WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT AMONG BLACKS, WHITES, AND THREE GROUPS OF LATINAS:

DO MORE PRIVILEGED WOMEN HAVE HIGHER EMPLOYMENT?

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Abstract

During much of U.S. history, Black women had higher employment rates than white women. But by the late 20th century, women in more privileged racial-ethnic, national origin, and education groups are more likely to work for pay. We compare the employment of white women to Blacks and three groups of Latinas—Mexicans, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans—and explain racial-ethnic group differences. White women work for pay more weeks per year than Latinas or Black women. In all groups education encourages and children reduce employment, but having a husband does not reduce employment, and even husbands' earnings have little effect. In explaining the lower employment rates of Latinas relative to white women, the higher fertility of Mexican women, and the large number of immigrants among Mexican and Cuban women reduce their employment. The higher education of white women explains large shares of the employment gap with each group of women of color because, in today's labor market, education strongly predicts employment.

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In 1890, 40 percent of Black but only 16 percent of white women were in the labor force. By 1950, Black women's participation (38 percent) was still way ahead of white women's (29 percent) (England 1992:Table 1.1). We know less about the historical trajectory of Latinas' employment in the United States, since government statistics didn't start recording Hispanic ethnicity until the 1970s (Bean and Tienda 1987). By 1980, Black and white women's employment rates had converged at 47 percent, and 51 percent of Cuban, 44 percent of Mexican and 35 percent of Puerto Rican women were employed (calculated from Smith and Tienda 1988:63). Several authors have recently pointed out a cross-over. White women are now more likely to be employed than Black women and Latinas (Browne 1999; Corcoran 1999; Corcoran, Heflin and Reyes 1999). Employment declined substantially for Puerto Rican women (Tienda et al. 1992) and Black mothers with less than high school education (Corcoran 1999) between the 1960s and 1990.

Our analysis will show that by the early 1990s, African American women and Latinas (whether of Cuban, Mexican, or Puerto Rican descent) were employed at lower rates than nonHispanic white women. Moreover, despite welfare reform and the Earned Income Tax Credit, which pushed and pulled many poor women of color into employment in the 1990s (Meyer and Rosenbaum 2001), by 2001, white women still had the highest employment rates. We find that women with more education are more apt to be employed and that education explains a significant share of race and ethnic group differences in employment. We will show

that in all racial/ethnic groups except Blacks, immigrants are less likely to be employed than the native born. Our findings, and those of authors who have pointed out the Black-white cross-over, point to an emerging reality in which women in more privileged groups on dimensions of race, national origin, or education are more likely to be employed. Our claim is not that they are more privileged *because* they are employed. For many women who have low potential earnings (for reasons of their skills or discrimination) and would need to pay for child care, employment could make them worse off, especially if it meant losing government subsidies, as meager as they are (Edin and Lein 1997). However, for many women, employment confers benefits not obtainable any other way, and today these benefits go largely to women who are also advantaged on other dimensions. Understandings of how gender intersects with class, race, ethnicity, and national origin must grapple with this new reality.

The standard "gender story" has been that women's employment is deterred by marriage and children in the context of a division of labor that features husbands specializing in market work and providing income and wives responsible for child rearing and household work. We find that the part of this standard gender analysis which remains true is that young children reduce women's employment, although less than in earlier decades (Cohen and Bianchi 1999). But the "husband support" portion of the standard gender story never fit for women of color, immigrants, or many working class white women who historically have not had the option of being supported by a husband with a "family wage." This critique of the standard story was made by advocates of intersectionality, a perspective that looks at gender together with race, class, and other vectors of privilege (Higginbotham and Romero 1997). This critique was correct:

the lack of husbands with solid incomes, along with lower marriage rates, were undoubtedly

critical factors explaining Black women's higher employment rates than white women through the

1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. But today, white women, despite being more likely to be married to

high-earning men, have higher employment rates than Blacks or Latinas, as we will show. Cohen

and Bianchi's (1999) analysis from 1978 to 1998 shows that education became increasingly

predictive of women's employment over time, and family factors less so.   Thus, today economic

need is not the only, and not even the major factor driving women's employment. The earnings of

men with no more than a high school education have fallen dramatically in recent decades with

economic restructuring, leading to the hypothesis that this may explain some of the increase in

women's employment. But, as Chinhui and Murphy (1997) show, this hypothesis doesn't

square with the fact that women with college education, most of whom are married to men with

relatively high education and earnings, have increased their employment most dramatically. The

mystery is not that highly educated women would be employed at high rates–the increase in

recent decades of women's access to professional and managerial employment has made the jobs

available to college graduates more interesting and lucrative. What is perhaps surprising is that

their employment is now at a *higher* level than that of women at the bottom of class and race

hierarchies. Contemporary intersectionality must shed light on this reality.

PAST RESEARCH ON WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT AND ETHNIC DIFFERENCES

Children still reduce women's paid work in all ethnic groups (Tienda and Glass 1985;

Tienda et al. 1992; Christopher 1996; Cohen and Bianchi 1999; Kahn and Whittington 1996).

This is presumably because mothers, whether single or married, are generally more responsible

for child care than fathers, and they must replace their own services with paid help to be employed. Thus children increase the amount they need to earn to make work pay. The role we would expect for marriage is less clear, especially since it is not as tightly linked to child bearing as previously (Ellwood and Jencks forthcoming). Husbands could encourage a traditional division of labor, but absent such a differentiation by gender, having a husband might provide someone to share child rearing with and thus make it more possible for women to be employed. Kahn and Whittington (1992) find marriage to deter employment for Latinas but not white or Black women in 1990. Some recent studies have even found a positive (net) association between marriage and employment for Black women (Corcoran 1999; Christopher 1996). Of course, these "effects" may not really be causal, but rather indicative that the same women whose social networks include "marriageable" men are those whose race- and class-related advantages provide access to jobs that pay enough to make employment worthwhile. Past studies generally find husband's income to discourage employment (Tienda and Glass 1985), although less so over time (Cohen and Bianchi 1999). Analysis of 1980 and 1990 data find no significant effect of husbands' wage on Latinas' employment, but a negative effect for white women (Stier and Tienda 1992; Kahn and Whittington 1996).

Education and employment experience increase women's potential earnings, making the opportunity cost of staying home greater. They may also be indicators of more interest in and commitment to paid work, as well as access to more interesting jobs. Probably for all these reasons, studies have long found a positive effect of education on employment, especially when husband's earnings (often correlated with women's education because of marital homogamy) are

controlled (Kahn and Whittington 1996; Tienda and Glass 1985; Cohen and Bianchi 1999).

Christopher (1996) finds that education differences between Black and white women explain 20-

30 percent of Black women's fewer weeks of employment in 1990; Reid (2002) finds education

differences to explain some of the more frequent exits of Black than white women from

employment.

We will examine whether a woman is an immigrant, and, if so, when she entered the U.S.

Our hypothesis is that more recent immigrants will have fewer resources of language facility,

social capital, and local job experience and thus find getting a job more difficult and the potential

wage lower, and that this will lower the employment rates of immigrants, especially recent

arrivals. Despite a rich literature on gender and immigration (e.g. Pedraza 1991) and the difficult

work experiences of immigrant women (Romero 2002; Hondagnu-Sotelo 1997), few studies

compare the employment of immigrant and nonimmigrant women. Prieto (1978) shows that

Cuban women immigrants were employed at higher rates were current among women in Cuba at

the time. Nonetheless, Cooney and Ortiz (1983) found that native- or mainland-born women

were more likely to be employed than immigrants among Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban

women. They also show that English language proficiency facilitaties employment of Puerto

Rican and Mexican immigrants. (See Stier and Tienda 1992 for conflicting findings for various

groups of Latina immigrants on effects of recency of migration.)

Our analysis starts by documenting race-ethnic differences in weeks of employment in

1994 and 2001. For each year, we use regression analysis to examine how employment is affected

by age and number of children, marriage and husband's income, education, region, whether a

woman is an immigrant, and, if so, how recently she migrated. We use the regression results

together with race-ethnic differences in means to decompose the race-ethnic differences in

employment in each year. We seek to explain the gap between white women and each group of

women of color, assessing how much is explained by group differences in each of the independent

variables, and, where relevant, how much ethnic differential remains unexplained.

DATA AND METHODS

We use the 1994 and 2001 Current Population Survey (CPS) Annual Demographic Files

(U.S. Bureau of Census 1994, 2001). The CPS is a national probability sample of households.

We used individuals as the units of analysis, selecting women between the ages of 18-65 (to take

ages reasonably at risk for employment). We compare the three largest sub-groups of Latinas

with the two largest racial groups, whites and Blacks. We divide into non-Hispanic whites and

non-Hispanic Blacks, and among those reported as Hispanic, distinguished those of Mexican,

Puerto Rican, or Cuban descent (regardless of race, so that our Latino sample includes some who

also identify as Black). Other races (e.g. Asian, Native American) and Hispanics with ancestry

from other countries were omitted from our analysis. Although our categories cross-cut race and

ethnicity, we will use the terms interchangeably below. Table 1 presents the sample sizes and

means on all variables for each ethnic group.

Our dependent variable is the number of weeks a woman was employed in the previous

year. We chose to use this rather than a simple dichotomy measuring whether the individual was

employed at the time of the survey so as to use more detailed information. (Hsueh and Tienda

[1996] show how frequent labor force transitions make point-in-time measures of employment

misleading.)

We include independent variables hypothesized to explain variation in women's employment. Given the fact that all three Latina groups contain large numbers of immigrants, and differ in the recency of the large migration flows, we entered three dummy variables to capture whether a woman is an immigrant and, if so, how recent. The three categories for the 1994 data are immigrated to the U.S. before 1980, immigrated in the 1980s, and immigrated in 1990s. The categories for 2001 data are immigrated to the U.S. before 1990, immigrated between 1990 and 1997, and immigrated after 1997. In both analyses, the reference category is non-immigrant. Although people who are born in Puerto Rico and come to the mainland are not technically speaking, immigrants, since they are U.S. citizens, for continuity of terminology across groups, we will refer to them as immigrants to distinguish them from mainland-born women of Puerto Rican descent.

Education is measured with four dummy variables indicating that the woman has completed an advanced degree, completed an undergraduate degree, attended some college, or finished high school, with a reference category of those who did not complete high school. The sample contains women as young as 18, and some women in their late teens and 20s are attending college, which is likely to deter employment, so we include a dummy for whether the woman was enrolled in school full-time.

Marital status is captured with two dummies: married and no-longer married (divorced or widowed), with a reference category of those never-married. We also include a variable for the amount of income a woman's husband earned during the year; for unmarried women this is 0. We

include the number of children under age 6 that the woman has, and the number of children she

has between ages 6 and 18 (these are the age categories provided in the publicly available CPS).

We distinguish children by age since mothers are more apt to stay home with younger children.

Since CPS data do not include a measure of years of employment experience, which

increases across the life cycle with age, but also is more continuous in more recent cohorts, we

include age to roughly pick up these effects, and its square to capture nonlinearity. Because

employment opportunities for women may differ by region, and ethnic groups vary in regional

concentration, we include dummies for the West, Northeast, and South (North Central is the

reference category).

Given the continuous dependent variable, we use OLS regression to predict weeks

worked. However, since weeks worked has a nonnormal distribution, with a large number of

women at 0 weeks, in results not shown we perform a Tobit analysis, and the results are

qualitatively similar in terms of signs and relative magnitudes of effects of variables. For ease of

interpretation and decomposition, we present OLS results.

We regress weeks worked on dummies for ethnic groups (non-Hispanic Blacks, Cubans,

Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans, with whites the reference category) and other explanatory

variables, and include interactions between the ethnic dummies and all other variables described

above. We then trim all nonsignificant interactions, rerun models, and present results for the

coefficients on explanatory variables (other than ethnic dummies and interactions with them) in

the column labeled "white"in Tables 2 (1994) and 3 (2001). Coefficients in this column indicate

the effect for whites pooled with any ethnic groups whose slope for this variable was not

significantly different than whites' (as assessed by the interaction term). The separate columns in

Tables 2 and 3 for each group other than whites give the pooled coefficients if the interaction

term was not significant, and the distinct coefficient for this ethnic group in cases where the

interaction terms shows it to differ significantly from the effect for whites. Where interactions

showed that slopes differed by ethnicity, the slope for the group in question was calculated by

adding the coefficient on the covariate from the trimmed model (which tells the effect for whites

since they are the reference category on the ethnic dummy) to the interaction effect (which tells

how different from whites' slope this groups' slope is). Presenting results like this allows us to

show group differences in returns only when they are statistically significant.

We use the ethnic-specific means in Table 1, together with the regression results in Tables

2 and 3, to decompose ethnic differences in weeks worked between each group of women of color

and white women (Table 4). We chose white women to contrast all groups to because they are

the largest group, have the most racial/ethnic privilege, and have the highest employment.

Regression decomposition takes the difference in means between two groups on a dependent

variable, and assesses what percent of that difference is explained by group differences in means

on independent variables, on slopes, on intercepts (and an interaction between slopes and

intercepts). We restrict our attention to the portion explained by ethnic group differences in

means on independent variables, comparing it to the entire rest of the gap (which may be

explained by a combination of slope or intercept differences, or their interaction).[1] To compute

the portion of the gap between two groups' average weeks of employment that are explained by

group differences in means on an independent variable, we multiply the difference in the groups'

means on this independent variable times the slope for this variable. Where the group of women of color had a different slope from white women, Table 4 presents the estimate using the slope of the group of women of color; otherwise the pooled slope is used since it fits both groups. Thus, the decomposition implies this thought experiment, taking the white/Mexican gap as explained by education as an example: Suppose that Mexican women changed their education levels to those white women have, but how much education affects their employment (their slopes) remained unchanged. How many more weeks of employment per year would they have? And what percent of the gap between their employment and white women's (in weeks/year) would be closed by this change? (If which group's slope we use changes the story nontrivially, endnotes mention this.)

RESULTS: EXPLAINING ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN EMPLOYMENT

Table 1 shows the magnitude of white women's advantage in employment. In 1994, Cubans and Blacks worked 4 to 5 weeks less than whites. Mexican women were employed 9 weeks less per year than whites, and Puerto Rican women were employed the least, 12 weeks less than white women. By 2001, perhaps because of the combination of welfare reform, a strong economy, and the EITC which increased incentives for poor women's employment, the gaps between white women and all groups of women of color had narrowed. Yet white women still had the highest employment, narrowly above Black and Cuban women (less than 2 weeks), but about 6 weeks above Mexican and Puerto Rican women. Below we present results one explanatory factor at a time, paying attention to what we learn from combining the information from Tables 1-4: how groups are different in their means on each independent variable (Table 1),

what effect the variable has on employment in 1994 and 2001 (Tables 2 and 3), and how much of the gap in employment between each group of women of color and white women can be explained by group differences in means on the explanatory factors in each year (Table 4).

Immigration Status. In both 1994 and 2001, immigrant women have lower employment levels than native-born women for all ethnic groups except Blacks (Tables 2 and 3). In 1994, immigrants who arrived in the U.S. during the last three years averaged 14 weeks less employment, those who arrived in the 1980s worked 4 weeks less than non-immigrants, and those who came before 1980 worked about two weeks less than non-immigrants. A similar pattern is evident in 2001. Thus, the pattern for groups other than Blacks is that immigrants are employed less, but among immigrants, those who have been in the U.S. longer have employment more similar to the native-born. This pattern is probably explained by the fact that new immigrants lack network connections, English-speaking skills, and/or country-specific experience helpful in getting jobs.

For Blacks, the pattern *within* immigrants is similar to that of Latinas and whites; more recent immigrants are employed less than those who have been in the U.S. longer. But Blacks differ from all other groups in that immigrants, except for the most recent, actually have higher employment than native-born Blacks. Non-Hispanic Black immigrants are largely from the English-speaking Caribbean (the West Indies) and many white immigrants are from Canada. Thus, the results for whites and Blacks are not entirely comparable to those for Latinas since, among whites and Blacks, the group of native-born workers is not really the descendents of earlier migration streams from the same country that current immigrants in the ethnic group are

coming from, as is true for Latinas. Nonetheless, it is surprising that Black immigrants are

employed for *more* weeks than native-born Blacks; past research, which is beyond our scope to

review here, has shown and attempted to explain the advantage of Caribbean-born over native-

born Blacks (Waters Forthcoming; Kalmijn 1996).

How much of the gap in weeks of employment between white women and women of

color can be explained by immigration? The groups with high proportions of immigrants are the

three Latina groups; in 1994, only 5 percent of whites and 6 percent of Blacks but 50 percent of

Mexicans, 61 percent of Puerto Ricans, and 83 percent of Cubans were immigrants (Table 1). By

2001, the percentage of Mexicans who were immigrants increased, while the percentage decreased

for Cubans and Puerto Ricans. Among immigrants, Mexicans are the most and Cubans the least

recent, because the largest wave of Cubans came shortly after Castro came to power, whereas

Mexican immigration has been continuous and growing. Presence and recency of immigrants

explains about 2 weeks of each of the white/Mexican and white/Cuban employment gaps in 1994;

however, since the employment gap is much bigger for Mexicans, immigration explains a larger

portion of the Cuban/white gap (41 percent) than the Mexican/white gap (25 percent) (Table 4).

Presence and recency of immigrants explains 1.4 weeks, or 11 percent of the 1994 white/Puerto

Rican gap (Table 4). Immigration is an entirely trivial factor in the white/Black gap in both 1994

and 2001(Table 4). In 2001, immigration status explains a greater portion of the (now smaller)

employment gap between white women and Latinas; presence and recency of immigrants

explains 2 weeks, 25 percent of the Mexican/white gap (Table 4), 1 week or 22 percent of the

Puerto Rican/white gap and it over-explains the small Cuban/white gap in 2001. In sum, the

greater representation of immigrants among Latinas than whites is an important part of the reason that Latinas, particularly Mexicans, have lower employment rates.

Education. Education is related to employment for all groups. In the pooled model for 1994, high school graduates have 10 more weeks employment per year than drop outs, those with some college 13 more, college graduates 15 weeks more, and those with advanced degrees 19 weeks more (Table 2). Mexicans have the lowest returns to high school, while Blacks have the highest employment returns to college and graduate degrees (Table 2). Education slopes are similar in 2001. In 2001, Puerto Ricans and Blacks have stronger effects of a college degree on employment than other groups, but there are no other group differences in education returns.

How does education affect ethnic differences in employment? Whites have the highest levels of education and Mexicans the lowest in both years (Table 1). Education is important in explaining the employment gap between all groups of women of color and white women. In 1994, the lower education of Mexicans explains 5 weeks or 53 percent of their employment gap with whites; for Puerto Ricans the figure is 4 weeks or 33 percent; for Cubans 2 weeks or 52 percent; and for Blacks 2 weeks or 46 percent (Table 4). In 2001, a similar number of weeks are explained by education as in 1994, but because the employment gaps to be explained are smaller, education explains a larger percentage of the gaps. The percent explained in 2001 are 69 percent for Mexicans, 66 percent for Puerto Ricans, 68 percent for Cubans, and over 100 percent for Blacks.[2] While the general picture is of Black and Puerto Rican women having less employment because they have less education, given their higher employment returns to college than other groups, an interesting note is that in 2001, Black and Puerto Rican women who are college

graduates actually work a few more weeks per year than white women (not shown).

      <u>Marital Status and Husbands' Income.</u> Marriage no longer deters employment for women. In 1994, the pooled slope that fits whites and all groups other than Mexicans shows married women to be employed for 2 *more* weeks than the never married, and women who were previously married are also employed 2 weeks longer than the never married, net of other factors (Table 2). In 1994, marriage itself deters employment only for Mexicans, and only by 1 week/year. In 2001, there is no significant difference between currently married women and never married women, but women who were previously married work 1 more week than those who have never married (these effects apply to all groups; Table 3).

      Even if marriage itself doesn't deter employment, we might think that husband's income would. But support for this idea is weak and inconsistent. Husband's income deters employment for whites and Cubans, but the effect is trivial (.3 of a week for each additional $1,000/year). Husband's income actually *increases* employment for Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Blacks in 1994, although the magnitude of these effects is also trivial (a fraction of a week for each $1,000/year). By 2001, husband's income has a trivially deterring effect for all groups except Blacks, who show a trivial positive effect. All of these effects seem too small to take as substantively interesting.

      White women are the most likely to be married (64 percent), with Mexicans (59 percent) and Cubans (57 percent) right behind them, and Puerto Rican (40 percent) and Black (32 percent) women having much lower rates in 1994 (Table 1). Marriage rates are lower for all groups by 2001, but groups differences are similar (Table 1). Marriage explains none of the white/Cuban or

white/Mexican employment gaps in either year (Table 4). But both Blacks and Puerto Ricans have much lower marriage rates and less income from husbands in both years. Given the odd findings that, if anything, marriage or husband's income increase employment for these groups in 1994, paradoxically, their lower access to other income through marriage and husband's income actually "explains" a substantial portion of the white/Puerto Rican and white/Black gaps in 1994 (22 percent of the white/Puerto Rican gap, and 32 percent of the white/Black gap). Oddly, they appear to work for pay less because they don't have a husband or a high earning husband![3] How can we make sense of this? In some cases, marriage may encourage employment for poor women because even low husband's income often disqualifies one from receiving welfare. But, it is also possible that these associations between marriage and husband's income are not truly causal but rather reflect "selectivity"—that women whose (unmeasured) class, neighborhood, or network privilege give them access to "marriageable" men may also have employment advantages. Given a number of small offsetting factors, the 2001 decomposition does not find group differences in marriage or husband's income to explain a nontrivial share of any of the group differences in employment (it reduces some group differences so white women's marriage and to higher earning men makes their employment less far ahead than it would otherwise be). The main point we take away from all these small but conflicting effects of marriage and husband's income is that effects on employment are very small relative to effects of education or immigration status, and they often don't fit the standard "gender division of labor" story.

    Children. Although marriage and husbands' incomes no longer do much to deter employment, children do deter employment for all ethnic groups. The pooled models for 1994

show that, each child under 6 is associated with 7 fewer weeks of employment per year, and each child from 6 to 18 with 3 fewer weeks. Effects are similar in 2001 (a bit smaller for older children). Blacks show a somewhat smaller (but still significant) deterrent effect than other groups. Cuban women have lower fertility than white women, so fertility differences explain none of the employment gap; in both years the gap would be slightly larger if Cuban women had the (higher) fertility of white women (Table 4). But fertility is crucial to the white/Mexican employment gap, explaining 25 percent of the 9 week gap in 1994 (Table 4) and 30 percent of the 7 week gap in 2001 (Table 4). Black and Puerto Rican women have fertility higher than that of Cubans or whites, but lower than that of Mexicans (Table 1). Puerto Rican women's fertility levels relative to white women explain 13 percent of the 12 week gap in 1994 and 15 percent of the 5 week gap in 2001 (Table 4). Black women's higher fertility explains less than 1 week, or 17 percent of the Black/white gap in 1994 and nothing in 2001 (Table 4). In results not shown, we interacted children with marriage to see if married women were more likely to forego employment because of children, but found no such consistent pattern. This may be because, for single women with low potential earnings, welfare, as meager as it is, may be a better option than their earnings minus child care costs, thus creating a negative effect of children for single women as well.

Age. Age structure has little to do with ethnic gaps in employment, with one exception. Cubans have an unusually old age structure because of the large migration after the revolution and their low fertility. Differences in age between Cubans are whites are important (explaining about 2 weeks in each year, not shown). The impact of age is included in the total explained in Table 4, but is not reported as it generally has little effect except for Cuban/white differences.

Region. Results provide no clear message about how groups' different   regional

distributions affect employment prospects, so we don't show the decomposition for region in

Table 4 (except in totals explained by all independent variables together). In results not shown

we assess whether the concentration of Puerto Ricans in New York and New Jersey or of Cubans

in Florida accounts for their lower employment rates. We do not find this to be true; models with

dummies for each state have similar coefficients to our models with only regional control.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Our analysis explains most or all of the white/Mexican and white/Cuban employment

gaps in both years. In 1994 Mexican women are employed 9 weeks less than white women; this

gap is explained by the fact that the Mexican population contains more immigrants, especially

recent immigrants (2 weeks of the gap), has lower education (5 weeks), and higher fertility (2

weeks) (Table 4). When all factors are added together, 96 percent of the 1994 white/Mexican gap

has been explained, with education being the largest factor by far. In 2001, the findings are

qualitatively the same. The gap to be explained narrowed from 9 to 7 weeks. The biggest factor

is education, followed by immigration and fertility, and together they more than explain the gap

(104 percent) (Table 4).

Cuban women have a smaller employment gap with white women (4 weeks) in 1994, and

it is largely explained by our variables. The large factors are the older age structure of Cubans

(explaining 2 weeks, not shown), the high proportion of immigrants (1.7 weeks), and lower

education (2 weeks). Combined, these variables more than explain the gap. By 2001, there is

less than a 2 week/year employment gap with white women, but it is more than entirely

explained by group differences in immigration and education. In both years, Cuban fertility, being lower than whites, makes their employment higher than it would be if they had the white fertility, so this factor is offsetting (about -1 week) rather than contributing to the gap (Table 4).

While our decomposition has explained virtually all (sometimes more than all) of whites' employment advantage relative to Mexican and Cuban women, we explain less, although still a large share, of the gap with the most disadvantaged groups, Black and Puerto Rican women. In 1994, the biggest gap is for Puerto Rican women, employed 12 weeks less than white women, whereas the Black/white gap was 5 weeks. By 2001 those gaps had shrunk to 5 and 1 week, respectively. Our decomposition explains 77 percent of the gap for Puerto Ricans in 1994 and 84 percent of the smaller gap in 2001. For Blacks, the figures are 73 percent in 1994, and 84 percent of the (trivial) gap in 2001. For both groups, and in both years, education is the biggest factor, explaining 33 percent and 66 percent of the white/Puerto Rican gap in 1994 and 2001 respectively, and explaining 46 percent and 131 percent of the white/Black gaps in the respective years. Puerto Ricans' higher rate of "immigration" explains 11 percent in 1994 and 22 percent in 2001 of employment gaps with white women. The fact that we cannot explain all of the white/Puerto Rican and white/Black gaps suggests that factors unmeasured in our regressions are affecting Puerto Rican and Black women more than other groups. Some combination of employment discrimination and living in segregated neighborhoods with inferior schools and few jobs easily accessible, sometimes making welfare the best option for single mothers, undoubtedly contributes to unexplained portions of these gaps.

By 2001, employment increased for all groups, but especially for Black and Puerto Rican

women. The employment gaps between whites and all groups of women of color narrow, especially those with Blacks and Puerto Ricans. The increased employment of Black and Puerto Rican women was probably because of some combination of welfare reform which pushed many women into employment, the strong economy of the late 1990s providing more jobs at the bottom, albeit still at low wages, and the expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit, which strongly increased the rewards for employment for low-income women, providing a tax credit of several thousand dollars in excess of the taxes paid for some families. This recent change, disproportionately bringing less class- and race-privileged women into employment, is opposite the longer term trends in which more privileged women on ethnicity and education are increasing their employment the most. Despite the narrowing of the gaps, similar variables are still important in explaining the remaining gaps and in 2001 the decomposition explains a higher proportion of smaller gaps with the measured variables—all of whites' greater employment relative to Mexicans and Cubans, and 84 percent of the gap with each of Blacks and Puerto Ricans (Table 4).

What do these findings imply for our contemporary understanding of race, gender, and other axes of privilege such as education and being born in the mainland U.S.? Sociologists often tell a "gender story" in which women are disadvantaged in the labor market relative to men in part because of a division of labor in marriage in which women do child rearing. Our findings suggest that today, responsibility for children, not marriage, is the lynchpin of gender inequality, at least insofar as it affects employment. And child bearing is less closely coupled with marriage than previously. The higher fertility of Black, Puerto Rican, and especially Mexican women reduces

their employment, even while their low marriage rates do little or nothing to encourage their employment. Advocates of an intersectionality perspective have criticized the "generic" gender account emphasizing marriage and children, pointing out that many Blacks and Latinas need to work for pay because of the unemployment or low wages of men of their race. We agree that scholarship should seek to understand how race, class, and gender intersect, but our findings make clear that the central race/gender interaction is no longer that less privileged women on race and class are more likely to work outside the home. The unquestionably greater need for employment among women of color no longer leads to higher employment rates (albeit at low wages) as it once did.

In recent decades, the rise in women's employment has actually been greatest among the well educated (Cohen and Bianchi 1999; Chinhui and Murphy 1997). This is one reason that white women, who still have some edge in educational attainment, now have higher employment levels, as our analysis has shown. In the 1970s and 1980s, the most disadvantaged racial and ethnic groups were adversely impacted by recent trends toward greater earnings inequality and the drop in demand for labor with workers low in the labor queue for reasons of education or discrimination. It is well known that this negatively impacted the earnings of men with low education, especially Black men (Bernhardt, Morris and Handcock 2001). But this restructuring made employment more difficult for some groups of women as well, especially women of color with no more than a high school education (Browne 1999; Corcoran 1999; Tienda et al. 1992). While it remains true that many women need employment because they are single or married to men with modest earnings, it is simply not true today that the women who need jobs the most

are most apt to find them. Women privileged by race, national origin, and education are the most likely to be employed, as our analysis has shown. Some of the employment edge of privileged women is ascriptive (being born in the U.S., or the edge of white women over Black and Puerto Rican women that remained unexplained by our models), and some is on "achieved" criteria such as education or lower fertility.

The last decade has also made it clear that economic and political trends can move the employment of women of color in either direction relative to white women. While some combination of the pressures of welfare reform, the incentives to employment of the EITC, and the strong economy of the 1990s increased the employment of women of color more than that of white women, we would not be surprised if the post-2001 recession is currently reversing those gains. The general picture of recent trend research is of losses for men and women toward the bottom of labor queues defined by education or ethnicity. At the same time all groups share in a retreat from marriage, but less advantaged groups have not delayed their age of childbearing as much as more educated women, so the result is an increased proportion of births outside of marriage, especially among those who do not go to college, and particularly among Blacks (Ellwood and Jencks forthcoming; Raley 1996). When we put these realities together with the retrenchment of welfare, we see that women in less privileged racial and ethnic groups are experiencing simultaneous decreases in their chances of employment, marriage, *or* welfare to provide a decent level of support for themselves and their children. This is the reality that intersectionality studies must grapple with in future research.

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[1] We focus only on the difference-in-means components because Jones and Kelly (1984) have shown that one cannot distinguish between the portion of the gap explained by group differences in slopes and intercepts; changing the metric on an independent variable or changing which

reference category is used (for a set of dummies representing one multiple-category variable) will change how standard formulas apportion the gap between that "explained by" intercept and slope differences. Thus, the only clear distinction is between how much of the gap in employment weeks is explained by group differences in means on each variable versus the entirety of the rest of the gap (from differences in slopes or intercepts, taken together).

[2] The explanatory power of education for the Black/white gap in 1994 would be less, 39 percent rather than 46 percent, if the pooled education slopes were used rather than Black women's returns, since Black women have higher returns to education, but the 2001 gap is more than 100 percent explained by education whether Black women's own or pooled slopes are used.

[3] Here the choice to use Black and Puerto Rican women's slopes makes a difference. These groups are less likely to be married have lower husbands' income in both years. But while the effects of marriage and husband's income are generally small, they change over time differently by group. Decomposing the Puerto Rican/white gap, ethnic differences in marital status and husband's income explain 22 percent in 1994 but -18 percent in 2001 in Table 4; if pooled slopes are used, it is -7 percent in 1994 and -18 percent in 2001 (not shown). For Blacks, Table 4, using Blacks' own slopes shows these factors explaining 32 percent of the 1994 and 15 percent of the 2001 gap; if pooled slopes are used, it is -15 percent and -83 percent.