

Life Support: The Problems of Working for a Living

American Sociological Review
2021, Vol. 86(2) 191–200
© American Sociological
Association 2021
DOI: 10.1177/0003122421997063
journals.sagepub.com/home/asr



Christine L. Williams^a



Photo by Marsha Miller

Abstract

For most Americans, paid work is their primary means of support. A small percentage of Americans are wealthy enough that they do not need a job, but most people rely on their paychecks for survival. The coronavirus pandemic starkly reveals the limitations of this dependence. In this address, I draw attention to three “problems of working for a living”: lack of access to jobs, poor job quality, and inequality in the workplace. I will argue that addressing these problems is urgently needed to ensure the well-being of all workers. Going even further, I encourage consideration of alternative forms of life support, including expanding the private and the public safety nets, arguing that our existence should not depend exclusively on working for a living.

Keywords

work, poverty, social inequality, pandemic

The coronavirus pandemic caused the cancellation of the 115th annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, something that had not happened since World War II. As I am writing this in December 2020, Covid-19 has killed more than 300,000 people and infected 19 million more in the United States—numbers that are almost certainly underestimates and a mere fraction of the worldwide damage wrought by this scourge. Although the full impact of the

pandemic is not yet known, every institution of social life has been affected, including families, churches, government, schools, and workplaces.

^aThe University of Texas at Austin

Corresponding Author:

Christine L. Williams, The University of Texas at Austin, 305 E. 23rd Street, Stop A1700, Austin, TX 78712
Email: cwilliams@austin.utexas.edu

In this presidential address, I focus on how the pandemic is exposing the vulnerabilities of workers in the United States.

BACK TO WORK

As the pandemic is threatening the lives of untold numbers, it is also destroying people's livelihoods. Many people have lost their jobs. Others are experiencing furloughs or pay cuts.

Documenting the extent of these job losses is difficult. The official U.S. unemployment rate is 6.7 percent (as of November 2020),¹ but this is surely an underestimate of joblessness. Measuring unemployment is vexing even in the best of times. Government unemployment statistics are based on the number of claims for unemployment insurance. This statistic excludes people who are not searching for a job because they are discouraged, keeping house, or unable to work—all conditions intensified by the pandemic (more on this below). Adding to the measurement challenges during the pandemic, the government offices charged with gathering data on unemployment are currently overwhelmed and understaffed.²

One alternative measure of joblessness is the "employment-population ratio," which compares the number of adults with jobs to the total number of adults in the population. This number tells a much grimmer story, as the ratio dipped to 51 in April 2020, compared to 61 before the pandemic struck. This means 49 percent of adults were without a job of any kind. The numbers were especially bleak in minority communities.³

For most Americans, losing a job is devastating. Their day-to-day survival depends on working. It is through work that most people acquire the basic necessities of life—food, clothing, and shelter—but much more than that. In the United States, most people depend on employers for access to healthcare and retirement.⁴ Many people cannot afford to go to college unless they are working.⁵ Even some forms of public assistance have work requirements.⁶

When businesses were forced to shut down, and workers were furloughed or laid

off, people lost their livelihoods. This dire situation led the federal government at the start of the pandemic to pass the 2.2 trillion-dollar Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Here is how the Act is described on the government website:

"The CARES Act provides fast and direct economic assistance for American workers and families, small businesses, and preserves jobs for American industries."⁷

The language used here is important: the Act assumes Americans are supported either through employment or through their families. Notice that the CARES Act does not say it "provides fast and direct economic assistance for Americans [full stop]." Although support for families is included in the bill, and individuals did receive needed direct payments from the government, the language of the CARES Act foregrounds assistance to American *workers*, explicitly tying economic support to participation in the labor market. The language of the CARES Act also equates the protection of U.S. industries with the preservation of jobs, providing a rationale for the financial bail-out of corporations. As the *New York Times* reported in July, the government "backstopped corporate borrowing while allowing companies to lay off millions of workers. As a result, stock prices have soared even as people stand in long lines at unemployment offices and food pantries."⁸

In the early months of the pandemic, states and municipalities, acting with limited federal coordination, introduced a variety of measures to contain the virus, including issuing stay-at-home directives.⁹ Government officials in Texas, where I live, closed down businesses in March, and then decided to reopen them in May, much earlier than scientists believed prudent.¹⁰ Many people here sincerely believed that getting people back to work was the only humane response to the pandemic, even if the results were deadly. Our Lt. Governor made the trade-off explicit when he told us to "go back to work" because "there are more important things than living."¹¹ He had in mind protecting the American economy.

This forced choice—between protecting the economy or the American people—goes to the heart of the dilemma posed by working for a living. Even without a pandemic, employment does not ensure our collective well-being. Although work can be a source of meaning, identity, and fulfillment for people, it is a deeply flawed way to support human life. I will briefly describe three main problems with relying on working for a living: lack of access to work, poor job quality, and inequality in the workplace.

ACCESS

First, not everyone can even get a job. This is the problem of access to work. Not everyone is “employable”: people may lack the knowledge, dispositions, and bodies that employers seek to hire. Employers routinely bemoan the “skills gap” between the qualifications they seek and their availability in the labor market.¹² In addition to skills, employers in some industries may seek aesthetic styles that cater to the expectations of their preferred clientele, eliminating from the hiring pool anyone who is unable or unwilling to conform to these requirements (Williams and Connell 2010). Older workers and those with physical and mental disabilities encounter well-documented obstacles to securing employment (Roscigno et al. 2007; Yelin and Trupin 2003).

Individuals who do have the qualifications to work may be prevented from working for a wide range of reasons, including lack of access to transportation or, these days, lack of access to the internet. The pandemic has highlighted how digital inequality reinforces social and economic inequality, as people without computers and stable internet connections have limited job and educational opportunities.¹³ In addition, family care responsibilities keep many people, especially mothers, out of the workplace (Collins 2019; Damaske 2011). Individuals with criminal records may also be prevented from working (Alexander 2011). And undocumented immigrants may struggle to find employment, a situation worsened by xenophobic politics.¹⁴

In a society where working is the primary means for making a living, people who are unable to work for any of the above reasons are vulnerable to poverty. Their survival is imperiled due to their lack of access to work.

JOB QUALITY

The second problem with working for a living is that even those who can get a job have no guarantee of earning enough to support themselves or their dependents. Relying on paychecks alone leaves many people destitute. One estimate from 2019 showed that 40 percent of jobs pay poverty-level wages and 45 percent of households have no or inadequate health insurance—these types of jobs mainly employ immigrants and people of color.¹⁵ As sociologists are well aware, income inequality has widened over the past decades, with white people benefitting the most.¹⁶

This is the problem of job quality. As Arne Kalleberg (2011) argued, the labor market is divided into bad jobs and good jobs, a distinction based on salary, benefits, and stability, among other factors. Workers in bad jobs suffer exploitation, as their labor generates profit for their employers and penury for themselves.

A standard response to the problem of poor job quality is to encourage people in “bad jobs” to upgrade their skills so they can enter “good jobs.” The pandemic has made it clear there are not enough “good jobs” to go around. Two months into the pandemic, the local newspaper in Austin reported that, while other businesses were laying off workers, fast food restaurants were hiring; so were grocery stores, pharmacies, delivery services, and warehouses.¹⁷ Many of these opportunities are “bad jobs”—the positions are poorly paid, stressful, unstable, and offer few if any benefits—making them inadequate sources of life support. In the context of the pandemic, some of these “bad jobs” have become even worse. Jobs in the low-wage sector often require face-to-face interaction, exposing people to the risks of Covid-19.

During the pandemic, certain groups of workers have been deemed “essential,”

meaning they are required to show up to work in person and on site. This includes people employed in healthcare, construction, grocery stores, meat packing, and delivery—all jobs that require close contact with other people. These so-called essential workers are not eligible for unemployment compensation. They do not have any choice but to go to work, putting them and their family members at increased risk of contracting the disease.

Because of their vulnerability to exposure to Covid-19, essential workers have been hailed as “heroes.” Yard signs went up all over Austin acknowledging and celebrating their sacrifices. The public buses were festooned with images of essential workers on the job, “thanking our everyday heroes.”¹⁸ When I first saw this display, I did a double take: almost all of the workers depicted on the bus were women, and most were women of color, illustrating how on-the-job exposure to the disease is both gendered and racialized.¹⁹

Just as job quality is a concern for individuals in bad jobs, it is a growing concern for those in so-called “good jobs.” Good jobs are not as good as they once were for maintaining a livelihood. Even before the pandemic, layoffs were becoming common even in professional occupations. Companies routinely cut their labor force in response to economic downturns and to shore up their stock prices (Jung 2017; Vallas 2011). As long as global outsourcing is a cheaper alternative, good jobs in this country are in danger of elimination. This uncertainty can result in high levels of stress for people in “good jobs.” When companies downsize, workers who manage to keep their positions often struggle to cope with “overload,” the unreasonable demand to be always available to employers and work excessively long hours without vacation or time off, causing harm to their health and well-being (Kelly and Moen 2020).

During the pandemic, some professionals were able to work from home in the interest of public health. This is something feminist sociologists have been advocating for years (Correll et al. 2014; Williams 2000; cf. Glass and Noonan 2016). But in the current context, this may entail combining full-time paid work

with full-time family care. Around the country, many schools switched to online learning, which meant many workers had to devote extensive time to helping their children with “zoom school,” making it difficult for these workers to perform at a high level and thus increasing their vulnerability to job loss. Since the pandemic began, women’s labor force participation has dropped more than men’s, signaling the gendered economic impact of these additional home-based responsibilities.²⁰

Thus, having a job, even a so-called good job, is no guarantee of a secure livelihood—and these conditions were made worse by the pandemic. While workers in bad jobs experience exploitation and deprivation, many individuals in good jobs are facing deteriorating job quality, including overload and its flip-side, the ever-present threat of unemployment.

INEQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE

The third problem of working for a living is inequality in the workplace. The risks and benefits of working are stratified by gender, race and ethnicity, sexuality, age, and physical ability. As scholars of gendered and racialized organizations have demonstrated, workplaces reproduce the power and privileges associated with whiteness and hegemonic masculinity (Acker 1990; Britton and Logan 2008; Gorman and Mosseri 2019; Ray 2019; Williams, Muller, and Kilanski 2012; Wingfield and Alston 2014). As a result, white men occupy the top positions and women of color are concentrated in the worst jobs.

It is always worth mentioning that discrimination in the workplace is technically against the law. The 1964 Civil Rights Act made it illegal to discriminate in employment based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. In subsequent years, legal protections were added for people experiencing discrimination on the basis of age, veteran status, pregnancy, marital status, disability, and genetic information.²¹ These legal protections are important. The 2020 Supreme Court decision to outlaw discrimination based on gender

identity expression and sexual orientation was long overdue, and it represents a hard-fought victory for the LGBTQ movement.²²

But legal protections are not enough. More than 50 years after passage of the Civil Rights Act, social inequalities remain deeply entrenched in work organizations. White men sit atop 456 of the largest 500 firms. There is not a single black woman or Latina CEO in this entire group.²³ Black/white income disparities are the same today as they were in the 1950s,²⁴ and women still earn 17 percent less than men earn (England, Levine, and Mishel 2020).

Sociologists have thoroughly documented how inequality becomes entrenched in work organizations. They have shown how every element of the employment relationship is structured by inequality, including through the seven mechanisms I briefly describe below. Research documents the inequality regimes in workplaces, demonstrating how these mechanisms play out differently across work organizations and industries, but almost always with the same result. It remains to be seen whether and how the pandemic is altering these mechanisms.

Ideal worker norms. This concept from Joan Acker (1990) highlights employers' stereotypical preconceptions about the best candidates for different jobs. Acker emphasized that the ideal worker for good jobs is usually a man, because employers assume men can dedicate themselves unconditionally to work (unlike women who are assumed to have domestic responsibilities). As Victor Ray (2019) argued, whiteness is also treated as a credential for the best jobs. In general, the more a job is white-male dominated, the higher its salary.²⁵

Recruiting practices. Inequality is often linked to processes of finding, hiring, and vetting employees. A company's recruiting practices may result in workplace segregation. When companies rely on references from current employees, or when they target their recruiting efforts at predominately white colleges and universities, they can more or less guarantee themselves a racially homogeneous workforce. We also know that informal networks are critical for getting a job, but

these networks are segregated by race and gender in ways that privilege white men (Williams et al. 2012). Weak ties may generate job leads for white men, but strong advocacy is often necessary to open doors for other groups, resulting in fewer job opportunities (Smith 2005).

The division of labor. This concept refers to occupational specialization. Workers are sorted into jobs on the basis of their qualifications. Inequality emerges when groups of workers are prevented from acquiring the qualifications for the better jobs, resulting in high levels of gender and racial segregation. Sociologists understand credentialing as a form of social closure that typically benefits elites. Likewise, the division of jobs into "skilled" and "unskilled" positions reflects and reinforces social inequality. Although my own view is that there is no such thing as an unskilled job (Williams 2006), some groups of workers struggle to get their skills recognized and adequately compensated. Workers who perform low-paid care work and unpaid domestic work are prime examples. Throughout history, unions have demanded recognition of workers' skills to gain greater respect, autonomy, and remuneration from their employers; racial/ethnic minority men and women face the greatest obstacles to obtaining this recognition. The point is that when the division of labor is founded on pre-existing social divisions, social inequality is the inevitable result.

Labor processes. Norms governing how work is conducted and evaluated have implications for social inequality. Whether the mode of production involves small artisanal workshops, assembly lines, or interdisciplinary teams, certain groups of workers may be advantaged over others. In the transition to the post-industrial economy, many U.S. companies organized workers into project-based teams, an innovation that contains built-in biases that favor white men (Williams et al. 2012). Similarly, the productivity measures and performance reviews that companies implement to evaluate workers may, intentionally or not, privilege

characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity, giving a boost to individuals best able to conform to those stereotypical expectations (Castilla 2008).

Organizational hierarchies. Many workplaces are organized in a pyramid shape, with authority and power concentrated in the hands of highly paid executives and directors at the top. When deciding who occupies these top positions, employers typically use criteria that favor white men. As Adia Harvey Wingfield (2009, 2013) has shown, double standards affect the careers of black professionals. A white male worker who demonstrates authority, ambition, and confidence may be promoted, but similar behaviors may result in ostracism for women, and even elicit fear when demonstrated by black men—impeding their ascension into leadership positions.

Interactional dynamics. Most jobs require specialized and nuanced displays of comportment, deference, and emotions. Sometimes referred to as “soft skills,” these expectations also reflect gendered and racialized norms. Sociologists studying emotional labor in the workplace have revealed how racially inflected gendered performances are required of a variety of workers, including flight attendants, bill collectors, manicurists, lawyers, doctors, and many others (Hochschild 2003; Kang 2010; Pierce 1995; Wingfield 2019). When “doing gender” is built into the job description, sexual harassment can be the institutionalized result (Williams 1998).

Terminations and layoffs. In the United States, employers have wide discretion to fire workers. In “right-to-work” states, employers can terminate workers for virtually any reason. When mass layoffs occur, employers may consider some groups more deserving than others of keeping their jobs (Byron 2010; Kalev 2014). In my study of scientists in the oil and gas industry, I found that when the price of oil fell, certain groups were targeted for layoffs—including older workers, international workers, and women, especially mothers of young children (Williams 2019).

My research shows how the routine use of downsizing more or less guarantees the continued white male domination of this industry.

The workplace is a major source of social inequality. Work organizations are not gender- or race-neutral institutions. Employers treat people differently on the basis of gender and race/ethnicity, as well as other characteristics that are formally protected by law. Through these and other mechanisms, inequality results. Some workers enjoy good salaries, benefits, and security, while others receive meager rewards for their toil.

In summary, my main point is a simple one. In the United States, where work is the primary means of supporting life, the results are poverty, exploitation, and social inequality.

Unless, of course, things change.

SOCIAL CHANGE

Each of the problems of working for a living has motivated feminist, civil rights, and labor activists to promote improvements in the conditions of employment—efforts that are taking on renewed urgency during the pandemic. These groups often draw on sociological research to support their demands for social change. Here are some of the workplace reforms currently advocated:

Improving access to jobs. Groups are advocating universal access to skills training, education, the internet, paid parental leave, and childcare. Activists promoting criminal justice reform and immigration reform include better access to employment among their demands. These changes would enable more people to get a job.

Improving job quality. During the pandemic, the essential workers who are being lauded as heroes have voiced their demands for improved job quality.²⁶ These efforts include raising the minimum wage—the Fight for \$15 is an example.²⁷ Support for unionization, profit-sharing, enhanced labor protections and labor rights, and stronger health and safety rules are all examples. Calls to lessen overwork are also attempts to improve job quality.

Mitigating inequality in the workplace. The Black Lives Matter movement has brought renewed attention to addressing inequality in the workplace.²⁸ The policies advocated today include affirmative action and its variants, comparable worth, proportional board representation, reporting mandates (this would require employers to disclose the income and worker characteristics for all their employees), and diversity and inclusion programs. Although some of these reforms have not proven to be successful (Dobbin, Kalev, and Kelly 2007), they are supported by activists who are seeking to mitigate social inequality in the workplace.

All these measures are critically important for addressing the problems of working for a living. If more people had access to work, if job quality improved, and if workplaces were more fairly and equitably organized, then our existential dependence on work would not be nearly as problematic as it currently is.

But upgrading employment is not enough. Widespread economic hardship resulting from the pandemic reveals the limitations of working for a living—and may be a harbinger of things to come.²⁹ It is time to consider uncoupling employment status and well-being. This would involve expanding alternative forms of life support that do not depend on employment, as in the following two scenarios.

Expand the Private Safety Net

One alternative is to expand the private safety net. The fact is, some people do not have to work for a living. They can lose their jobs and not worry about becoming destitute. This is because they have accumulated wealth—a private safety net that protects them and their families.

Access to private wealth enhances well-being in many ways. First, it gives people access to employment opportunities. Having wealth enables individuals to invest in education, take unpaid internships, and attend networking events to improve their personal job prospects. Wealth also enables people to weather financial setbacks brought about by illness, divorce, or job loss.

As sociologists are well aware, wealth inequality in the United States is extreme, as much as three times greater than income inequality.³⁰ The median household wealth in the United States is about \$100,000, and most of it is tied up in home equity.³¹ Most families do not have enough wealth to cushion them in case of unemployment. In fact, 20 percent of families have zero wealth.³²

But that could change. The redistribution of wealth is on the table today, thanks to the Black Lives Matter movement. Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones (2020), drawing on the work of many social scientists, recently laid out the compelling case for slavery reparations, arguing that it will begin to make up for the enormous racial wealth gap in this country.³³

Redistributing wealth will give more people access to a private safety net. It would mean losing a job would not result in poverty. It would also mean not having to put up with bad jobs, empowering people to refuse to work in substandard conditions or to tolerate on-the-job discrimination.

Expand the Public Safety Net

A second alternative approach to life support is to expand the public safety net. This is also referred to as the “beyond employment” model, an approach that emerged from the European Commission over a decade ago (Vosko 2010). This effort would provide everyone with a basic livelihood independent of whether or not they have a job.³⁴

Advocates for this approach do not long to return to the so-called “golden age” when steady jobs paid living wages (Reich 2007). Some people call this “the New Deal nostalgia trap” because it deludes us about a system that actually excluded half the population from receiving its benefits (Mittelstadt 2015). Instead, advocates for this approach recognize that employment instability is probably here to stay. Today and in the future, people will move in and out of the work force over the course of their lives. However, workers should not be forced to bear the brunt of this precariousness. No one should be penalized

when they get laid off, or when they have to leave work to care for their family members, or to attend to their own needs. The goal is to ensure a livelihood for everyone, regardless of whether or not they have paid employment.

Advocates for expanding the public safety net argue not only for this guaranteed income but see it as part and parcel of a larger social support system that includes universal health-care and retirement, as well as access to quality higher education, childcare, and elder care (e.g., Neely 2020a, 2020b). These should be available to everyone, not only to those who have good jobs or substantial wealth.

Both of these approaches—expanding the private safety net and expanding the public safety net—uncouple employment from well-being. Neither approach is perfect (Williams and Neely 2015). But they offer “real utopias” (Wright 2013). They may seem completely out of reach but they have historical precedent here and in other countries.

It is important to bear in mind that the United States is an outlier compared to many countries in Europe and other places, where there is less income inequality, welfare benefits are more generous, and most citizens have access to healthcare, childcare, paid paternity leave, and a whole host of other social support provisions. These societies provide alternative forms of life support that do not depend exclusively on working for a living, made possible by a more redistributive system of taxes and transfers. In contrast, tax policies in the United States directly aid the growth of income and wealth inequality.

CONCLUSION

We need some utopian thinking right now. Lately, I’ve heard many people say in response to the economic crises we are experiencing, “At least I’m lucky I still have a job.” As sociologists, we know that luck has very little to do with it. I also worry that this common sentiment yields too much power to employers.

In this address, I identified three problems of working for a living. I’ve argued that when paid employment is the only way for people to live,

let alone to thrive, the result will be widespread poverty, exploitation, and social inequality.

I believe it is time to imagine a society where people are not dependent on work. The pandemic shows us that relying on employment to ensure our collective well-being can have catastrophic consequences that are not equally borne throughout society. It is crucial to address the problems of access, job quality, and social inequality in the workplace, but it is not enough. A good life should not depend on having a good job. As sociologists, we have the tools and the research to show the world what is at stake in providing a good life for everyone.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the editors of *ASR* for their patience as I prepared this article for publication. This is “sociology live,” an attempt to make sense of events as they are unfolding. I thank James Jasper, Debra Umberson, and Mary Waters for their wisdom and guidance. Megan Tobias Neely gave me helpful feedback on an earlier draft, and Jennifer Glass provided an incisive review of a later version. I am grateful to ASA Council members who offered precious encouragement at a particularly stressful time, and also to my colleagues, friends, and family for their enthusiasm and support.

Notes

1. <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empsit.pdf>
2. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/11/30/gao-unemployment-pua-backlogs/>
3. <https://www.bls.gov/charts/employment-situation/employment-population-ratio.htm>; <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2020/employment-population-ratio-54-point-6-percent-in-june-2020-down-from-61-point-1-percent-in-february-2020.htm>
4. <https://www.kff.org/report-section/ehbs-2020-summary-of-findings/>; <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/13/us/politics/coronavirus-health-insurance-trump.html>
5. <http://collegeaffordability.urban.org/covering-expenses/working-during-college/#/>
6. <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/work-requirements-social-safety-net-programs-status-report-work-requirements-tanf-snap-housing-assistance-and-medicaid>
7. <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/cares>
8. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/24/opinion/sunday/income-wealth-inequality-america.html>
9. <https://www.rand.org/blog/2020/04/who-calls-the-shots-during-a-pandemic-the-us-government.html>
10. <https://www.texastribune.org/2020/03/19/texas-restaurants-bars-closed-greg-abbott/>; <https://www>

- .texasribune.org/2020/04/30/texas-reopening-coronavirus-cases-spike/
11. <https://www.texasribune.org/2020/04/21/texas-dan-patrick-economy-coronavirus/>
 12. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/understanding-the-skills-gap-and-what-employers-can-do-about-it/>
 13. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/internet-broadband/>
 14. <https://www.ssa.uchicago.edu/advocates-forum-2020-workplace-discrimination-undocumented-immigrants>
 15. <https://www.umass.edu/employmentequity/covid-19-recession-opportunity-reform-our-low-wage-economy>
 16. <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2020/01/09/trends-in-income-and-wealth-inequality/>
 17. <https://www.statesman.com/zz/news/20200401/here-are-companies-mass-hiring-during-coronavirus-pandemic>
 18. <https://www.capmetro.org/docs/default-source/about-capital-metro-docs/dashboards-docs/care-report-pandemic-recovery.pdf> (see page 17).
 19. <https://www.texasribune.org/2020/05/01/texas-coronavirus-frontline-workers/>
 20. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/why-the-pandemic-is-forcing-women-out-of-the-workforce>; <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2020/10/30/492582/covid-19-sent-womens-workforce-progress-backward/>; <https://www.brookings.edu/essay/why-has-covid-19-been-especially-harmful-for-working-women/>; <https://www.brookings.edu/research/working-parents-are-key-to-covid-19-recovery/>
 21. <https://www.eeoc.gov>
 22. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/15/us/gay-transgender-workers-supreme-court.html>
 23. <https://www.catalyst.org/research/ceos-underrepresented-groups/>
 24. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/25/opinion/sunday/race-wage-gap.html>
 25. <https://www.umass.edu/employmentequity/race-states-and-mixed-fate-white-men>
 26. <https://newrepublic.com/article/157354/problem-heroizing-health-care-workers-like>; <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/04/i-work-grocery-store-dont-call-me-hero/610147/>; <https://www.brookings.edu/research/essential-but-undervalued-millions-of-health-care-workers-arent-getting-the-pay-or-respect-they-deserve-in-the-covid-19-pandemic/>
 27. <https://fightfor15.org/>
 28. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/06/business/corporate-america-has-failed-black-america.html>
 29. <https://speak4sociology.org/2016/12/07/the-real-structural-problem-the-self-destruction-of-capitalism/>; <https://www.noemamag.com/an-inequality-of-being-seen/>
 30. <https://apps.urban.org/features/wealth-inequality-charts/>
 31. <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2020/01/09/trends-in-income-and-wealth-inequality/>
 32. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/us-policy/2019/02/08/wealth-concentration-returning-levels-last-seen-during-roaring-twenties-according-new-research/>
 33. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/06/04/economic-divide-black-house-holds/>
 34. Andrew Yang championed the idea of a universal basic income in his 2020 presidential run (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/18/us/politics/universal-basic-income-andrew-yang.html>).

References

- Acker, Joan. 1990. "Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations." *Gender & Society* 4(2):139–58.
- Alexander, Michelle. 2011. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: New Press.
- Britton, Dana M., and Laura Logan. 2008. "Gendered Organizations: Progress and Prospects." *Sociology Compass* 2(1):107–121.
- Byron, Reginald. 2010. "Discrimination, Complexity, and the Public/Private Sector Question." *Work and Occupations* 37(4):435–75.
- Castilla, Emilio J. 2008. "Gender, Race, and Meritocracy in Organizational Careers." *American Journal of Sociology* 113(6):1479–1526.
- Collins, Caitlyn. 2019. *Making Motherhood Work: How Women Manage Careers and Caregiving*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Correll, Shelley, Erin Kelly, Lindsey Trimble O'Connor, and Joan Williams. 2014. "Redesigning, Redefining Work." *Work and Occupations* 41(1):3–17.
- Damaske, Sarah. 2011. *For the Family: How Class and Gender Shape Women's Work*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dobbin, Frank, Alexandra Kalev, and Erin Kelly. 2007. "Diversity Management in Corporate America." *Contexts* 6(4):21–27.
- England, Paula, Andrew Levine, and Emma Mishel. 2020. "Progress toward Gender Equality in the United States Has Slowed or Stalled." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 117(13):6990–97 (<https://www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1918891117>).
- Glass, Jennifer L., and Mary C. Noonan. 2016. "Telecommuting and Earnings Trajectories among American Women and Men 1989–2008." *Social Forces* 95(1):217–50.
- Gorman, Elizabeth H., and Sarah Mosseri. 2019. "How Organizational Characteristics Shape Gender Difference and Inequality at Work." *Sociology Compass* 13(3) (<https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12660>).
- Hannah-Jones, Nikole. 2020. "What Is Owed." *New York Times Magazine*, June 28 (<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/06/24/magazine/reparations-slavery.html>).

- Hochschild, Arlie. 2003. *The Managed Heart: The Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Jung, Jiwook. 2017. "A Struggle on Two Fronts: Labour Resistance to Changing Layoff Policies at Large U.S. Companies." *Socio-Economic Review* 15(1):213–39.
- Kaley, Alexandra. 2014. "How You Downsize Is Who You Downsize: Biased Formalization, Accountability, and Managerial Diversity." *American Sociological Review* 79(1):109–135.
- Kalleberg, Arne. 2011. *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs: The Rise of Polarized and Precarious Employment Systems in the United States, 1970s to 2000s*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Kang, Miliann. 2010. *The Managed Hand: Race, Gender and the Body in Beauty Service Work*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kelly, Erin, and Phyllis Moen. 2020. *Overload: How Good Jobs Went Bad and What We Can Do about It*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Mittelstadt, Jennifer. 2015. "Reimagining the Welfare State." *Jacobin*, January 23 (<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/07/fdr-social-security-gi-bill/>).
- Neely, Megan Tobias. 2020a. "Essential and Expendable: Gendered Labor in the Coronavirus Crisis." *Gender News Articles*. Stanford Clayman Institute for Gender Research, June 3 (<https://gender.stanford.edu/news-publications/gender-news/essential-and-expendable-gendered-labor-coronavirus-crisis/>).
- Neely, Megan Tobias. 2020b. "What Will U.S. Labor Protections Look Like After Coronavirus?" *Harvard Business Review*, April 2 (<https://hbr.org/2020/04/what-will-u-s-labor-protections-look-like-after-coronavirus/>).
- Pierce, Jennifer. 1995. *Gender Trials: Emotional Lives in Contemporary Law Firms*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ray, Victor. 2019. "A Theory of Racialized Organizations." *American Sociological Review* 84(1):26–53.
- Reich, Robert. 2007. *Supercapitalism: The Transformation of Business, Democracy, and Everyday Life*. New York: Knopf.
- Roscigno, Vincent J., Sherry Mong, Reginald Byron, and Griff Tester. 2007. "Age Discrimination, Social Closure and Employment." *Social Forces* 86(1):313–34.
- Smith, Sandra Susan. 2005. "'Don't Put My Name On It': Social Capital Activation and Job-Finding Assistance among the Black Urban Poor." *American Journal of Sociology* 111(1):1–57.
- Vallas, Steven. 2011. *Work: A Critique*. Boston: Polity Books.
- Vosko, Leah F. 2010. *Managing the Margins: Gender, Citizenship, and the International Regulation of Precarious Employment*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Williams, Christine L. 1998. "Sexual Harassment in Organizations: A Critique of Current Research and Policy." Pp. 19–43 in *Sexuality & Culture*, edited by B. M. Dank and R. Refinetti. New York: Taylor and Francis.
- Williams, Christine L. 2006. *Inside Toyland: Working, Shopping, and Social Inequality*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Williams, Christine L. 2019. "The Deserving Professional: Job Insecurity and Gender Inequality in the Oil and Gas Industry." *Labour and Industry* 29(2):199–212 (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10301763.2019.1600856>).
- Williams, Christine L., and Catherine Connell. 2010. "'Looking Good and Sounding Right': Aesthetic Labor and Social Inequality in the Retail Industry." *Work and Occupations* 37(3):349–77.
- Williams, Christine L., Chandra Muller, and Kristine Kilanski. 2012. "Gendered Organizations in the New Economy." *Gender & Society* 26(4):549–73.
- Williams, Christine L., and Megan Tobias Neely. 2015. "Gender and Work: Precariousness and Inequality." *Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118900772.etrds0140>).
- Williams, Joan. 2000. *Unbending Gender: Why Family and Work Conflict and What to Do About It*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wingfield, Adia Harvey. 2009. "Racializing the Glass Escalator: Reconsidering Men's Experiences with Women's Work." *Gender & Society* 23(1):5–26.
- Wingfield, Adia Harvey. 2013. *No More Invisible Man: Race and Gender in Men's Work*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Wingfield, Adia Harvey. 2019. *Flatlining: Race, Work, and Health Care in the New Economy*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Wingfield, Adia Harvey, and Renée Skeete Allston. 2014. "Maintaining Hierarchies in Predominantly White Organizations: A Theory of Racial Tasks." *American Behavioral Scientist* 58(2):274–87.
- Wright, Erik Olin. 2013. "Transforming Capitalism through Real Utopias." *American Sociological Review* 78(1):1–25.
- Yelin, Edward H., and Laura Trupin. 2003. "Disability and the Characteristics of Employment." *Monthly Labor Review* 126(5):20–31.

Christine L. Williams is Professor of Sociology and the Elsie and Stanley E. (Skinny) Adams, Sr. Centennial Professor in Liberal Arts at The University of Texas at Austin. She has studied gender inequality and sexual harassment in a wide range of workplace settings, most recently in the oil and gas industry. A forthcoming book is titled *Gaslighted: How the Oil and Gas Industry Shortchanges Women Scientists*. Williams received the Jessie Bernard Award from the American Sociological Association, and the Distinguished Lecturer Award and the Feminist Mentor Award given by Sociologists for Women in Society.