RESEARCH STATEMENT

My research agenda focuses on the interplay between justice, gender, and work. Specifically, I am interested in the gendered consequences of unequal and unfair treatment, especially in the realm of unpaid labor. In the following sections, I outline how my dissertation research, my published papers and works in progress, as well as plans for future research are associated with these larger research interests.

Dissertation Research

My dissertation focuses on an under-studied form of unpaid labor---caring for aging relatives. I am interested in studying how participation in adult care changes over time for caregivers, thereby establishing adult care as a dynamic process. I am also interested in discovering how various patterns of participation are differentially related to workplace and mental health outcomes. To do this, I use advanced statistical techniques on data drawn from the longitudinal, nationally representative Household and Labor Dynamics in Australia survey.

While scholars have established how long the average caregiver spends in adult care in a given day or year, what remains unknown is how individual participation in adult care changes over time. The first part of my dissertation shows that adult care is a dynamic process in that it varies in intensity over time. I use group-based trajectory modeling to show that there are various paths that describe the participation in adult care over time. Some individuals start off providing small amounts of care, and their participation increases over time; others begin by providing large amounts of care that vary over time; another group of people never participates in adult care. I also consider gender in this analysis and show that women have a larger number of distinct patterns of adult care than do men.

In the second part of my dissertation, I examine how these patterns are related to workplace outcomes. Past studies have shown deleterious effects of caregiving on a caregiver’s income, but these studies have been limited in many ways, mainly through cross-sectional designs and non-representative samples. Consistent with previous studies, I find that there is a deleterious effect on a caregiver’s income for being in any path that provides adult care, but the most detrimental effect on income is for caregivers who provide the highest and most variable amounts of care.

In the third part of my dissertation, I examine how the patterns I identified are related to a caregiver’s levels of psychological distress. Some past studies have shown that caregiving is associated with high levels of psychological distress, while other studies show limited effects. To adjudicate these conflicting findings, I compare levels of distress based on the patterns of care. Preliminary findings show that caregivers who provide the highest and most variable amounts of care display the highest levels of psychological distress. Interestingly, caregivers who provide modest levels of care are no more distressed than people who do not provide adult care. These findings show that providing some amount of adult care is not particularly disadvantageous for a caregiver’s mental health, which speaks to social psychological literatures regarding the relationship between multiple roles and well-being.

Publications and Manuscripts in Progress

Another area of unpaid labor that I am interested in examining is household labor, particularly how it relates to gender and justice. My master’s thesis examines the role that nonstandard work
hours play in the relationship between divisions of household labor and women’s perceptions of fairness of these divisions. In 2010, this thesis won the graduate student “Paper of Distinction” award from the Mid-South Sociological Association. A manuscript developed from this thesis is forthcoming in a special issue of Research in the Sociology of Work, titled “Work and Family in the New Economy.” In it, my co-author and I found that women who work nonstandard hours are less likely than women who work standard hours to perceive under-benefit in their divisions of household labor. This relationship is partially explained by the fact that men whose wives work nonstandard hours spend more time in routine chores than men whose wives work standard hours. Past research has shown that women value men’s time in housework, specifically in types of chores that are typically assigned to women. As such, women who work nonstandard hours are likely to perceive their divisions of household labor as fair, even when they are objectively unequal, due to the fact that their husbands are participating in a form of labor that counters gender expectations. This paper points to the new service economy as one of the reasons that the gender revolution has stalled.

My interest in justice processes is further highlighted in an article forthcoming in Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice. This article tests the impact of a student’s perceptions of teacher and rule fairness on his/her likelihood of bringing a weapon to school and fighting at school. My co-authors and I find that students who perceive that their teachers treat them unfairly are more likely to participate in school violence, but this relationship is buffered by perceptions of adult support in the school environment. Perceived adult support serves as a protective factor against participating in school violence when students feel they have been disrespected by their teachers.

My interest in justice processes is also related to my interest in gender. For many years in graduate school, I encountered research projects rooted in essentialist ideas that made claims that women are simply more focused on establishing relationships in the workplace and less concerned with pay than are men. As a scholar who aims to debunk essentialist notions, I published a piece in Sociology Compass that provides a critical review of the literatures surrounding gender and justice. In this piece, my coauthors and I challenged the idea that justice is gendered by pointing to the limited amount of research that actually finds gender differences in justice processes and show that in each of these cases, gender was conflated with status. This piece contributes to the literature on women in the paid labor force by showing that women indeed care about both fair treatment and fair outcomes at the same level as men.

During my time at the University of Georgia, I have also been able to use laboratory methods to study justice processes. As project manager for a series of NSF-funded studies examining emotional responses to over-reward, I helped to design laboratory experiments, implement the laboratory protocol, and analyze project data. Not only did this experience expand my methodological toolkit, but it also allowed me to study justice from a basic science perspective, which complements my other research. I am a co-author on a paper derived from this project that will soon be under review.

I also think it is important to bring my research interests into the classroom and allow them to inform my teaching. To this end, I teach Gender and Work. In this course, we discuss several forms of unpaid labor including household labor, childcare, adult care, and emotional labor. I noticed that my students had particular trouble grasping the concept and consequences of emotional labor. To rectify this, I developed a teaching tool wherein students find examples of
emotional labor in television and film and present them to the class. Embedded measures on exams and pre-and-post-tests surrounding the assignment showed that students’ understanding of emotional labor improved as a result of this project. As there is a dearth of published pedagogical strategies surrounding emotional labor, I developed a manuscript outlining this activity and its effectiveness, and it is currently under review.

**Future Research**

While much research documents deleterious consequences for those providing adult care, the next step in my research agenda is to examine whether there are also potential benefits for caregivers in providing this form of labor. Specifically, I plan to perform a qualitative study that examines whether adult care prepares the caregiver for the ultimate death of the care recipient. If so, it may be a way that caregivers are able to grieve prior to the loss of the care recipient. As women are more likely than men to provide care, I argue that this could serve as one of the mechanisms through which women come to grieve in different (and potentially psychologically healthier) ways than men.

I also want to continue disentangling the relationship between participation in unpaid labor and social psychological outcomes in both the paid labor force and the family. In particular, I am interested in discovering how participation in adult care is related to satisfaction on the job, turnover intentions, and job stress, and how these processes may be shaped by the age of the caregiver, caregiver perceptions of social support, and caregiver perceptions of physical and mental well-being. To link adult care to my interest in justice processes, I am also planning a project that considers how perceptions of fairness of the distribution of adult care affect relationships in the family, as indicated by perceptions of marital quality and happiness with sibling relationships.