Women’s engagement in paid work has changed dramatically over the last century—even as the shape of work under capitalism itself has changed. The two important volumes under review here provide important insights into both the history of gender and labor and their potential future. While Ruth Milkman’s *On Gender, Labor, and Inequality* draws together works about gender and labor over U.S. history, Elaine Ecklund and Anne Lincoln’s *Failing Families, Failing Science: Work-Family Conflict in Academic Science* focuses primarily on current U.S. academic science. Through their analyses, these authors demonstrate the importance of sociologists’ engaging with gender and labor inequality to build more effective workplaces.

In *On Gender, Labor, and Inequality*, Ruth Milkman, the 2016 President of the American Sociological Association, gathers together four decades of her pioneering research—work that has defined the field—and develops new insight about how gender and class inequalities operate in the United States. Milkman’s research addresses big questions but remains clear-sighted and well-written. While she has theoretical perspective, she allows empirical data to challenge her expectations. As a result, her research makes enormous contributions to knowledge.

One key argument of this book is that it is critical to “bring class back in” to the analysis of gender; Milkman shows that gender segregation in occupations and jobs powerfully influences structural gender inequalities. Gender segregation reflects the power of ideologies about “woman’s place” found among managers, union leaders, and workers. While women workers mobilize to gain ground, their early struggles tended to focus on where boundaries between men and women’s work should be drawn, rather than on if boundaries should exist.

Milkman argues that while some gender inequalities have improved over the last several decades, class inequalities have widened the gaps among women in the post-industrial era. Both class and gender are key touchstones, though Milkman recognizes that race may also be implicated in these inequalities. Early chapters focus on the 1930s and 1940s, a period when class inequalities were declining but gender inequality showed remarkable resilience. Later chapters focus on recent decades, when gender inequalities have declined for some but class inequality has been growing.

The early chapters point to how—counter expectations that women work as a “reserve army of labor,” drawn into the workforce in times of need and expelled at other times—occupational gender segregation strongly mediates women’s engagement in the workforce. For example, during the Great Depression, men were more likely to lose their jobs because of the types of jobs they were in and the way these jobs were affected by the economic downturn. Even as the Second World War drew women into manufacturing work, employers created gender-segregated jobs so that men and women continued to carry out different tasks.

Milkman further traces how labor unions did not, for the most part, challenge gender segregation and in fact did not work to include women, which “has been costly both to women workers and to the unions.
themselves” (p. 81). Rather than acting in solidarity with white women or people of color, most unions, led by white men, aimed to ensure white men’s occupational privilege. During the post-war period, management also emphasized reestablishing the pre-war division of labor, favoring men for most jobs even as women sought to remain employed in industrial jobs.

Later chapters consider the historical relationship between U.S. labor unions and women workers. For example, Milkman shows how structural characteristics and gender arrangements in place in society when unions were formed help explain why different kinds of unions have such varied relationships with women workers. She also analyzes how women-dominated workplaces were most readily organized during the 1980s, mostly through public and service-sector unions, leading her to some optimism about the potential for a transformation in the labor movement. Yet she further shows that unions themselves are gender segregated, leading to institutional divisions that make broader mobilization difficult.

Milkman’s final chapters focus on the growth of inequality among women as class inequality has been growing. While highly educated women have recently made inroads into professional and managerial occupations, class-disadvantaged women face limited opportunity. For example, she shows that income inequality helps drive the growth of paid domestic work; where there is more income inequality, there are more paid domestic workers. In addition, while professional women are more likely to access paid family leave through their workplaces, highly educated women are also more likely to know about and use the state paid-leave program in California. Both the growth of domestic work and the differences in access to paid leave point to growing differentiation among women workers. The book’s final chapter compares the gender dynamics of the Great Depression to those of the Great Recession, showing that even as continued gender segregation in occupations led to similar results in the short run, the lack of structural transformation in response to the Great Recession means that class inequality among women continues to grow.

While I agree with many of Milkman’s conclusions, I disagree that intersectional scholarship has ignored class. Milkman notes, “most of those who invoke the term intersectionality devote far less attention to class inequalities among women than to racial inequalities and those based on sexual orientation” (p. 4). Yet, just as Milkman recognizes how ideologies about “woman’s place” help explain structural inequalities between men and women, it is critical to recognize that ideologies about the “place” of women of color and migrant women help explain structural inequalities among women. And even as Milkman analyzes the deepening inequality among women by class, a more relational analysis of the nature of these inequalities would lead to a sharper argument. As intersectional theory argues, privilege for one group is directly linked to disadvantage for others. While Milkman makes this argument explicitly regarding how white men maintain their privilege, it is more implicit regarding how highly educated men and women maintain their privilege vis-à-vis domestic service and access to paid leave.

Moving from a general argument about gender and labor historically to a specific argument about present-day academic scientists, Failing Families, Failing Science: Work-Family Conflict in Academic Science is based on a multi-method study consisting of surveys and interviews with faculty, postdocs, and graduate students in programs ranked among the top 20 in biology, physics, and astrophysics.1 Elaine Ecklund and Anne Lincoln chose these fields because the number of women in biology has been consistently increasing, while the number of women in physics remains extremely low. They target

---

1 Because one university may have multiple departments that fall into these fields, and because the rankings of these differ, academics from thirty different universities ranked in the top 20 for these fields were included in the study. Approximately 3455 scientists were randomly selected from top-ranked departments, and 2503 responded (a 72 percent response rate). A stratified random sample of the survey recipients was used to generate the interview sample. Of the 216 scientists asked to engage in interviews, 150 agreed (a 69 percent response rate).
graduate students, postdocs, assistant, associate, and full professors in these fields because they want to understand how gendered processes play out across scientists’ careers.

Just as Milkman finds that ideologies about “woman’s place” animate workplace inequalities, Ecklund and Lincoln find that disciplinary cultures about gender animate differences across these two fields. Yet they also find that the “family-unfriendliness” of academic science creates challenges for women, but not only for women; men and women in both fields, particularly among the younger scientists, see academic science as an unforgiving career setting. This work has substantial potential to help universities rethink the assumptions that structure academic careers. Because the research focuses on men and women scientists across career stages in different disciplines at top-20 universities, it is much more generalizable than studies focused only on one university or only on women STEM faculty. The work is both original and timely. It is also engaging, because interview quotes that support the survey findings are interspersed throughout.

The key argument is that gender, choices, and institutions structure academic careers, which then influence family life. Structural barriers drive both men and women scientists out of the academy because work-family balance is not feasible. As they argue, “academic science remains greedy—it wants all of a scientist’s time, devotion, and commitment” (p. 58). Many scientists—both men and women—reject the image of the “ideal worker” with no care responsibilities and total devotion to work because their partners also work and they wish to have children and engage in family life.

Ecklund and Lincoln also find cultural differences between physics and biology across the institutions they include in the study. There is a strong assumption that physics requires greater commitment, and men and women are more likely to be married and have children if they are in biology, though men in both fields are more likely to be married and/or parents than women in either field. Yet biologists tended to work more hours a week than physicists. If work hours limited women’s engagement in academic science, we might expect women to be more successful in physics. But instead, the cultural sense that physics requires a “more intense” commitment means that women are more likely to leave physics than biology.

By interviewing and surveying scientists at a variety of career stages, Ecklund and Lincoln are able to understand why so many graduate students and postdocs leave academic science. Many young scientists worry about balancing their own careers with those of their partners (particularly when partnered with another scientist) and about how fertility clocks are often competing with career clocks. In addition, while they want to succeed in academic science, neither men nor women are willing to give up family life. In fact, the only factor that predicts whether a graduate student or postdoc will seek a career outside of academia is having fewer children than desired due to a career in science; this is true for both men and women. Senior scientists describe living in a system where they must achieve grants, publications, and awards, with work time constantly bleeding into family time but not vice versa. Yet senior scientists also describe challenges balancing their careers with their partners (half of women faculty were married to a man who is a faculty member), making decisions about having children, and finding ways to balance work and family.

While men and women in these two fields describe many similar struggles, some interesting gender differences do emerge among parents. Mothers continue working as many hours as fathers in their fields, though they have on average fewer children and are more dissatisfied with their faculty work. They also experience discrimination, both implicitly and explicitly, based on the idea that mothers are not fully committed to science. While both men and women note that they want to be involved in family life, men are more likely to view this involvement as a “sacrifice,” while women note that they are “lucky” if they have a partner who helps at home (not one man referred to himself as “lucky” for a partner’s help at home). Both men and women feel guilt for not being more involved at home, but women express more guilt.

Ecklund and Lincoln end the book with recommendations for how to create more family-friendly institutions. These include
policies such as flexible schedules, on-site subsidized childcare centers, better nonstandard childcare benefits, automatic care leaves, and tenure-clock stoppages, as well as measures aimed at changing departmental and institutional cultures. The goal is to shift universities, given the demographic realities of today’s scientists, toward creating more open and supportive structures. This will help retain more academic scientists and more diverse academic scientists.

Based on compelling research, the book has potential to reshape the conversation about academic science, most notably because it suggests that not only women but men also are making choices to leave universities due to lack of family support. They also note that enrollment growth in graduate programs in science is mostly driven by international students, which suggests the need for more analysis of how nationality intersects with gender in the trends they describe. Yet the book could also say more about how changes might take place. Have grants from the NSF aimed at transforming institutions made a difference? Have unions taken up these calls? At my campus, we have many of the policies Ecklund and Lincoln call for as a result of union negotiating, although changes in institutional culture have been more challenging to achieve. Knowing whether there were any institutions among the twenty included in the study where academic scientists feel more supported, and how gains were won at those institutions, could help create blueprints for change.

Milkman provides a deeply important overview of gender inequality and labor in the United States that makes key points about gender ideologies underlying occupational gender segregation as well as increasing inequality in the post-industrial period. Ecklund and Lincoln focus on a group of relatively privileged, highly educated workers in this post-industrial period, and they show that even among this group, gender ideologies continue to powerfully affect the experiences of these workers. Diverse worker movements are necessary to fight back against workplace inequalities and to ensure a society where families are supported and where less-educated as well as educated women as well as men have true workplace opportunity.

Four Perspectives on Contemporary American Judaism

LYNN DAVIDMAN
University of Kansas
lynndavidman@ku.edu


I begin this essay with a discussion of Uzi Rebhun’s book, Jews and the American Religious Landscape, because it offers an overview of the rich data on the demographics of Jews as of 2007. Also, this work provides us with a broad contextual understanding in which to situate the other books reviewed here. But Rebhun does not stop