

As the director of this agency I would like to state that I too, am concerned with the findings from the 2010 Census which show growing economic disparities, indicating that Utah is rapidly becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. “There have clearly been critical changes over the past 50 years in how women work during their lifetimes, in both paid and nonpaid work. In the face of these dramatic changes, critical differences have persisted within the population of employed women. Major inequalities in U.S. society shape where women work, their working conditions, their wages and salaries, their abilities to control their work environments, and how they see themselves in the workplace (Elizabeth Higginbotham, Shapiro p.346).” I would like to discuss with you what I feel are two major contributors to the labor market challenges facing women in Cache Valley. The first being racial/ethnic backgrounds and the second being motherhood.

“Race, ethnicity, and social class shape distinctive circumstances for women throughout the life cycle, given that most women in the United States spend many years in the workforce, this has dramatic implications for their lives (Elizabeth Higginbotham, Shapiro p.347).” Black and Hispanic women trail white women in the amount of school they have completed and also stand apart from white women in relation to other social and demographic aspects associated with labor market outcomes. So what does this mean? It’s hard enough as it is for white a woman to get a competitive job in the work force having a formal education. Now imagine you’re a woman of color without a formal education. Landing a competitive job might be next to impossible without an education.

There could be a number of reasons why one might have had to end their education prematurely. Perhaps they were forced to enter the workforce early. For example; historically, black men earned less than their white counterparts. With the cost of living on the rise and this lower income, many wives were forced to enter the job force to help make ends meet.

With Utah becoming more and more racially and ethnically diverse, it can be very difficult for women of color to find jobs. So what is to be done here? “We know that the major ideology with regard to race among White Americans is color blindness- that is, a willingness to ignore the reality of race and just see people as people. . . We have to recognize that as people of color and working-class persons enter spaces that were formerly middle-class and all White, there is a cost for them. These settings might be hostile and alien and, in their physical reality, not welcoming to people who are different . . . It is important that employers, administrators, and those responsible for justice in the workplace hold supervisors accountable for ensuring that tensions are not translated into new structures of inequality (Elizabeth Higginbotham, Shapiro p.350).” Most people aren’t aware of the phrase “white privilege” (Class Lecture Nov 2) or what it means. People need to be made aware that they might unintentionally be doing something that could be considered racist.

Now let’s talk briefly about motherhood. Let me start by saying that there’s nothing wrong with one wanting to be a mother. There’s no reason why one can’t be a mother and also take an active part in the labor force. Yet studies show that gender inequalities in employment and especially wages, occupational sex segregation, and involvement in part-time work primarily manifest for women and men with children (Gender Tradeoffs, p. 170).

Many women have entered the labor force over the past 20 years or so with male wages on the decline and the cost of living on the rise. So why is it women receive lower wages in the work force? Some have suggested that women might intentionally select jobs with lower economic rewards in order to maximize other work (i.e. motherhood). Others have argued that because women are so heavily concentrated in a small number of occupations, that competition lowers the prevailing wage rate (Class Lecture Nov 28). So which is it? Are mothers settling for part-time work rather than full-time employment so that they can spend more time at home caring for their families? Or are there too few occupations for women to choose from that they have no choice but to accept a job offering lower pay?

“In the 1990’s, we find that the range of occupations on which women are employed is more varied than in 1947, although the majority of women [were] still in sex-segregated occupations (Elizabeth Higginbotham, Shapiro p.352).” “Redskin and Roos (1990) found that women are likely to enter fields as men abandon them in response to structural changes and/or earnings decline (Elizabeth Higginbotham, Shapiro p.352).” With these “abandoned jobs” women can now be found tending bars, baking bread outside the home, selling real estate, and working in positions in banking other than behind tellers’ windows (Elizabeth Higginbotham, Shapiro p.352). Having said that, even though women are increasingly entering jobs that pay better than most traditional female occupations it still rarely closes the wage gap and has yet to give us a true integration of workplaces that is beneficial to all women.

“Single women, women with no children, and women who maintain full-time work generally do as well as similarly skilled men across countries . . . and have exhibited strong gains

in employment along with gains in occupational integration and wages. Yet we struggle to identify even one country where women can have children without risking their economic fortunes (Gender Tradeoffs, p. 170).”

So what can be done for women that wish to have families and still make a respectable earning in the work force, equal to that of an unwed woman without children? For starters, one of the simplest things that can be done isn't done by the mother at all, but rather by the father. “Gender divides in the workplace are strongly related to gendered expectations surrounding domestic work and the care of children. Women’s economic advancement is deeply intertwined with men’s involvement in home production. Policies and conditions that support men’s home production may further women’s economic standing. Reductions in work hours and “use it or lose it” paternity leave schemes are two examples of efforts to encourage men’s involvement in the domestic sphere (Gender Tradeoffs, p. 175).” Plain and simple: men need to get involved. Secondly, “supporting women as worker and mothers is also critical for advancing women’s economic opportunities, enabling them to make choices about how to allocate their time, and shaping normative expectations about the appropriateness of the employment of women and mothers. Publicly supported child care, extended school days, and flexible working arrangements may allow women to combine work and family, should they choose to do so (Gender Tradeoffs, p. 176).”

The main thing we can do to help fight the growing economic disparities, indicating that Utah is rapidly becoming more racially and ethnically diverse is to spread the word of the issues at hand. “Public action and advocacy against gender inequality are necessary to redress

women's blocked access to jobs and mobility within traditionally male occupations and professions, and to promote equal pay for comparable work, higher wages for traditionally female professions and other efforts that seek to address important differences in employment prospects for men and women (Elizabeth Higginbotham, Shapiro p.352)."