

**PHD THESIS SUMMARY:
Gender in the Labor Market**

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In the novel *Orlando: A Biography*, Virginia Woolf (1928) tells the story of the nobleman Orlando, who undergoes a mysterious change of sex and lives the rest of his life as a woman. Woolf depicts Orlando's despair after discovering the limitations and expectations that come with being a woman:

The comforts of ignorance seemed utterly denied her. She was a feather blown on the gale. Thus it is no great wonder, as she pitted one sex against the other, and found each alternately full of the most deplorable infirmities, and was not sure to which she belonged—it was no great wonder that she was about to cry out. (77–78)

As economists, we might think of these deplorable infirmities in other ways than Orlando does, but we are well aware of gender differences in behavior and inequalities in outcomes. While men and women's roles in society have converged over the last century, substantial gender gaps remain. This dissertation approaches the question of gender equality from different angles—parenthood, job loss, and occupational outcomes—to shed new light on how gender norms contribute to persistent gaps.

The notion of gender norms is making its way into economics (Lundberg 2022), and in this endeavor it is useful to pay attention to insights from the other social sciences. Sociologists Pearse and Connell (2016) show that economists often—either explicitly or implicitly—assume a strong consensus in society and fail to acknowledge the within-society variation regarding gender-related attitudes. Drawing on insights from the broader social sciences, Pearse and Connell (2016) also argue that while gender norms can be stated abstractly (e.g., in value surveys), what matters is the way norms function in social life. Treating norms as something that inhabits the mind of individuals (and not too different from the concept of preference), overlooks how norms function as the

pillars of a community or society, and how they are embedded in institutions, whether in the form of organizations, public policies, or collective identities.

Parental leave policies provide a useful example of this. In high- and middle-income countries, parenthood is the main driver of gender inequality in the labor market. To help mothers balance work and family considerations, most countries have implemented some sort of maternity leave system. Chapter 1 (published as Canaan, Lassen, Steingrimsdottir and Rosenbaum 2022) reviews a large literature on the impact of maternity, paternity, and parental leave on women's labor market outcome, maternal and child health, and firms. While parental leave can be used by any parent, mothers are the primary users of these policies and mothers subsequently allocate more time to childcare than fathers.

Chapter 2 provides an improved understanding of the striking gender gaps in time allocation following parenthood. A parental leave reform in Denmark provides a useful setting for understanding how parents distribute leave. The reform economic compensation new parents received while on leave effectively increased the leave duration. At the same time, policymakers removed two weeks of earmarked leave specifically allocated to fathers. First, I show that mothers increase their leave by 5 weeks while the average leave duration of fathers remains unchanged, irrespective of relative earnings. Second, I ask how gender norms at the family level influence women's take-up. The pattern is highly consistent with a model of gender identity: women who had a working mother take a shorter leave than those with a stay-at-home mother. Moreover, I document peer effects among sisters who take a longer leave if exposed to the reform-induced change in leave duration. The chapter utilizes within-society variation in gender norms to understand the mechanisms being the striking gender gaps in time allocation around parenthood and highlights how policies and norms are intertwined.

When the responsibility of childcare falls disproportionately on women, it likely imposes constraints on how women can adjust to labor market shocks. Chapter 3 investigates the effects on women's and men's job loss. Following job loss, women are facing a higher risk of unemployment than their male counterparts. Women are over-represented among workers with little formal education. In addition, both the absolute and the unexplained parts of the gender gap grow in the presence of children. Women's gain in the labor market is fragile and mothers are facing meaningful barriers.

Chapter 4 focuses on intergenerational transmission of the gender composition of occupations. While female-dominated sectors are growing in size and importance (Petrongolo and Ronchi 2020), men appear reluctant to enter these occupations. To improve the understanding of the gender norms that are influencing men, I use detailed administrative data to construct measures at the family level, school level, and broader municipal environment to capture transmitted norms of the ‘appropriate role’ of men and women. Boys socialized in environments with men who have gender-stereotypical labor market behavior enter male-dominated occupations themselves. In general, women’s labor market behavior has negligible effects on boys. However, when boys grow up around a larger share of mothers who work full-time gender segregation decreases in the next generation. The chapter highlights both the immediate family and the schooling environment as important sites for the construction of gender norms.

Each of the empirical chapters of the thesis are answering independent questions related to gender equality. With detailed and linkable administrative data, I construct measures of gender norms and exploit variation in important spheres. Next to the empirical contributions of this thesis, there is an underlying lesson: gender norms are not monolithic. Paying attention to within-society variation and the sites that enforce gender norms provides meaningful insights into the mechanisms behind persistent gender gaps.

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