

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY  
*Department of Economics*

Comprehensive Examination  
Econ \_\_\_\_ Economics of Gender

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**Directions:** Ph D students: You must answer a total of four (4) questions.  
Answer at least one (1) question from each of the three (3) parts.

**PART I: Choose at least one (1) question**

1. An international research institution is about to embark on an income diversification and expenditure allocation project and has asked you to participate as a researcher. In reading the research proposal, you noticed that it adopts Becker's model of the household as its framework of analysis. Write a detailed memo that includes the following:

a) A critical review of Becker's portrayal of intra-household relationships and his analytical framework regarding the household division of labor. Be sure to mention the underlying assumptions embodied in his model.

b) A proposal of an alternative household (bargaining) model or analytical framework. Be sure to identify its assumptions and key features. Mention how this model is different from that of Becker.

2. a) Discuss at least one deeply ingrained practice or conceptualization that tends to exclude gender in its analysis or approach. In what sense is the *objectivist* standard to which conventional economics subscribes, violated in your example?

b) An economics professor challenges you by stating that economics is a science, which necessarily proceeds by the methods of abstraction and rational deduction and thus, is 'objective'. How would you respond to his/her argument?

c) What limitations are imposed by the standard economic tools when addressing gender concerns? Explain carefully why interdisciplinary analysis is important in understanding the gender dimensions of economic life. Give examples to illustrate your point.

3. You are a member of the Committee of Economic Advisers. You are also the

only gender-aware economist in the Committee. Your group is asked by the President to provide a progress report on women's economic contributions and well being in the country.

a) Two members of the Council want to focus/use the official labor statistics, particularly the labor force participation rates, employment trends and earnings. Some feel that this may not be the complete picture, but don't know what else to include. They ask your assistance. How would you respond? In your answer, be sure to discuss i) other contributions of women to the economy and their indicators (or lack thereof) and ii) the linkages (or interconnections) between productive and reproductive economies and the roles of women.

b) With regards to women's well-being, two committee members cited the increase in the average earnings of women and the narrowing of the gender wage gap as indicators of progress. How would you respond? In your answer, discuss the relationship between unpaid work, paid work and women's well-being based on existing research.

4. a) Discuss at least three methodological and conceptual issues related to the documentation and measurement of unpaid work. What additional concerns are raised when it comes to measuring and valuing unpaid work in developing countries like India or South Africa?

b) Choose any particular country or region and discuss the ways in which the time use and allocation patterns of men and women differ. Are these differences only an empirical matter, or do they affect the way that we theorize economic behavior? Justify your answer

### **Part II: Choose at least one (1) question**

1. Critically comment on any two (2) of the following statements. Be sure to provide evidence in support of your arguments.

a) "The cause of women's low earnings is that they have children to attend to."

b) "The reason that care labor (e.g. nursing the sick, childcare, elderly care) is poorly paid is because care labor can be found in the market as well as in nonmarket sectors of the economy. "

c) "Discrimination is a rational behavior, which is why it persists."

2. a) Gender wage differences have been examined using the following function:

Gender wage gap = Difference due to qualification + Unexplained difference.

Review the empirical evidence in the literature that has tested this equation and discuss the main findings.

b) Discuss the merits of the Pay Equity Act. What are the main arguments posed by critics of this policy? What counter arguments can you present?

3. Suppose that you are a policy adviser to an emerging economy called *Pandesal*.

a) You want to provide a strong case in favor of Affirmative Action. How would you go about doing this? Discuss some arguments posed by critics of this policy. What counter arguments can you present?

b) You are concerned that the rate of single parenthood is rising and that poverty is increasing among women and children in *Pandesal*. Discuss the merits as well as limitations of any one (1) of the following proposals to address these concerns:

- i) increase the minimum wage;
- ii) implement comparable worth policy;
- iii) implement child support policy, e.g. Germany's family policy; or
- iv) implement child care welfare policy, e.g. Sweden's promotion of marriage.

4. As a human resources and development officer of Chicken Breeding Ltd, a German multinational corporation, you were asked to inspect the conditions of work in the developing countries called *Mangoland and Sagingland*. You found that chicken breeding was produced in *Mangoland* in factories similar to the maquiladora system in Mexico. In *Sagingland*, it is produced and retailed by informal sector, self-employed workers, many working in their homes.

a) You were struck by the prevalence of informal sector activity in these countries and the sheer presence of women in the sector. What explains the large size of the informal sector and the over-representation of women in the sector? In your answer, compare and contrast the gendered patterns of employment and work conditions between the formal sector and the informal sector.

b) After your return to Germany, you read in the *Financial Times* newspaper that the "European Union will try to improve working conditions in developing countries by demanding that trade *and investment* partners meet minimum labor

standards....” ( p. 6, Financial Times)<sup>1</sup> How, in your opinion, will this affect women workers in *Mangoland and Sagingland*?

### PART III

1. Macroeconomic policies have shaped the options and constraints faced by women throughout the world and macroeconomic models provide the theoretical foundations for them.

a) Consider any one (1) of the mainstream trade or growth models. Identify its main features as well as assumptions. Describe briefly the model's predictions. In your opinion, is the model gender-neutral or gender blind? Explain your answer carefully. How might it be made more gender-aware?

b) Discuss the usefulness as well as limitations of gender-aware SAM or CGE models as a macro policy tool.

2. a) How has trade expansion affected women's employment? Discuss in your answer the evidence presented in the literature.

b) How has trade growth affected gender wage differences? Discuss the methodology used and the evidence provided in the literature to support your arguments.

3. a) What is risk and what explains why women respond differently to risk compared to men? Provide examples to illustrate your point.

b) Does a change in women's relative bargaining power have any effect on household saving? Critically discuss the empirical evidence regarding the role of bargaining power on saving.

4. a) How do gender norms and gender relations influence the operation of financial institutions, such as banks, credit cooperatives and ROSCAs? Discuss in particular the gender-differentiated concerns with regards to the need (demand) for financial services and on access to financial services (supply).

b) In recent years, credit targeting of women has become an important development policy initiative. What explains its growing popularity? Discuss the challenge(s) posed by gender-aware research to the findings of conventional credit impact studies. What insights, in particular, are provided by a more gender-aware program evaluation of microfinance programs?

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<sup>1</sup> This quotation is from the FT article: "EU plans to link labor standards to trade deals," Dec 6, 2006, p. 6. The italics are added.

