

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

BROOKINGS CAFETERIA PODCAST

GENDER EQUALITY, UNPAID WORK, AND WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

Washington, D.C.

Friday, May 15, 2020

PARTICIPANTS:

Host:

FRED DEWS
Managing Editor, Podcasts and Digital Projects
The Brookings Institution

Guests:

STEPHANIE AARONSON
Vice President and Director, Senior Fellow, Economic Studies
The Brookings Institution

MOLLY KINDER
David M. Rubenstein Fellow, Metropolitan Policy Program
The Brookings Institution

ISABEL V. SAWHILL
Senior Fellow, Economic Studies, Center on Children and Families, Future of the Middle
Class Initiative
The Brookings Institution

* * * * *

PROCEEDINGS

The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

DEWS: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria, the podcast about ideas and the experts who have them. I'm Fred Dews.

That's the simple text of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, that gave American women the right to vote and which was ratified in August 1920. In the centennial year of this milestone in women's political equality, Brookings has launched a new series on gender equality in which Brookings scholars, public officials, and other experts examine not only the imperfect implementation of women's political participation but also how gender equality has evolved since 1920 and the social, economic, and political forces that have kept the United States from achieving full gender parity. You can find this new initiative and its first set of essays on our website, [Brookings.edu/19A](https://www.brookings.edu/19A). That's the number 19 and the letter A.

On today's episode of the Brookings Cafeteria, I'm excited to present a conversation among three Brookings scholars whose research eliminates some of the key issues in women's participation in the workforce and society, with attention to the gender impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

Isabel Sawhill is a senior fellow in Economic Studies at The Brookings Institution, working in the Center on Children and Families and on the Future of the Middle Class Initiative. She's co-author of one of the first essays in our 19A Initiative.

Stephanie Aaronson is the vice president and director of the Economic Studies Program at Brookings. And, Molly Kinder is a David M. Rubenstein Fellow in the Metropolitan Policy

Program at Brookings and an adjunct professor at Georgetown University's McCourt School of Public Policy.

You can follow the Brookings Podcast Network on Twitter, @policypodcasts, to get information about and links to all of our shows, including Dollar and Sense, the Brookings trade podcast; The Current; and our Events podcast. And, now, here's Isabel Sawhill, moderating the discussion with Stephanie Aaronson and Molly Kinder.

SAWHILL: Thank you, Fred. And, I am very excited to be part of the launch of the 19A series at Brookings. I think we have posted four essays already, one by Susan Ware who's a distinguished historian of the whole period when women were gaining suffrage, one by Lori Robinson and our colleague Mike O'Hanlon on women in the military, one by myself and Katie Guyot on what we call the time squeeze that's been caused by the fact that more and more women have gone to work and are the backbone of middle-class prosperity, and one that we're very excited about by Janet Yellen, tracing the history of women's involvements in the labor market. That essay was something that Stephanie Aaronson worked hard on with Janet when they were both at the Federal Reserve, and I'm sure she'll have more to say about that.

Now, we planned this series on the 19th Amendment long before the coronavirus became part of all of our lives, and I think it's very fitting that we are not going to let a focus on women's equality be derailed by the current virus. But, I do think the virus has actually highlighted some of the challenges and issues that women face in the labor market and in the home, and we're going to be talking about those.

And, so, let me start with this whole question of how women have been affected by the virus. And, I think we know that in terms of health effects, what I read anyway is that men have more vulnerability to the virus from a health perspective. They are contracting it in slightly

greater numbers than women. But, women have been very hard hit in terms of the economics. So, Stephanie Aaronson, let me turn to you first to talk a little bit about the economic effects of the coronavirus.

AARONSON: Let me just start off and say thank you, Val, for inviting me here to join in this conversation with you. I think the employment report released last Friday, which showed eight -- data for April, showed that women were much more likely to lose their jobs than men were. So, relative to February the unemployment rate among women is up 30 percentage points compared to 10 percentage points for men.

Now, these are shocking numbers for everyone, but it is clear that women have been particularly hard hit by the economic shutdowns related to the coronavirus pandemic. And, this is actually in contrast to the usual pattern. So, typically, the unemployment rate of men is more cyclical than that of women. Construction and manufacturing are highly cyclical industries, and men are more likely to be employed in those industries.

But, I think it isn't so surprising that we have seen that women have been harder hit so far in the event when you consider that many of the industries that have been the most affected by business closings, including retail and leisure and hospitality, and even some health fields for elective procedures, are heavily dominated by women. And, not only all women have been affected equally. This speaks to another issue, which is that women of color, and especially Hispanic women, have seen the highest rates of job loss, again, because they are more likely to work in these service jobs which have been so affected by the closings.

And, the only other thing I would just add is that this impact, the job loss, is particularly difficult because many of these jobs are low-paid jobs, and so the women who are losing them do not have a lot of cushion to fall back on. So, for these women, the special COVID benefits that

have been passed, like the unemployment insurance benefits, are particularly beneficial, assuming that women are eligible to receive them and are able to apply.

SAWHILL: That's a really nice summary. And, let me now turn to you Molly. Molly Kinder has been doing a lot of work on what we call essential workers during this pandemic. And, I've been fascinated to hear a little bit about your work. Tell us more about it and about what you're finding.

KINDER: Sure. Thanks, Belle. And, I just want to echo Stephanie. It's such an honor to be in this discussion, and I'm so proud of Brookings for this terrific 19A series that we're doing.

When we typically think of a big disaster in this country, whether it's a catastrophic weather event, like Hurricane Katrina or flooding, or an event like 9-11, so often the workers we think of in that response are first responders. They're military. They're firefighters. And, the iconic image of 9-11 is a firefighter in New York City.

This pandemic is different. I think the workforce that we're seeing, really at the front lines, women are a very big part of that. And, because of this role, this essential role that women play, which is that women are at the forefront of caring for others, whether it's treating those who are critically ill with the coronavirus, whether it's caring for the most vulnerable to the pandemic, which are older individuals at home or in nursing homes, making sure that we're fed - so, cashiers in grocery stores, or cooking the food that we're eating, and even cleaning, to make sure that hospitals are safe from the virus, this is work that women predominantly have done. And, in this moment it highlights how valuable this work is to society.

And, in fact, it's not just in the pandemic. Well after this is over, women are going to play this critical role of caring, for being the front line of healthcare, for making sure that our population which is rapidly aging and the number of older people who are going to need to enter

into their older age in their personal home or in a care facility, it's women who have those roles. And, yet at the same time, the interviews I'm doing with these workers reveal this gap between the societal value that they play and how underpaid and undervalued they feel, and they are.

So, a lot of these roles, the average earnings are just so low. So, a typical home health worker makes just about 11.50 an hour. These are poverty wages, and these women are literally in poverty. They rarely have benefits like health insurance or paid leave. And, the women that I've interviewed who are doing these roles, they're now risking their lives and trying to keep their family afloat in this hard time. They're struggling financially. Some of the stories have really been pretty heartbreaking about what they're enduring.

So, I think it's just showing this essential role women play, that at the same time, really with the exception of registered nurses and some of the higher-paid health roles, a lot of this workforce that is female dominated are very low-paid.

SAWHILL: Could you just say a little bit more, Molly, about how you got into interviewing these workers and how you've done it during this difficult time? I mean, I think when people think about Brookings they think about the kind of paper-and-pencil research that we do so well, and you have done something more innovative. Just say a few words about that.

KINDER: Sure. Well, when this pandemic hit and our newspaper stories were hearing about grocery cashiers suddenly showing up in their job overnight has become essential but also a risk to themselves, my instinct immediately was I want to go talk to these workers, I want to understand what they're going through, I want to understand what their needs are and how that should inform what Brookings, which has this huge policy influence, what are we asking for at this moment in terms of a policy response?

So, the first thing I did was just -- I'd reignite some contacts I had with grocery workers

that I've interviewed in my past life at New America. I'd done some human-centered research in my last job where I interviewed fast-food workers and grocery and retail workers, which I'll talk a little bit more about in this interview, what I learned. And, so I just got in my car and I went to some of those grocery stores. I interviewed some of those workers. I took photographs of them, because I feel that when we see a human face we often connect better to the story.

And, my first post was about grocery workers, and immediately I wanted to start talking to the healthcare workers as well. And, that was in part because my daughter has just been in the hospital for a week. She's 1-year-old. This is just as coronavirus was hitting. I was struck by how many workers are in the hospital, not just nurses and doctors -- cleaners, lower-paid workers, front desk staff, security guards, and I thought how are they being impacted by this virus?

So, I actually went through contacts at unions. I just cold-called SEIU 1199. I had some other contacts who work in non-profits that focus on home-health workers. So, I made a bunch of phone calls and emails and I just started fanning out my network to get contacts who could put me in touch with workers. Hopped in my car, drove to Philadelphia. I met some really amazing home-health workers. I've interviewed about a dozen health workers and about 2 dozen workers total.

I've recruited gig workers off the street, on Craigslist ads, partnered with several unions, and it's been really powerful. And, I would say that it's not only given me a sense of what the needs are and what the policy responses should be, but I'm finding that Brookings, at using our platform to weave their personal stories into the policy writing, has really been able to bring more, I think, policy attention and urgency to the issues.

SAWHILL: My hat is off to you for doing all of that. I think it adds tremendously to our work. And, Stephanie, I want to invite you if you have any thoughts on other work that we're

doing. Every time I look at a list of what Brookings is doing to address the coronavirus and all of the material we've put out on that and the kind of material we're thinking of putting out on it, I'm quite impressed. Anything you want to chime in on there?

AARONSON: I think it is pretty remarkable the breadth of work that we've been able to produce in response to the coronavirus and the policymakers who we've been able to inform. I think for me the issues that are the most salient right now are about how we are getting money to families who are in the greatest need for it and how we are working to protect their help.

So, there's been a lot of work going on at Brookings concerning the unemployment insurance system, what its shortcomings have been about our payment systems, how difficult has been for us to get money to the households. Every family is supposed to receive at least \$1,200 and how is it that it's been a very slow process getting that money out the door, and also how we can evolve our healthcare system to better meet the needs of everyone, especially during this pandemic -- so, greater use of telemedicine, broader insurance coverage.

I think that there's a long-term research agenda for all of us related to how we need to reform our policies in the light of what we've learned about our current systems, given the crisis. And, I think we're off to a very good start on doing that, across a broad array of areas and there'll certainly be more to come.

SAWHILL: Yeah, I really think that's important that we're not only looking at the immediate impacts of the crisis but also thinking about what the implications are for a policy going forward. What kind of permanent changes do we need as well as temporary? And, I always like the way Andrew Cuomo put it recently. He said let's build it back better. And, that sort of summed it up for me.

But, I want to segue now to the historical story here. Not a lot of people know that the

efforts to pass the 19th Amendment was preceded by another pandemic, the flu -- the Spanish Flu -- in 1918-19. I mean, we all know that that occurred then, that we forget about the fact that the suffragettes had to worry about flu at the same time that they were fighting for more equality in the political arena.

And, when you look back, Stephanie, you see a huge amount of change in women's lives, and especially that work that you did with Janet Yellen when you were both at the Fed, I think, plays that out very well. Do you want to say a little more about that?

AARONSON: Yeah, I'd be happy to. I think it's true that the time in which the 19th Amendment passed was really a time of just incredible social ferment, economic ferment, as you said, health crisis, and the war ending. But the changes that were fomented in those years have really had a lasting impact on us, even into this century. And, as the speech that I worked on with Janet talked about, one of the biggest of these changes was the gradual increase in women's participation in paid work outside of the home.

So, to be clear, women were always working, and even a hundred years ago many women were contributing income to their families, for instance, by selling produce or providing boarding rooms, things like that. And, African-American women have always had much higher participation rates than white women, especially married women.

So, I think another one of the big changes was that early on, even when women did work outside the home, they were typically the single women who were working, and there was a lot of pressure, both social and legal, that women leave the labor force when they got married. And, that was much less true for African-American women who often had to work even when they were married to help support their families.

And, over time, what we've actually seen is a gradual increase in participation rates of

white women, and more recently Hispanic women, to start to match those higher participation rates among African-American women. And, I think really this has just been probably the biggest change in women's lives over this time period, and as women gradually became more attached to the labor market, their own expectations of their work lives changed and the legal system has changed also to reflect this reality of women's employment.

So, early on, when women were working outside the home, they worked while they were single, or if they were married they worked for a few years to maybe support their families, provide a little extra income, but, over time, they began to view work as something they would be doing continually throughout the course of their lives. And, they started to think more about having careers and not just having spots of employment. And, as they made those changes in their own expectations of their work lives, they started to plan for those changes.

So, now actually, women have higher levels of education than men do, in part because they are preparing themselves to have careers in the labor force that will last throughout their lives, even through marriage and childbearing for those who go that route. And, the legal system has to some extent changed also to accommodate that. So, we don't have marriage bars anymore.

In the 1970s there was the Pregnancy Discrimination Act which prevented employers from discriminating against pregnant women. There have been rules around sexual harassment and pay equity in various states. And, so, all those have contributed to supporting women's participation in the labor force, although, of course, there are still a lot of barriers.

SAWHILL: Right. Molly, I want to see if you have anything to add. But, let me just say first that one of the things that I am always struck by that most people don't know is that if you're looking at primary breadwinners, the people who are really responsible for the livelihood for their family, 40 percent of them are now women.

Now, a lot of those are single parents, but a lot of them are two-parent families or two adult families in which the wife earns more than the husband. So, that's a really dramatic change. And, I don't think that our attitudes have quite kept pace with that. Our attitudes are still to think about women as secondary earners, as primary in the home and not in the labor force, and that's really just not true anymore. But, Molly, anything you want to add in here?

KINDER: Yes. So, one of my research interests is how work has changed and how work is changing and how that impacts women, in particular in low-wage workers. And, when I look back at the last 30 to 40 years, I think there's a good-news story for women in there, in the sense that we've seen a lot of shrinking of those stable middle-class jobs that have historically employed men in production work, in manufacturing, and women in clerical work. And, so, we've seen this sort of barbell growth, so a growth in the high- income and growth in the low-income jobs.

And, women, because of what Stephanie was discussing with this huge increase in the rate at which they were getting higher education, moved disproportionately into those professional jobs. So, while those middle-income jobs were squeezed for women, women were actually often times moving up into better-paying jobs. Whereas, in that time, men's rate of education (inaudible) really didn't keep up, and a lot of them have fallen into low-wage service jobs as they've lost these manufacturing jobs, which I think a lot of us think that is, in part, to do with some of the political moment we're in and some of the dark stories of unhappiness and the depths of despair type research.

So, women, I think a lot have been resilient. I think it's been a good-news story to date. But, I do worry. When I look out in the future -- I did a lot of interviews last summer with women in those clerical roles, and I was struck that while we don't really think of clerical work

as being passion oriented or fulfilling in the way we might think of a professor or a teacher or a nurse, the women that I interviewed who -- a lot of them were older -- found that those jobs provided the things they want out of a job, if not fulfillment emotionally -- stable schedules, benefits, respect. They were not back-breaking jobs, so you can age into them.

And, then, when I think about the interviews I'm doing now with these low-paid cleaners in hospitals, home-health workers, nursing assistants, these are the jobs that are growing the fastest. Those are the jobs of the future. They can't be done by technology, whereas, technology's replacing a lot of those clerical roles. But, they don't provide that stability, that middle-class life, those things people need, benefits. And, they're hard on the body.

So, I worry about what this means for women in the future. It seems to me the barrier for women to enter the middle class, the entry is higher education. And, we can talk more. There's a lot of barriers still to lower-income women getting those degrees to be a medical assistant or whatever it is. And, whereas before, a clerical job, you don't necessarily have to have more than a high school degree. It's a stepping stone into the middle class.

So, while I think we have a good-news story that we're building on for women, I think some of our resilience that we will see up ahead to weathering some of those technological changes could be hampered.

SAWHILL: Well, I think it's really interesting what you're saying about this bifurcation and hollowing out in the middle which is going on, I guess, for both men and women. But, the education story is so interesting. Who would have imagined even 20, 30 years ago, which I can remember well, being the age I am, that we never thought women would be as educated as men. They're much more educated now. The gaps are getting quite large.

Yet, the bad news there is that there are still barriers, there are still big pay gaps. Even

among full-time men and women, women are only earning about 83 cents on the dollar. And, that seems to have to do with the kinds of occupations that women work in and the sort of wages that those occupations can command, which in turn may actually be a reflection of the fact that so many women are in them. Women's work is devalued.

But, for whatever reasons, we've still got a big pay gap. I'd love for both of you to talk a little bit more about these barriers or the pay gap and what you think is going on there.

Stephanie, can we start with you there?

AARONSON: Sure. So, I think there are two issues. I mean, one is precisely the tremendous amount of occupational segregation that still exists in the labor force. And, as you mentioned, a lot of times occupations are paid less just because it's women doing them. And, so, until we see just a greater, more equal mix of men and women doing a lot of these jobs, I actually don't expect the wages to rise in some of these industries, absent some external force.

And, so, I think the reasons why we still see so much occupational segregation is actually something we don't understand very well. I mean, some people have looked at whether there are some preferences around it. There are questions around whether certain occupations are really open to everyone.

So, for some jobs, especially unionized jobs, there can be very high barriers to entry, and there can be difficulties for women to get jobs in those industries. So, there could be just some bias against women in certain industries. But, occupational segregation itself, I think, is a big issue and something that actually we could do more work on.

Another problem is that, even when men and women are doing similar work, and even in very high-paid professional occupations where men and women both have a lot of education to be doing these jobs -- I'm talking about things like law and business and medicine -- women and

men often start out very similarly situated early in the careers.

But, what we find is that, over time, the women end up falling behind in terms of their promotions and their pay. And, a lot of this coincides with family formation and women's childbearing years. And, these are jobs that require extensive hours of work, don't allow for very many breaks, and there's a big penalty if you want to take time off from work or reduce hours.

And, so, I think that even in cases where we think women have made a lot of progress -- I mean, women get the majority of medical degrees in this country. They are equally likely as men to be coming out of law school and business school, but still, even in these fields we see that, over the course of careers, women fall behind men.

SAWHILL: Right. Molly, do you want to add to that? That was a pretty complete answer, but.

KINDER: Just to second what Stephanie said, I've grown increasingly frustrated. I've been part of this "future of work" conversation, and it's -- almost always when I'm on a panel, I sense that when people say future of work they mean the future of work for male workers. That's been really dominating the discussion. And, I've tested this by Google imaging the word worker or putting robots in work or AI in work. It's always a cartoon of a man, either a blue collar worker or a man in business.

We just have this national conception of work equals men, and as a result all the policy discussions I'm having, about how do we make sure as work is changing, whether because of technology or any other factor, workers do well, it's by and large men that we're thinking about. And, I think our policies extend to that, and I think the value -- what Stephanie was saying, the value that we give workers, women just get the short shrift.

When I'm on a panel, I always bring up that the biggest job, the job of the future, is a

home-health worker. And, it's like eyes glaze over. This is just not even necessarily seen as work in the same way as a manufacturing worker or some other type of work.

And, the second this is, again, as I've been thinking about the future of work in technology, so many of those fast-growing, good jobs, like the winning jobs of the way work is changing, which are tech oriented -- software development, computer science in some way, those are just disproportionately male-dominated, and not just because women don't rise up into them, it's even in the degrees that people are getting.

I see a real worry that when we think about the way the economy's changing and those really high-paying knowledge jobs that are driven by technological advances, women are really underrepresented in those jobs. And, that really comes down to occupational segregation, and I think that's a major challenge that we need to address.

SAWHILL: Although, I might add -- because this was a big focus of one of the papers we commissioned recently -- that because women are better educated, there is a sense in which they are better prepared to make the shifts that technological change and AI are going to require. And, in fact, this paper that was done by some academics that we were working with suggested it was very hard to sort out the two; how much of this is a gender thing and how much of it is an education thing, since they're correlated.

But, not to get bogged down in that. I think I want to shift a little bit to some home responsibilities of men versus women. I mean, we all know, I think, that women still -- they are the major burden for childcare, for housework, for all of the organizing of the home.

I'll never forget being at a seminar at Brookings in which one of our more junior colleagues was talking about this, and she said, you know, my husband is quite ready to go to the store and take a list with him to buy whatever's on the list. But, guess who has to put the list

together, guess who has to plan ahead, guess who has to think about what we're going to have for dinner, whether we have enough canned soup in the house, or enough paper towels or whatever? And, that's my job, and that's a much more stressful job than just going to the market and picking up whatever is on the list.

So, I throw that out anecdotally that it's not just a matter of who puts in the most hours, because men are, according to the evidence, putting in more hours at home and more hours in childcare than they used to, and that's the good news. But, they're still not doing as much as women. And, that creates some of the issues that I think you alluded to, Stephanie, about -- especially in these high-paid professional jobs that require that you work 6 days a week and 12 hours a day. It's very hard on women who have those responsibilities. Stephanie, what further thoughts do you have if any on that topic?

AARONSON: I think that's exactly right. I think that, although there have been changes to our legal system that have facilitated women's work or at least taken down barriers that previously existed to women working, that we really haven't fundamentally changed the organization of our lives, of our social safety net, in a way that really promotes the possibility for women with family responsibilities to really participate to their full capacity in the labor force. And, that goes for men as well.

So, I think that the system we have today really relies on one person, typically the woman, being the full-time caregiver at home. So, we have not very good support for childcare, we have very limited paid family leave, and especially in comparison to other countries. And, I think that, actually, a good part of the second half of the 20th century, the U.S. actually had higher labor force participation rates among women than did European countries. And, in recent years, actually, it's been reversed.

So, now, a lot of European countries, including countries that traditionally had very low rates of female participation -- like Italy. Actually, you have higher rates of female participation than the U.S. does. And, there's been a good amount of research that shows that one of the big differences is the social safety net.

So, in Europe they tend to have more childcare, subsidized childcare, more family leave, and these are policies that are shown to promote female labor force participation. And, so, I think that there's still a long way we can go to providing support for women who want to balance their work and family.

And, I think the other thing I would just add is that we also want to make sure that these aren't benefits only for women, that men also are free to avail themselves of these benefits, because when men feel it's okay to take time off to care for their children and that it's supported at work, then that will also help to equalize the two-job crunch that a lot of women face.

SAWHILL: Absolutely right. And, Molly, I'm going to bring you in in a sec, but I want to just mention, since Stephanie brought it up, that paid family leave is something that is clearly needed. The need for it has been greatly accelerated in the current crisis, and there has been some temporary legislation to deal with that.

But, we are also going to need an effort to think that through for the longer term. And, we do have a major project at Brookings that I happen to be involved in, as does Stephanie, on paid family leave, and we'll be coming out with some new research in that area before too long. But, Molly, any final thoughts on this set of issues from you?

KINDER: Yes. So, I think often when we have a discussion about barriers to women advancing and some of the challenges at home, it tends to be a white collar discussion. And, I think that could be some cultural influences like the lean in discussion. Last year I led a team at

New America to conduct interviews across the country with about 40, primarily low-wage, front line workers in retail and fast food, folks who work at gas stations and grocery stores, and it was stunning how much this concept of a second shift came up over and over and over in really almost every interview with women. And, these were a lot of women of color, Hispanic women. There were some cultural factors in there as well.

But, they all described working on their feet, sometimes getting up at 2 in the morning, and coming home and working until they go to bed, doing all the housework, all the childcare, often sometimes even for their grandchildren. And, it was clear that that had real barriers for women.

So, there was plenty, especially some of the younger women I interviewed in gas stations or in some of these retail jobs, who had big dreams. They wanted to be a medical assistant or a graphic designer, but they had children, they had all the housework to do, and they had to work a low-paying job. And, there was just no way in that impossible trinity of all of that childcare and housework, having a full-time job and somehow finding the time and resources to also study.

The other thing that came up a lot that really surprised me was how often women said they've been offered a promotion. And, I don't mean to CEO, I mean to the next layer up, first or second rung of management in a gas station or in a Target, and they turned it down. And, part of it was because the hours were going to get crazy and they had childcare issues. But, often they described it as being stressful. Managers didn't get the support that they felt they needed.

So, there were real barriers to women, even moving up within these lower-paying jobs to a better-paying job that might have benefits. We didn't hear that from any man. Every single man we interviewed talked about their dream. I'm going to be better off when I can get to become the Burger King manager. But, there were all sorts of obstacles standing in the way of

women. And, so it's really a universal issue, as much for the women who could have been CEO of McKinsey as it is for somebody working in a gas station.

SAWHILL: I'm so glad you brought the focus back to that group of low-wage women and women of color, because I think those of us who write about these issues and study them, so many of us are professionals and we tend to not spend as much time thinking about the lives of those women, and it's got to be so much tougher.

And, going back to the puzzle that I think Stephanie posed earlier about why we have so much occupational segregation and why, as you said, those women don't always accept a promotion. It really goes back to how people see their roles. And, there's just a feedback loop here that I don't pretend to know how to think about, that if you're grown up and been socialized to think that to be a good person you have to be a good parent and a good family member, somebody else has been brought up to think, well, the most important thing in life is to be a good breadwinner, which is what men are taught, then how do we get out of that loop? So, that's really an interesting issue going forward.

And, with that as background, I now want to ask a really big and a probably impossible question, but I'm going to put both of you on the spot and ask the following, which is, we focused in this series, the 19A series, on the last hundred years and what has happened to women since the 19th Amendment was passed.

And, I want you to now think about the next hundred years, especially in the U.S., but even globally, what is it going to look like a hundred years from now? What is gender equality going to look like? Are we still going to have big differences or not, and what do we need to do to achieve the goal of gender equality a hundred years from now? What would your priorities be? As I said, I know these are impossible questions, but, speculate or reflect on them if you can.

Maybe, Stephanie, we should start with you.

AARONSON: So, I am optimistic that because we're having these discussions now, so in the open, that we really can make progress on these issues. I think when I've been studying why was the women's labor force participation increased so much over the last century, actually one of the really interesting case studies was what happened around the Second World War.

So, that was a time when women came into the labor force in response to the huge needs of the war effort. Men were fighting the war and women were required at home to be helping to produce the arms and other things that the country needed to fight the war, and that had a really lasting impact on the way the country viewed women's work.

So, it's true. When the soldiers came home a lot of women were forced out of their jobs, but the experience that those women gained from having worked and the experience that their children gained, actually having had mothers who were working, had a lasting impact on female labor force participation. And, actually, like, the sons of women who worked in the Second World War were like more likely to have wives who worked.

SAWHILL: Good.

AARONSON: Yeah. And, so, I think that our society can change and that even thinking now, you know, what Molly talked about, about how we're recognizing the importance of what we previously considered low-wage work -- and, I think because it was seen as low-wage work it was seen as not valuable work. I think the experience we're having of that work now really can change how we view it, how it's compensated, and how we treat those workers. And, so I think that actually makes me very hopeful for the future.

And, I also just had one other thing on a more personal note, which is I'm the mother of both a son and a daughter. So, I see these dynamics playing out in my household and I realize it's

my responsibility not only to raise thoughtful children who are smart but also to really think about the gender dynamics in my household.

So, my son is sitting and reading and not clearing the table and it's always my daughter who's emptying the dishwasher. I called them both on it, and I try to model for them positive home and work life, and I think my husband does as well. He does a lot of the childcare. And, so I think if we are conscientious about it now, then I think that that just will help our children to be less constrained by norms around gender than even I was growing up in the wake of the second wave of the feminist movement.

And, I think that that also bodes well for the future, where people just -- I think in a sense when you ask what my vision is, it's that people are constrained by their gender and feel that they can become what they want to become. And, I think that as we have these discussions and model this behavior, to the best of our abilities ourselves, -- I'm not saying we're always perfect at it, but that can really help.

SAWHILL: Well, kind of what I hear you saying is really interesting, though. You're saying that norms and preferences are shaped by experience, and so, the World War II experience, the recent experience with the virus, what kind of family you grow up in, and what kind of goals your parents played, really have big feedback effects on attitudes and norms. And, there's that interplay there that's so interesting. Molly, your thoughts.

KINDER: Well, I have to say I feel more optimistic now after reading Janet Yellen's essay to kick off the series, because it really put me back a hundred years. I think it's breathtaking how far women have come. And, I try to put it even in my own personal terms.

My grandmother, she's passed away, obviously, but she'd be about 110 now, and she was a maid. She was an uneducated immigrant from Ireland. She was a housekeeper like a lot of the

housekeepers I've been interviewing for this series in hospitals, and she was limited in what she was able to do a hundred years ago. She stopped working. She had kids.

My mom went to college. She got a master's. She was a teacher, because that was the set of options in front of her. And, I have a master's degree from Harvard and I do amazing work that I love every day that's fulfilling to me personally. And, I have a 1-year-old, and I imagine what are her opportunities moving forward and what's possible?

Like Stephanie, when I think about my husband and how much more active he is than his own father, and the expectations on each generation. That makes me hopeful. But, I would say one of the things that makes me hopeful is I think our political representation of women might go a little faster even than some of our economics. And, I think that's going to make a difference.

One of my graduate school advisors, where he'd -- Hyundai had done some great work in India, showing that female political representation did have a material impact on policy choices of things women wanted. And, when I think about the fact that the pay of a home-health aide is dictated by Medicaid reimbursement rates, that's a policy choice that reflects what society values. But, most of the policymakers I see championing those workers are women.

My personal view is that as we have someday a female president and we have more women leadership who are able to weigh in on some of these policy choices, whether it's minimum wage or how much we value and pay some of our public sector workers who are predominantly women, I really do feel hopeful that that will have an impact on the real economic value that these workers, who are bringing so much societal value, how much they get back in return.

SAWHILL: Well, I think what you're both saying, and I couldn't agree more, is that the strides that women have made are just quite remarkable. And, I as the oldest of the three of you

can tell you lots of stories about how bad things were in the bad old days, but they have definitely changed for the better. And, I think that you're both optimistic about the future, as am I, and that's a nice note on which to leave this. And, so, I want to thank both of you a lot for doing this and turn this back to Fred Dews.

DEWS: My thanks to Isabel Sawhill, Stephanie Aaronson, and Molly Kinder for participating in this important conversation. You can find more research about gender equality on our website, [Brookings.edu/19A](https://www.brookings.edu/19A). A special thank you to my colleague, Emily. You read the texts of the 19th Amendment at the top of this episode.

The Brookings Cafeteria Podcast is the product of an amazing team of colleagues, starting with audio engineer Gaston Reboredo. Bill Finan and Robert Wicks of the Brookings Institution Press do the book interviews. Thanks also to my colleagues Adrianna Pita, Marie Wilkin, and Chris McKenna for their collaboration. Finally, my thanks to Camilo Ramirez and Emily Horne for their guidance and support.

The Brookings Cafeteria is brought to you by the Brookings Podcast Network which also produces Dollar and Sense, The Current, and our Events podcasts. Email your questions and comments to me at bcp@brookings.edu. If you have a question for a scholar, include an audio file and I'll play it and the answer on the air. Follow us on Twitter, [@policypodcasts](https://twitter.com/policypodcasts). You can listen to the Brookings Cafeteria in all the usual places. Visit us online at [Brookings.edu](https://www.brookings.edu).

Until next time, I'm Fred Dews.

* * * * *

CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

Carleton J. Anderson, III

(Signature and Seal on File)

Notary Public in and for the Commonwealth of Virginia

Commission No. 351998

Expires: November 30, 2020