

SOPHIE LI

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EDUCATION

Ph.D., Economics, Boston University, Boston, MA, May 2024 (expected)

Dissertation Title: *Essays on U.S. Women in the Historical Labor Force*

Dissertation Committee: James Feigenbaum, Robert Margo and Johannes Schmieder

B.A., Economics (*Magna Cum Laude*), New York University, New York, NY, 2018

New York University Shanghai, Shanghai, China, 2018

FIELDS OF INTEREST

Economic History, Labor Economics, Economics of Gender

WORKING PAPERS

“[The Effect of a Woman-Friendly Occupation on Employment: U.S. Postmasters Before World War II](#),” October 2023. Job Market Paper.

“[Returns to Education for Women in the Mid-Twentieth Century: Evidence from Compulsory Schooling Laws](#),” June 2023.

WORK IN PROGRESS

“Sibling Mortality on Surviving Children's Long-Term Labor Market Outcomes”

“Rebuilding the State: Confederate Post Offices After the Civil War”

“Gender Differences in Managerial Performance: Evidence from the Post Office”

“Germ Theory at Home: The Role of Private Action in Reducing Child Mortality during the Epidemiological Transition” (with James Feigenbaum and Lauren Hoehn-Velasco)

PRESENTATIONS

NBER SI DAE Student Session, World Cliometrics Conference Dublin, EHA Annual

Meeting Pittsburgh, SEA Annual Meeting New Orleans, 2023

AEA CSWEP Mentoring Workshop, Harvard Graduate Student Workshop in Economic History, SEA Annual Meeting Fort Lauderdale, 2022

FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

Rosenstein-Rodan Prize for Best Graduate Student Paper, Boston University, 2023

Deanne and Gerald Gitner Prize for Excellence in Teaching, Boston University, 2023

Research Grant \$1,700, Institute for Economic Development, Boston University, 2022

Graduate Student Fellowship, Boston University, 2018-2023

Ph.D. Summer Fellowship, Boston University, 2019-2022

University Honors Scholar, New York University, 2018

Recognition Award, New York University Shanghai, 2017

Dean's List, New York University Shanghai, 2015, 2016

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Instructor, Labor Economics, Department of Economics, Boston University, Spring 2022,
Spring 2023
Teaching Fellow, Introduction to Microeconomics, Department of Economics, Boston
University, Fall 2019, Spring 2020, Spring 2021, Fall 2022
Teaching Fellow, Empirical Economic Analysis, Department of Economics, Boston
University, Fall 2020
Teaching Assistant, Intermediate Micro Analysis, Department of Economics, Boston
University, Fall 2023
Teaching Assistant, Economic Institutions in Historical Perspective, Department of
Economics, Boston University, Fall 2021

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Co-Organizer, EC3004 Graduate Student Workshop in Economic History (joint with Ross
Mattheis), Harvard University, 2022-2023
Co-Chair, Women and Non-Binary People in Economics (joint with Vittoria Dicandia and
Nayeon Lim), Boston University, 2019-2021

LANGUAGES

Chinese (native), English (fluent)

COMPUTER SKILLS: STATA, Python, LaTeX

CITIZENSHIP/VISA STATUS: China/F1

REFERENCES

**Professor James J.
Feigenbaum**

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Margo**

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Schmieder**

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SOPHIE LI

The Effect of a Woman-Friendly Occupation on Employment: U.S. Postmasters Before World War II (Job Market Paper)

I examine the effect of a woman-friendly occupation on employment by exploring a unique historical setting -- the postmaster occupation during the early twentieth-century United States. Unlike many other occupations that established practices to prevent married women from entering, postmasters were open to married women and offered flexible work arrangements and equal pay. With a novel dataset on postmaster appointments and census linking, I show that postmasters attracted qualified women who were not gainfully employed previously. However, the postmaster occupation offered women few benefits beyond the appointed term. Taking advantage of the fact that postmasters were presidential appointees and were rarely re-appointed after the party of the president changed, I compare the 1940 outcomes of women appointed just before and after the 1933 presidential transition in a regression discontinuity (RD) design. The RD estimates suggest that women experienced a 26.7 percentage points reduction in gainful employment after finishing their postmaster term. Finally, I show that women postmasters were not more likely to be employed than their women neighbors who had never been postmasters. The lack of benefits for women's employment beyond the appointed term is in part explained by state-level discrimination against married women working and the severity of the Great Depression.

Returns to Education for Women in the Mid-Twentieth Century: Evidence from Compulsory Schooling Laws

Women had a similar level of schooling to men during the mid-twentieth century United States, but research on the returns to education for women is scarce. Using compulsory schooling laws as instrumental variables, this paper examines the causal effect of education on women's labor market and marriage market outcomes. I show that an additional year of schooling increases women's probability of gainful employment by 7.9 pp. and women's wage earnings by 15 percent, which can be explained by women's entry into skilled occupations. Given the large returns on earnings, education surprisingly does not increase women's probability of never marrying, but it does increase the probability of divorce and separation. In addition, women's education positively affects the husband's and the household's labor supply and earnings, conditional on marriage formation and the husband's education.

Germ Theory at Home: The Role of Private Action in Reducing Child Mortality during the Epidemiological Transition (with James Feigenbaum and Lauren Hoehn-Velasco)

In this paper, we study whether the dissemination of germ theory--which provided new methods of controlling infectious disease--enabled households to prevent child mortality. We focus on physician households, who, as a group, should have had the clearest informational shock after the availability of germ theory. Our analysis evaluates a well-cited claim that physicians' children died at similar rates to non-physicians' children before the discovery of germ theory, but not after. We use a novel measure of child mortality that follows young children over time by linking households between censuses. Leveraging this nearly century-long measure of child mortality, we find that germ theory enabled physician households to reduce child mortality by 1-2 percentage points, a 7-14% reduction. We also show that this reduction in child mortality after germ theory is unique to physician households and is not an artifact of income or education.