

ECN 500/WGS 500 (001) - HANDOUT - FALL 2009
Introductory Definitions, Outline of the Course
Brief History

Definition 1 *Economics is the study of the allocation of scarce resources.*

Definition 2 *Gender is the social meaning given to biological differences between the sexes; it refers to cultural constructs rather than biological givens (from Ferber and Nelson, pp. 9-10, on reading list).*

Definition 3 *Sex characteristics are used to classify men and women; they are biologically determined, they are determined by nature.*

Definition 4 *Gender characteristics are used to classify masculine traits and feminine traits; they are culturally determined, i.e., determined by the environment, nurtured.*

Definition 5 *Economics and Gender is the area that explicitly considers the effects of the existence of two genders in the allocation of scarce resources.*

OVERVIEW OF THE COURSE

- The household as a site of resource allocation; the intrahousehold economy.
 - Who does what in the household? Why?
 - * What factors determine specialization of labor within the household? How is this influenced by factors outside of the household (specifically labor markets)? What types of changes lead to changes in this specialization?
 - Who gets what in the household? Why?
 - * The building blocks of bargaining models. Potential gains from cooperation. Gains by individuals as they depend on exit options, options outside the household situation.
 - Other models involving the household.
 - * An economic model of domestic violence. What determines the level of violence in a household? (Specifically, we consider the level of violence of a male against a female.) How is this level influenced by exit options? How does the threat of violence influence the female's behavior?
 - * Terror as a bargaining instrument
- Labor markets and gender.
 - Who does what jobs outside the household? Why?
 - Who gets paid how much? Why?
 - Is there gender discrimination in the labor market? What is its nature? What is the evidence about wage discrimination?
 - Sexual Harassment

BRIEF HISTORY

- Prior to the industrial revolution, the family was an economic unit; marriage was an economic partnership. All members were expected to earn their own keep.
 - For example, a family might produce products in the home for sale; i.e., it might produce items with exchange value. Simultaneously, the wife and other women in the household would produce items with exchange value and those with use value, i.e., those for consumption by the family (note that our meaning of this phrase is different from your text's).
 - For example, a family might work together on someone else's farm.

- As a result of the industrial revolution (in the last half of the 18th century in Great Britain, early 19th century in America), many changes occurred.
 - Given the ensuing change in the nature of the production of items with exchange value (and some with use value), many individuals were pulled from the home into factories and businesses.
 - Women
 - * Some sought wages in factories, home work, or a few other employments.
 - * Some became part of the “leisure class” or they became “parasitic,” depending on others (husbands, fathers, brothers) for their support, although they faced the prospect of having to find outside employment if their male relatives ceased to support them.

What Were Labor Market Conditions Like?

- Relative to Men, Women Faced Limited Job Opportunities
 - The possibilities were: governess, teacher (lower levels), agricultural worker, factory worker (typically in clothing and textile industries), seamstress, i.e., needlewoman, domestic industry worker, e.g., lacemaker, glove maker, domestic servant, prostitute
 - In fact the possibilities were so few that it was said that women could “marry, stitch, die, or do worse.”
- Why Did They Face Limited Job Opportunities?
 - Sometimes they were unable to perform jobs due to lack of education, training.
 - * Women couldn’t enter professions (e.g., medicine, law) since they were barred from the necessary education.
 - * When education had to be paid for, family resources tended to go toward educating males in the family.
 - * Women were barred from significant apprenticeships.
 - Employers were unwilling to hire women.
 - Women were barred by unions from some work (or women did not successfully unionize themselves).
 - * There were efforts by women to improve the situation, but Sumner notes that “[a]t the 1835 convention of the National Trades’ Union a resolution was passed recommending that the workingmen oppose, ‘by all honest means, the multiplying of all description of labor for females - inasmuch as the competition it creates with males tends inevitably to impoverish both’ ” (p. 28, *Women in America: From Colonial Times to the Twentieth Century*, 1910).
- Women Also Faced Low Wages Relative to Men
 - They often could not make a “subsistence” wage, i.e., a wage which was just enough to support themselves. Often a woman earned 1/4 to 1/2 what a man earned even for what appeared to be the same work.
 - We’ll see through our readings that there were efforts made by women to improve this situation, but Sumner notes that “[a] writer in the NY Evening Post, during this early discussion of women’s wages, seriously asserted that the only way to make husbands sober and industrious was to keep women dependent on them by means of insufficient wages. ‘I once lived in a place,’ he said, ‘where there was such a demand for female labor, of a particular description, that the wages of the women would support the family. The consequence was, that the town was filled with the most lazy, drunken set of men I ever saw’ ” (p. 26, *Women in America: From Colonial Times to the Twentieth Century*, 1910).