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Research Statement

The economic approach in answering difficult questions is what drew me to the field in my early college career. I am interested in using economic methods to understand the ‘why’ of certain market outcomes, specifically for women in the labor market.

I strive with my research to contribute to the existing knowledge on women in the workplace and I strive to understand through the lens of economics the individual labor-related choices that aggregate to labor market outcomes.

My academic research uses statistical methods to analyze the dynamics that effect women in the labor market, with the intention of advocating policy and educational pathways for women in various fields. My research fits well into labor and gender economics.

The purpose of my dissertation is to explore how market dynamics, namely low unemployment, affect the number of women and the wages of those women in blue-collar occupations and industries. The first chapter of my dissertation, “Under Pressure: Effects of Tight Labor Markets on Women in Skilled Blue-Collar Occupations,” looks at the labor market factors that lead to women’s increasing or decreasing representation in blue-collar occupations at the metropolitan statistical area (MSA) level. The low unemployment rate coupled with the high need for blue-collar labor provided the background for this paper, as I questioned whether tight labor markets would cause firms to hire more women as an alternative labor source. I propose skilled blue-collar labor (occupations requiring a degree or certification) to be an alternative path for women who do not plan to go to college. Using American Community Survey (ACS) data from 2005-2019, I show that low service wages are a contributing factor for an increase of women in blue-collar occupations. I also show that the number of women in skilled blue-collar labor is modestly affected by low unemployment.

In the same vein as the first chapter, the second chapter of my dissertation, “The Effect of Tight Labor Markets on Women in Management in Blue-Collar Industries,” explores a similar question as the first chapter, however at a different angle. The basis of this paper is that certain management occupations exist both in blue-collar industries (such as construction) as well as in non-blue-collar industries (such as education). An example highlighted in the paper is Finance Managers. This paper seeks to understand if tight labor markets effect the number of women in non-blue-collar management within blue-collar industries, using ACS data. Another purpose of this paper is to show patterns of women’s employment in management-industry pairs over time. I also explore, using O*NET information, what differences exist between blue-collar management occupations and non-blue-collar management occupations.

The third chapter of my dissertation, “Is CTE for Me? An Exploration of Women in High-School Level CTE Classes,” deviates from exploring current labor market outcomes to looking at young women’s experiences in secondary education. I measure the impact of community and school variables on the number of women enrolled in Career Technical Education (CTE) classes in high schools across Tennessee. CTE education is an important topic to Tennessee, as CTE classes in high school lead to enrollment in technical colleges. The lack of young women in those classes could represent a failure on the part of the schools and the state to appropriately support young women who want to take those classes. This also could lead to a shortage of skilled blue-collar labor in the future if young women are not enrolled in these classes and thus never continue to blue-collar education.

Working on my dissertation has led me to see that committees and research groups exist that hope to answer questions about women’s labor market outcomes and how interventions can influence the educational and career paths of women. I am particularly interested in the motivations of women as they enter higher education, their perceptions of success of various fields, and their adherence to individually-based and peer-based beliefs.

Going forward, I expect to continue using the framework of economic incentives and choice to explore the labor market dynamics that influence women, adding to the knowledge of women in the labor market.