Short Abstract
This paper examines the extent to which women change occupations and/or industry when seeking re-employment after a period of non-employment and whether women’s reasons for job exit predict such changes in occupation and/or industry. Beyond whether young to middle-age women return to the labor force (considered in a previous paper), examining the types of jobs women attain upon return and the differences in their new jobs compared to the jobs they left will provide insight into broad labor force inequalities in the US, including gender inequality. This paper will use data on around 9,000 person-spells of non-employment lasting three months or more in the NLSY79 to examine these aspects of women’s employment. I expect that such women will move out of more prestigious, perhaps better compensated, occupations and industries and into less advantaged areas where they are able to attain employment after being non-employed for a period of time.
Relevance

Women’s labor force participation has been studied extensively and in a variety of ways (e.g. Damaske 2011; Jacobs and Gerson 2004; Nieuwenhuis, Need, and Van Der Kolk 2012). One recent study examines whether and after how long women return to the labor force after an earlier exit from it (Kaduk 2015), finding that while most women eventually return to work, the timing varies by reason for exit and human capital. This study considers the degree to which women change occupations and/or industries of employment when returning to work after a period of non-employment. These transitions back to paid employment may become increasingly important for women’s well-being given increased life expectancies and the increasing individualization of risk in U.S. labor market (e.g. declining job security, defined contribution pension plans instead of defined benefit) (Hacker 2006), particularly if women move to occupations or industries that have less advantageous job conditions than the ones they left.

Beyond whether women return to the labor force, examining the types of jobs women attain upon return and the differences in their new jobs compared to the jobs they left will provide insight into broad labor force inequalities, including gender inequality. Existing research on professional women suggests that when they return to work after a labor force exit, they often change their priorities with regard to job conditions and characteristics. Many also choose to switch industry or occupation to better fulfill their desire to “give back” (Hewlett 2007; Lovejoy and Stone 2012), although in some cases, this is because of barriers they encounter when trying to return to their previous profession. Among these women, such changes in occupation or industry are usually away from more prestigious, highly compensated areas into areas with lower prestige and compensation (Lovejoy and Stone 2012), factors that contribute to the lack of women at higher levels in many fields and women’s lower average wages (Cohen, Huffman, and Knauer 2009). However, little is known about these processes in a more representative population of women. In addition, existing evidence shows that workers who experience job loss are reemployed in a different occupation or industry for a variety of reasons, including inability to find another job in the same occupation or industry and changes in their desired job conditions (Holzer et al. 2011). Those who move from manufacturing to other industries, especially to the service industry, tend to experience wage decreases (Cha and Morgan 2010); such changes also contribute to labor force inequalities in the U.S. Thus the results from this study will contribute to knowledge on how the individual advancement opportunities of some groups of workers may be hindered by their life circumstances such as job loss.

Research Questions and Analytic Strategy

This paper examines the extent to which women change occupations and/or industry when seeking re-employment after a period of non-employment and whether women’s reasons for job exit predict such changes in occupation and/or industry. While there have been many studies of women’s exits, little is known about the consequences of taking time out of the workforce for a broad population of women. I draw on data from the National Longitudinal Study of Youth 1979 Cohort (NLSY79) and consider the impact of a variety of reasons for job exit, including family reasons (e.g. caring for children and caring for adult relatives), job displacement (e.g. losing one’s job because the company closed or through layoffs) and getting fired. Job exits are freely chosen by employees in some situations but beyond their control in others. Even “voluntary” exits are often the result of a structural mismatch between existing job conditions and employees’ needs at a given life stage. The small amount of existing
research on returning to work after employment exits to care for family members mainly discusses the difficulty of doing so and the career penalties associated with it (largely for married, professional women), while existing research on reemployment after job loss tends to focus on wage penalties. This paper focuses on periods of non-employment lasting three months or more because it reflects a greater disruption to women’s employment histories and avoids categorizing planned short periods of non-employment between jobs in the same way as longer exits.

The paper will first summarize the prevalence of occupation and industry changes after periods of non-employment lasting three months or longer. I expect to find some occupations and industries with more stability (such as nurses, teachers, and perhaps retail or foodservice) and others where there is more of an exodus (such as higher status professional/managerial occupations). Job conditions are often a driving force in people’s decisions to exit the labor force or search for a new job, and they would like seek to mitigate the factors that drove them to leave the labor force if returning to work. For example, overwork (often defined as working 50 or more hours/week) is a job condition that can push women out of the workforce under some circumstances (Cha 2013). Analysis for this portion of the paper will summarize and examine descriptive differences by reason for exit among those who return to employment after exits, with a focus on occupation and industry changes (or stability).

Second, the paper will examine the relationship between reason for leaving last job and changes in occupation and/or industry upon re-employment. It is likely that reason for leaving last job will influence the characteristics of one’s job upon return to employment. For example, workers experiencing involuntary job loss may be forced for economic or other reasons to accept job conditions that are not as good as the job they left, and they generally experience lower wages over time. Comparing job conditions before and after extended labor force exits will provide evidence as to whether disadvantages upon re-employment are similar (perhaps due to the time not employed) or how people leaving for family or non-family voluntary reasons differ in their experiences, especially as compared to those who experienced involuntary job loss due to layoffs. Analysis for this portion of the paper will include a multinomial logistic regression model to estimate the probability of changing occupation, changing industry, or changing both after a labor force exit as compared to attaining reemployment in the same occupation and industry (that the respondent was employed in before the labor force exit) after a labor force exit. These models will include a separate spell for each labor force exit and a “spell” variable counting each occurrence of a given respondent in the data, as well as a variable that is a count of the number of prior spells out of the labor force and a control for the reason for job exit for the most recent labor force exit. Models will examine likelihood of occupation and industry changes at various life stages, and more detailed national economic conditions by year of labor market entry and year of exit. Occupation and industry will be operationalized using the U.S. Census Bureau occupation and industry codes in the data at as detailed a level as possible. I will then estimate the probability of respondents’ moving from various industry/occupation categories to others, given demographic, family life stage, spousal employment (if applicable), and prior respondent labor force characteristics, including duration of labor force exit.

**Data**

The NLSY79 is well suited to answer questions about returning to work because it contains detailed employment histories over thirty years in length for women who remain in the sample through the 2012 survey wave (the most recent data available), starting with interviews at ages 14-22 and...
continuing to around age 50. Given that it is designed as a labor force survey, it also includes extensive relevant, time-varying independent variables and controls, including education, marital status, and parental status. Analyses will use all available waves of the NLSY79, building from both the employer history roster to more easily get information on the sequence of jobs and relevant job conditions and the labor force participation arrays to get information on whether respondents were considered unemployed (i.e. – looking for work vs not) during periods of non-employment. Prior work (Kaduk 2015) has shown just under 9,000 person-spells of non-employment among women in this dataset; I expect an even greater number here, since the prior paper did not include data from the latest survey wave.

**Summary**

This paper will examine the extent to which women change occupations and/or industry when seeking re-employment after a period of non-employment and whether women’s reasons for job exit predict such changes in occupation and/or industry. Beyond whether women return to the labor force after an employment exit of three months or longer (considered in a previous paper), examining the types of jobs women attain upon return and the differences in their new jobs compared to the jobs they left will provide insight into broad labor force inequalities in the US, including gender inequality. Other scholars (Looze 2014) have shown that mothers are less like to make career enhancing job changes – they may be less likely to return to demanding jobs as well.

Aumann and Galinsky (2012) focus on a need for “flexible careers” where employees could increase engagement and commitment at work and seek advancement at certain life stages, while scaling back work hours or expectations or leaving the workforce entirely at other points in their lives. The vast majority of employers and career paths in the United States are not currently structured to allow for such flexibility, especially for transitions into and out of meaningful part-time work. This paper will consider the career trade-offs women make when they voluntarily leave work for family reasons, as compared to the jobs women who experienced involuntary job loss or who left for non-family voluntary reasons. I expect that such women will move out of more prestigious, perhaps better compensated, occupations and industries and into less advantaged areas where they may be better able to attain employment after being non-employed for a period of time. The results from this paper will provide information on whether and how women are at a disadvantage in the labor force if they use periodic non-employment as a way to meet their non-work needs in the absence of sufficient policy supports such as paid family leave.
References


