BIAS, THE PANDEMIC, AND POLITICAL DIVISIONS: WILL THE GENDER GAP CONTINUE TO INCREASE FOR U.S. WOMEN?

PRECONCEITO, PANDEMIA E DIVISÕES POLÍTICAS: A DIFERENÇA DE GÊNERO CONTINUA A AUMENTAR PARA AS MULHERES DOS EUA?

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Abstract: *Decades of research has found that pandemics disproportionately affect women than people from different gender backgrounds, and the COVID-19 pandemic has proven no different. However, gender inequity in United States contexts has proven an outlier across international contexts, as the nation considering itself the freest in the world still lags countless countries in many categories related to gender equity and women's rights. Our work explains this unique U.S. context and how social conditions, politics, education, and the economy have and will continue to pose unique challenges for women's rights in the United States long after the COVID-19 pandemic retreats, if it ever does. Then, we discuss the progress women have lost due to the pandemic, calling for a critical discussion as to how women—and specifically women of Color—can regain these losses and continue to fight for their basic human rights.*

Keywords: *Covid-19. Gender Gap. Future of Work.*

Resumo: *Décadas de pesquisa descobriram que as pandemias afetam desproporcionalmente as mulheres do que as pessoas de diferentes origens de gênero, e a pandemia do COVID-19 não provou ser diferente. No entanto, a iniquidade de gênero nos contextos dos Estados Unidos reforçou ser uma exceção nos contextos internacionais, pois a nação que se considera a mais livre do mundo ainda fica atrás de inúmeros países em muitas categorias relacionadas à equidade de gênero e direitos das mulheres. Este estudo explica o contexto único dos EUA e como as condições sociais, a política, a educação e a economia representam e continuarão a representar desafios únicos para os direitos das mulheres nos Estados Unidos muito tempo depois que a pandemia de COVID-19 recuar, se é que isso acontecer. Em seguida, discutimos o progresso que as mulheres perderam devido à pandemia, pedindo uma discussão crítica sobre como as mulheres – e especificamente as mulheres de cor – podem recuperar essas perdas e continuar lutando por seus direitos humanos básicos.*

Palavras-chave: *Covid-19. Diferença de Gênero. Futuro do Trabalho.*

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Introduction

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization has set 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to achieve by the year 2030 (UNESCO, 2017). One of the goals is gender equity, which is also one of two global priorities. The plan describes the goal:

> UNESCO recognizes gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as one of its two global priorities. The Organization is mainstreaming gender equality in all of its programmes to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This includes promoting girls' and women's education; promoting women in science [...] promoting women as agents of social transformations. (p. 5)

In the United States, however, women have *lost ground* in the struggle for gender equity during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Global Economic Forum (2020) gave the U.S. a score of .763, translating into 32nd place in the world. The rating was based on economic opportunities, educational attainment, and political empowerment. England, Levine, and Mishel (2018) documented the stalled progress - "women's employment rose almost steadily from 1970 to 2000, moving from 48% employed in 1970 to 75% employed in 2000 [...] In 2018 it was no higher than its level in 1996" (p. 1). In terms of salary, women made 60% of what men earned in the 1970s. Their earnings have risen more slowly since 1990, and women currently make 83% as much as men (p. 3). Further,

> The [gender] segregation of occupations has fallen substantially since 1970, moving from 0.60 to 0.42. However, it moved much faster in the 1970s and 1980s than it has since 1990. Thus, there has been a slowdown, but not a complete stall of occupational desegregation (p. 5).

England, Levine, and Mishel also examined whether shared housework has changed. They observed,

> Women's entrance to careers came more readily than changes in men's roles at home. . . research showing a much larger increase in women's paid work hours than increase in men's family work (housework, childcare, and shopping) [...] There is still a strong norm eschewing anything but full-time paid work for husbands (p. 5).

Women in the U.S. are affected by other lingering types of institutionalized sexism, such as the lack of 1) maternity/parental leave, 2) job titles that are the same for men and women but with differential pay scales, and 3) a healthy work environment free from harassment and violence. Combined with cultural norms about "women's work" and their role in the family, women's employment has stalled and declined.

It is ironic that as other countries embark on sustainable development goals, progress for women in the U.S. has been reduced. In this article, we discuss the intersections of race, gender, and the educational system, structural barriers, and chart a path forward for improving the working and personal lives of women (and of men).

Intersections of race, gender, and the education system

No cultural flashpoint in United States history has caused such immediate, public outcry among both Democrats and Republicans than the teaching of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in K-12 schools and institutions of higher education. In the second and third quarters of 2021, at least half of the state governments have considered or passed legislation prohibiting public school teachers and administrators from discussing Critical Race Theory (CRT). A new law from a North Carolina School Board says, "No student or staff member shall be subjected to the notion that racism is a

permanent component of American life [...] No unequal values shall be placed on any race, gender, religion, ethnicity, or any other identity group." The penalty for discussing CRT was the loss of $US 7.9 million in funding for the school. One teacher said, "The new policy is like selling our souls to the devil for $7.9 million [of funding from the state]" (COLAROSSI, 2021, p. 2). This and similar laws limit the discussion of gender equity in the classroom. However, there is little open discussion about what CRT is. Moreover, in the U.S., CRT is taught not to students in the creche but graduate students in the university. The assertion that young children learn these concepts is a red herring designed to misinform and agitate.

In short, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a conceptual and theoretical framework primarily concerned with racial oppression apparent in many facets of society. For more than twenty years, researchers and activists have applied CRT to various educational fields to help recognize and eliminate racism (CAPPER, 2015). The landmark work of Derrick Bell (1995) and Kimberlé Crenshaw et al. (1995) argued that CRT is a necessary pillar of education to analyze policies and policymaking while considering a historical context to deconstruct any actual racialized content. This contextualization thus challenges the dominant, White, cisgender, patriarchal hierarchy pervasive throughout United States culture.

Since its inception, scholars have employed CRT to define the contours of racialized barriers present in educational institutions and processes, often examining how educational policies perpetuate institutional racism and subordinate people of Color (CAPPER, 2015). Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw (1993) first defined several CRT-specific elements to help inform scholarly examinations of the many racialized barriers facing people of Color. Therein, Critical Race Theory:

- Recognizes racism is endemic to American life.
- Expresses skepticism toward dominant claims of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy.
- Challenges ahistoricism and insists on a contextual/historical analysis of institutional priorities.
- Insists on recognizing the experiential knowledge of people of Color and our communities of origin in analyzing society.
- Is interdisciplinary and crosses epistemological and methodological boundaries.
- Works toward the end of eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression.

However, also essential to CRT is an acknowledgment of intersectionality, a concept championed by Crenshaw et al. (1995). Intersectionality is an understanding that personal and social identities are interconnected and can create and amplify systems of oppression. For instance, White men hold both a White racial identity and cisgender man identity, and White men have typically created systems of oppression, and thus, essentially do not experience the oppression of these systems. Meanwhile, people of Color, women and queer people, immigrants, people with disabilities, and other minoritized individuals may hold any combination of these identities, amplifying the systemic oppression they face in United States society. Critically important is that rejection and contestation of CRT is a fundamental rejection of a discussion of how United States society minoritizes people of Color.

However, extending CRT and focusing more on Crenshaw et al.'s (1995) theory of intersectionality, a rejection of CRT is also a rejection of critical conversations surrounding any number of marginalized identities. Of these identities, people identifying as women in the United States have encountered multiple systems of oppression in society, including a very recent controversy surrounding abortion laws in the state of Texas and Texas' women losing their bodily autonomy to the law (RABIN, 2021). No state has mandated gender-conscious education in K-12 schools, complicating the current discussion surrounding critical race theory and intersectionality. Also, to date, no national- or state-level legislation has addressed the education of gender equity akin to parallel discussions of CRT within K-12 curricula. Without the tools to discuss institutional sexism, little can be done to inform students about reducing bias, racial and gender bias included.

As a result, United States society is left with a perplexing question: if CRT, and thus, a critical discussion of historical racial discrimination cannot be held, how could a discussion of historical gender discrimination take place? Perhaps the answer lies within both historical and recent demographics regarding the representation of people of Color and women within the education profession. Historically, throughout the 20th century, White men were teachers and usually held upper-level administration positions within K-12 school systems and institutions of higher education (WILL, 2020). As the education profession has continuously been de-professionalized by members of the White patriarchy in the United States, more women and more people of Color have entered the education profession (WILL, 2020). However, White men still tend to dominate administrative positions and policy-making positions, who then dictate what teachers of Color and women teachers are allowed to teach within the bounds of a classroom. This has resulted in little curricular progress regarding the education of racial and gender discrimination within United States school systems because the people in power are the ones who are likely perpetuating this racial and gender discrimination.

This argument—that teachers of Color and women teach but do not dictate what is taught—is both highly problematic and persistent. United States society has already had to manage a tense public discourse surrounding critical race theory and whether or not critical race theory should be taught and who should teach it. Ironically, White men are making these decisions. Therefore, even if Critical Race Theory is being discussed as a potential curricular element in school systems, White men will still likely dictate who teaches critical race theory and how it is taught. Any discussions of gender equity and the intersectional discrimination women face, especially women of Color, are a mere afterthought.

The gendered pandemic and psychosocial issues

As history has dictated time and time again, pandemics disproportionately affect certain groups more than others, and the COVID-19 pandemic has been found to disproportionately affect people of Color and women compared to their counterparts (Yildirim & Elsen-Ziya, 2021). Subsequently, a critical discussion must be had regarding the gendered nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and the psychosocial needs of women.

Of pandemics, DeFrancesco Soto (2020) said,

> Global pandemics have been regarded as great equalizers. Viruses do not discriminate based on who you are, where you live, how much you earn, and certainly not by how you vote. The COVID-19 crisis, however, has upended the 'egalitarianism' of pandemics, unearthing social and economic inequities that are jeopardizing half a century of women's hard-fought gains in the American workforce. We are living through our nation's first female-driven recession. Fueled by disappearing service-sector jobs and a lack of childcare options, the COVID-19 public health, and economic crisis has triggered a nationwide 'shecession', This 'shecession' s a bipartisan concern, the ripple effects of which are already threatening the current workforce and could imperil the female future of work. Women are being ousted from the workforce due to disappearing jobs in industries that may never recover. Absent pipelines to create an entry into the workforce—e.g., college preparation that promotes science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programs; dual-generation approaches that provide educational opportunities for children and parents; and apprenticeships in technical fields—this female departure from the workforce is at risk of becoming permanent (p. 1).

The initial studies that implicated COVID as a gendered pandemic came in the first few months of the onset of the global shutdown. That research was done through national health

systems. Following those articles was research on the economic, sociological, and psychological impact of the pandemic for women in the U.S., Canada, and Australia.

Although Iceland has been a leader in gender equality measures, still, researchers concluded COVID-19 precipitated a "throwback to the 1950s" (HJÁLMSDÓTTIR and BJARNADÓTTIR, 2021, p. 77). For example, two occupations employing many women were negatively affected. Nurses assumed a higher risk of catching the virus coupled with longer hours, more stress, and even violence from patients, family members, and others. Many teachers either lost their jobs temporarily or quickly pivoted to online instruction with little training or guidance. They also suffered higher stress from uncertainty over teaching, students' fear, and distraught parents' concerns. Some teachers also experienced violent acts, including a few murders, by community members.

One woman interviewed by Hjálmsdóttir and Bjarnadóttir described her "new normal, "I've turned into a foreman here at home" (p. 269). Other women reported doing twice as much childcare during the pandemic how they now oversaw the entire emotional burden of running their household; they could not show how overwhelmed they felt by family duties for fear of spiraling into chaos as a household. In speaking of both emotional toll and a lack of work/life balance, one mother described the guilt she was feeling. Her children wore their pajamas for the entire day, she was tired and angry, her paid work was unfinished, and she needed to cook and clean the house. Even if her partner telecommuted, that person was occupied with adjusting to the "new normal" in the workplace and had little energy left to deal with family issues.

The most robust research on the psychological impact of the gendered pandemic comes from epidemiologists in Australia (Dawali, et al., 2021). They studied women between the ages of 18 and 50 using the extant 2017-2018 National Health Survey (n=4267) and a nationally representative survey in October of 2020 (n=1005) (2021, *i*55). For both databases, they used the Kessler-10,

> A measure of psychological distress capturing symptoms of affective and anxiety disorders [which] were compared across the surveys and by sociodemographic characteristics (age, education, socioeconomic status, income, family type, and employment change) (p. 55).

In summary, the researchers discovered that 4.6 percent of the women were in high psychological distress in 2017 versus 19.3 percent in 2020; moreover, distress increased for all sociodemographic groups. In 2020, the highest distress rates were from women who changed jobs (29.8 percent) or earned $49,000 or less annually or were single mothers (24.8%). The authors conclude that the "rate of very high psychological distress increased fourfold for women during the pandemic" (55) and that it is crucial to "address social policies and access to mental health support" (56*).*

The future of work

Much of the ground lost by women in the pandemic stems from the structural issues in the labor market and family life. Economists have focused on unpaid care and the future of work.

Heintz, Staab, and Turquet (2021) criticized the exclusion of unpaid care work by women, particularly intergenerational work with children and other family members, from the global market-based economy. They point out that such work is a pillar of the global markets and could precipitate a full-blown market crisis. They define such a crisis as "disruption to national systems that threaten their sustainability and compromises the delivery of. . .goods and services on which human societies depend" (p. 474). They labeled macroeconomic theory as flawed and urged a modified approach that includes non-market variables such as non-paid care work in the metrics for productivity.

Collins, Landivar, Ruppanner, and Scarborough (2021) studied the work hours gap between dual-earner parents during the pandemic. They noted that,

> Beyond the disastrous health consequences, the pandemic has also ravaged national economies with soaring unemployment and work, school, and day care closures. The rapid growth in unemployment in the United States happened at unprecedented rates, with peak unemployment reaching 14.7 per cent in April. This is the highest rate since 1933 during the Great Depression (p. 101).

The researchers used the U.S. Current Population Survey to examine the hours gap between mothers and fathers. In a previous study, they determined that while all genders equally perceived the domestic work required, the fathers were less likely to do the work (THÉBAUD et al., 2019).

The researchers evaluated if this gap was reduced during the pandemic as more fathers telecommuted to work. Collins, Landivar, Ruppaner, and Scarborough (2021) found that mothers with children under the age of five have reduced their workloads 4 – 5 more times than their partners. As a result, they estimated the gender hours gap has increased between 20 to 50 percent (p. 101). As reported above, Hjálmsdóttir and Bjarnadóttir (2021) found that the emotional toll of the non-paid work increased dramatically. Similarly, Stevano, Mezzadri, Lombordozzi, and Bargawi (2021) used feminist social reproduction theory to identify a crisis of work which is "reshaping the organization of production and reproduction in households and global labor markets. . .[and] is exacerbating gender, class, and race inequalities" (p. 271).

Another marker of the disintegrating relationship between employer and work is the rise of the gig economy, which is in full view at colleges and universities (see: Kezar et al., 2019), and severs the relationship between employer and worker (Vallas & Schor, 2020; Woodcock & Graham, 2020). The employees are considered contractors or temporary workers who labor with zero-dollar contracts or short-term contracts with no or few benefits. They provide their own tools, computers, phones, and other equipment. Except in California, gig workers are not required to be paid the minimum wage. Fifty-five percent of the gig workers in the U.S. are female yet they still earn less than men working the same gig (Smith, 2016). Moreover, women tend to avoid ride share gigs to avoid sexual harassment and assault; instead, they opt for delivery services to protect themselves.

Guy Ryder (2019), Director of the International Labor Organization (ILO) wrote about valuing the work of the future. He called for "new metrics that enable us to measure the contribution of all work to our individual well-being and that of our societies, so that we can formulate policies to shape a Future of Work with social justice" (p. 23).

The changing character of work coupled with technological advances creates opportunities for employees to work in various modes: in-person, at home, and telecommuting from virtually any location 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. For many workers, a job equals a means of survival and they do not qualify for any alternate modes of working. However, in addition to survival, work provides connections to other people and society, a means of gaining additional skills, socialization, and social inclusion. These functions are important to workers and when they face job loss, they feel shame and depression. Goods and services are horizontally integrated, but vertical integration may result in the pressure to outsource work which translates into job loss (p. 26).

Ryder talks of the hours gap for women because of the amount of their unpaid care work. He classifies women's work as being "time poor," which can lead to inequality and impoverishment (p. 27). Also, at issue is "time sovereignty," that is who controls the work time and place. Ryder also argued for a new metric for valuing the worth of work (p. 28). For example, while the GDP (gross domestic product) is inadequate for calculating the true economic outcome, alternatives such as the General Progress Indicator (GPI) include unpaid volunteer and care work. These new metrics give dignity to the work and provide workers a sense of their worth and fair treatment. Guyer notes this is particularly important because workers who feel their jobs are not important are more likely to stir up political unrest.

The path forward

Klaus Schwab, the founder of the World Economic Forum, first wrote of the Fourth Industrial

Revolution (abbreviated 4IR or industry 4.0) in the journal *Foreign Affairs* in 2015 and followed up with a book on the same topic (Schwab, 2017). The three previous industrial revolutions used water and steam, electric power, and information technology to increase production. By contrast, the fourth revolution ". . .is characterized by a fusion of technologies blurring the lines between the physical, digital, and biological spheres" (Schwab, 2015, para. 2). Further, it will affect virtually all companies and operate on an exponential trajectory.

DeFrancesco Soto emphasized that the fourth revolution is the first with more than half of the women in the workforce. Yet typically "women's jobs" as cashiers, receptionists, and clerks, are the most at risk for job loss. She said that

> Today's most vulnerable workers—the low-skilled and low-wage workers—will suffer the greatest growing pains as the economy transitions from one industrial era to the next. Women of Color, communities of Color, and youth will be disproportionately affected. (DEFRANCESCO SOTO, p. 24).

Indeed, one study estimated that 32 - 42 percent of layoffs during the pandemic would be permanent (Barrero et al., 2020).

Industry 4.0 provides the space and opportunity to change that trajectory by developing and advancing modern technologies. This requires a redoubled commitment to creating opportunities for women in STEM (science, technology, education, and mathematics), education, and employment. DeFrancesco Soto asserts that while "more women than ever are entering STEM fields, women hold roughly one-third of STEM bachelor's degrees, and women of color hold far fewer" (p. 25). While women comprise 57 percent of those completing bachelor's degrees, the number of women of Color who enter, persist, and graduate from college is disproportionately lower. Specialized programs to recruit and retain women in STEM programs and internships, apprenticeships, and other experiential opportunities strengthen degree completion and post-graduation employment outcomes and earnings. Because girls are often frustrated by math and science courses, they tend to reject STEM careers in elementary school. However, to prepare for jobs in industry 4.0, they will need higher level technical skills to compete for this rapidly changing field.

De Francesco Soto (2021) outlined several strategies for intergenerational approaches to improve job opportunities for women. The first strategy is to build a childcare system and includes three groups of recommendations. This includes building an affordable system by:

- Increasing funding for existing programs from pre-Kindergarten to elementary school and supporting these programs in every state.
- Setting costs on a sliding scale, with no family paying more than 7 percent of their salary.
- The second effort is building high quality and accessible systems by:
- Providing sufficient services for underserved populations by increasing the number of state-approved childcare system.
- Increasing availability of childcare in various settings and at the times that children of working parents need.
- Increasing facilities for children with disabilities, toddlers, and infants.

Third is building an equitable future for childcare workers by:

- Paying at least the minimum wage and providing benefits, including sick leave and family leave.
- Hiring and training a diverse workforce.
- Providing professional development for workers.

The dominant theory of organizational change in this century is disruptive innovation, championed by Clay Christensen of Harvard Business School. He created the theory, which says that as new firms enter the marketplace, the existing firms for that product or service will improve.

Christensen suggested that half of U.S. colleges will go bankrupt in the next ten to fifteen years due to their conservative academic policies and inability to compete (JOHNSON HESS, 2018).

This disruption is tied to the future of work. De Francesco Soto identified occupational segregation, workforce training, and workplace setting as the most essential elements in changing the nature of work. She labelled the Fourth Industrial Revolution as a disruption but said that it can be a positive influence "if planned with an intentional structure of inclusivity and gender equity. Failure to enact a strategic future of work plan, especially a female future of work plan, will not only entrench existing pay gaps and labor market disadvantages for women but widen them as well" (p. 25).

De Francesco Soto clarified that a female future of work will not be exclusive to women:

> A female future of work is not a zero-sum paradigm where women gain at the expense of men. The creation of a female future of work addresses the inequities that have harmed women's labor force participation, whether as a result of gendered educational norms or occupational segregation. A female future of work is one that recognizes the reality that the majority of primary caregivers are women. And finally, a female future of work is one that is safe and supportive of all workers. A female future of work is necessary for an equitable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a pressing short-term need. But the intentional conceptualization of a female future of work is one that will pave the way for sustained growth and equity for both women, men, and the families they support (p. 25).

She identified core tenants of the future of work: occupational segregation, workforce training, and workplace setting. It is imperative that girls and young women aspire to careers fields that are in demand. However, many girls

> Track away from science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) throughout their education. As early as third grade, girls lose confidence in their math skills. Gendered math gaps are fueled by stereotyped threat, male-dominated STEM cultures, and fewer female STEM role models, all of which contribute to STEM pathways being less accessible to young women. (p. 25)

Likewise, middle school students who aspire to be the first in their family to attend college may not have access to "college knowledge." In the U.S., taking Algebra and a foreign language in 8th grade places a student on track to attend college. Students and their parents need information, support, and assurances that college is affordable to break through these barriers. Counselors, teachers, and community members can help students set their sights on attending college. The lack of a college degree (Associates or Bachelors) will limit the entry of young women into the future of work.

An example of a successful high school program to train young women who are the first-in-family to attend college is the Ann Richards School for Young Woman Leaders in Texas (ARS), which is based in our hometown of Austin, Texas. Through counseling, strong academic content, and setting high aspirations, 100 percent of the ARS class of 2018 both graduated from high school and attended college. Another route into skilled jobs with a future are apprentice programs in the crafts and trades such as plumbing electrician, and welder. Just over 7 percent of the apprentices are women. These middle-skill jobs pay well and offer on-the-job training. No college degree is required.

Some training programs use a dual-generation model, which allows mothers to attend training programs and their children to access high-quality childcare on site. This supports the mothers and allows their children to see their mothers preparing for a job. Thus, the mother is a role model for her children.

The third issue is workplace safety. The statistics are troubling:

> A safe and welcoming workplace is critical to a productive workforce. For women, working in an environment that is free from sexual violence, harassment, and discrimination is one of the top concerns for American women. In 2018, workers filed over 7,500 cases of sexual harassment charges with the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, women in nontraditional jobs report pervasive harassment in their trades, with one study finding that 83 percent of women affirmed that they experienced unwelcome sexual remarks (DEFRANCESCO SOTO, p. 111).

A survey by the AFL-CIO found that 88 percent of the women working in the skilled trades in construction and extraction had been harassed. Women have another layer of workplace barriers than their male counterparts in the form of harassment and violence. The harassment needs to be addressed seriously and promptly by line and staff management. Women also face concerns about bodily safety. Shoes, boots, and other protective wear were designed for male workers, and may harm women because these oversized items may become caught in machinery or are tripping hazards if they are too large. Employers and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration need to monitor these issues.

While De Francesco Soto (2021) discussed many examples of proposed and existing programs to address the "shecession," the federal government is moving slowly to develop federal policies that support modifying the future of work. After a Congressional hearing on the future of work, legislators formed the bipartisan Congressional Future of Work Caucus (New Democrat Coalition, 2020). According to the co-chair of the Caucus, they plan to

> Develop a clearinghouse of legislation relating the future of work in Congress, get continued participation and education of our members on the various aspects of the future of work, and finally, produce a national strategy that includes legislative wins for our country (2020, p. 4).

She added that the Caucus was designed to examine "the growing effects of automation on the workforce, the emerging impact of artificial intelligence on society, the changing nature of the social contract, and the possible disruption & opportunities presented by technology in the U.S. economy" (Mendez and Brooks, 2020). Unfortunately, more partisan issues have stalled progress on legislation related to the future of work.

De Francesco Soto (2021) ends with a clarion call:

> [to build] out the policy infrastructure to allow women to effectively engage in the workforce. . .When women thrive, American families and communities thrive as well. Historically, moments of great crisis bring with them windows of opportunity to enact transformational policy change. The COVID-19 pandemic presents this opportunity. Right now is the moment to remedy the disconnect between the needs of the American workforce and public policy realities. . . But overhauling the childcare system and creating a future of work stand out as unifying issues (p. 35).

Conclusion: intersecting goals

When we started this article, we focused on UNESCO's sustainable goal 5 related to gender. However, there is necessary and constructive overlap with SG 8 (decent work and economic growth through the future of work), SG 4 (quality education) and SG 10 (reducing inequities). The intersection between these goals point to complex changes that will affect many groups. More people with

similar needs requires additional effort, however, it also indicates much broader support. Especially as intersectional discrimination and marginality pose far greater threats to women than people from different backgrounds, the time is now for a critical discussion on how COVID-19 has and will disproportionately affect women and what can be done to assuage the suffering that women will continue to endure long after the pandemic has become manageable.

Much of the research we use in the discussion of the gendered pandemic is from western academics who have more resources to do research quickly and obtain more data from their respective governments. The message is inescapable: women have lost decades of hard-fought victories in the last two years. We expect research from other countries which is slowly being published show similar trends. We hope that the research does not show much larger damage to women workers in those other countries. Educators must have the resources to build programs for women who are in the labor force and their families. In addition, women must have a large presence at discussions of the future of work for women. If these do not happen, women around the world will continue to lose ground in their efforts to achieve gender equality.

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