. 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.

Learning objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, you should be able to (Core Curriculum):

- Analyze contemporary social justice issues and unbalanced social power systems (CCD-2).
- Understand different theories about human culture, social identity, economic entities, political systems, and other forms of social organization.

Subject to change

Unit I. Introduction

Class 1: Introduction to Working Women in American Society

Become familiar with Canvas. 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 survey.

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:

Optional Brief Response Paper: There are a total of 3 brief response papers available this semester on multiple topics. You are required to complete 1 brief response paper this semester. For detailed questions and instructions, please refer to Canvas.

Unit III. Gender Equality & Inequality

Class 3: Gender

1. Sweeney, N. (2017). [Gender Stratification: Crash Course Sociology #32](#). Crash Course. (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: You are required to make a minimum of two posts: One original post in response to the discussion forum topic by Friday evening, and one response to a classmate's original post by Sunday evening. For detailed questions and instructions, please refer to Canvas.

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:

Quiz: The quiz will cover topics from the lecture and assigned content from classes 1-4 and consist of 1 brief essay and 3 multiple choice or multiple answer questions.

Unit IV. Now & Then

Class 5: Pay

1. Majumber, A. & Mason, J. (March 2025) [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:

Discussion Forum: You are required to make a minimum of two posts: One original post in response to the discussion forum topic by Friday evening, and one response to a classmate's original post by Sunday evening. For detailed questions and instructions, please refer to Canvas.

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:

Optional Brief Response Paper: There are a total of 3 brief response papers available this semester on multiple topics. You are required to complete 1 brief response paper this semester. For detailed questions and instructions, please refer to Canvas.

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:

Quiz: The quiz will cover topics from the lecture and assigned content from classes 5-7 and consist of 1 brief essay and 3 multiple choice or multiple answer questions.

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. (2 pp.)
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:

Autoethnographic paper – draft due

Class 10: Occupational (or Gender) Segregation & Tokenism

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. Zimmer, L. (1988) [Tokenism and Women in the Workplace: The Limits of Gender-Neutral Theory](#). *Social Problems*, 35 (1).

Assignment:

Discussion Forum: You are required to make a minimum of two posts: One original post in response to the discussion forum topic by Friday evening, and one response to a classmate's original post by Sunday evening. For detailed questions and instructions, please refer to Canvas.

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:

Optional Brief Response Paper: There are a total of 3 brief response papers available this semester on multiple topics. You are required to complete 1 brief response paper this semester. For detailed questions and instructions, please refer to Canvas.

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:

Autoethnographic paper due

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. Nobel, C. (May 15, 2015). Interview with Kathleen L. McGinn: [Children Benefit from Having a Working Mom](#), Harvard Business School.
3. Peterson, A.H. (2020) "[Other countries have social safety nets. The U.S. has women.](#)" *Culture Study*. (10 pgs.)

Assignment:

Quiz: The quiz will cover topics from the lecture and assigned content from classes 9-13 and consist of 1 brief essay and 3 multiple choice or multiple answer questions.

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](#). 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:

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 15: Final Exam

Assignment:

Final Exam (Covers Classes 9 through 14)

Grading Criteria & Components

A 90.00 – 100%
B+ 86.00 - 89.99%
B 80.00 – 85.99%
C+ 76.00 - 79.99%
C 70.00 - 75.99%
D 66.00 - 69.99%
F 65.99% and below

Grades are based on the following components:

- #1 – Discussion Forum: Classes 3, 5, 10 & 14
20% of the grade
- #2 – Class Quizzes: Classes 4,7 &12
15% of the grade (The lowest quiz grade will be automatically dropped.)
- #3 – Brief Response paper
15%
- #4 - Autoethnographic Paper: Class 12
30% of the grade
- #5 - Exams: Classes 8 &15
20% of the grade

Though course materials can be used to complete any assignment, quiz or exam, AI tools may not be used in this course, and their use will represent a violation of Rutgers Academic Integrity policy. Further, you may not work in any way with another student on the quizzes or exams as that too will represent a violation of Rutgers Academic Integrity policy.

- Each Discussion Forum is worth 5% of one's grade, which is based on original content and follow-up to another's student's post about that week's course content.
- Each Quiz is worth 5% of one's grade and will consist of one brief essay and 3 multiple choice or multiple answer questions. The lowest score on one of the quizzes will be automatically dropped.
- The Brief Response Paper is worth 15% of one's grade, which is based on content, persuasiveness and readability.
- The Autoethnographic Paper is worth 30% of one's grade.
- Each Exam is worth 10% of one's grade and is composed of short essay questions. Content will cover the classes specified (i.e., tests are not cumulative) and have up to 2 extra credit questions worth 10 and 15 points respectively. Exams must be completed in 1.5 hours.

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. Data does **NOT** include academic references but is from your experience.

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 using data to show 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 work.

Using **comparative** facts (i.e., data) that you collect (e.g., quotes or paraphrases, 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. 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.**

See the **Rubric** below to understand what elements are needed for your paper and how the grading is structured.

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](#)

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

Late Assignment Policy

All assignments are due on the dates specified in the syllabus and on Canvas. Late papers will incur a reduction of 20 points per day for up to five days. Submissions later than five days will not be accepted. Please make every effort to submit your work on time. Late Discussion Forum - original or response - posts will incur a reduction of 5 points per day. Quizzes and tests must be completed within the time allotted as late quizzes and tests are not accepted.

Disability Statement

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>.

Free Inquiry

Faculty and students alike are free to express their viewpoints at appropriate times in class, including perspectives that differ from most in the Rutgers University community. Students may be exposed to views they find challenging, uncomfortable, or distressing. But, since Rutgers is a public institution, First Amendment speech protections apply. Legally, feelings of discomfort are not sufficient to restrict speech. Pedagogically, exposing people to different ideas—even challenging their most deeply held beliefs—is a feature, not a flaw, of academic life. Free inquiry is essential to a robust learning environment. Students and professors are at our best—and best able to contribute to society—when we are exposed to a wide range of challenging ideas.