

**HEATHER SARSONS**

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**Personal Information:**

Citizenship: Canada

**Undergraduate Studies:**

Undergraduate Studies, Commerce, Queen's University at Kingston, 2006-2008  
B.A. in Economics, University of British Columbia, Honors, 2011

**Graduate Studies:**

Harvard University, 2012 to present  
Ph.D. Candidate in Economics  
Thesis Title: "Essays in Labor Economics"  
Expected Completion Date: May 2018

**References:**

Professor Claudia Goldin  
Harvard University  
617-613-1200, cgoldin@harvard.edu

Professor Lawrence Katz  
Harvard University  
617-495-5148, lkatz@harvard.edu

Professor David Laibson  
Harvard University  
617-496-3402, dlaibson@harvard.edu

Professor Amanda Pallais  
Harvard University  
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**Research and Teaching Fields:**

Primary Field: Labor  
Secondary Fields: Behavioral, Development, Personnel Economics

**Job Market Paper:**

"Interpreting Signals: Evidence from Doctor Referrals"

This paper provides evidence that a person's gender influences the way that others interpret information about his or her ability, and that people use information about one woman to infer something about other women's abilities. Using data on medical referrals from primary care physicians (PCPs) to surgeons, I find that PCPs view patient outcomes differently depending on the performing surgeon's gender. Using referral volume to proxy for a PCP's beliefs about a surgeon's ability, I find that PCPs become more pessimistic about a female surgeon's ability than a male's after a patient death, indicated by a sharper drop in the number of referrals she receives. Conversely, PCPs become more optimistic about a male surgeon's ability after a good patient

outcome, indicated by a larger increase in the number of referrals that he receives. I then look at how PCPs change their behavior toward other surgeons and find that PCPs become less likely to form new referral connections with women after a bad experience with one female surgeon. There are no such spillovers among male surgeons. These effects are concentrated among new PCP-surgeon pairs as PCPs react less to new information the longer they have worked with a surgeon. I show that the empirical results are reconcilable with Bayesian updating but that if PCPs are Bayesian, they do not have rational expectations. Alternatively, the results fit with a model of confirmation bias under minimal assumptions.

### **Working Papers:**

“Gender Differences in Recognition for Group Work”

Does gender influence how credit for group work is allocated when individual contributions are not perfectly observed? Using data from academic economists’ CVs, I test whether coauthored and solo-authored publications matter differently for tenure for men and women. Because coauthors are listed alphabetically in economics, coauthored papers do not provide specific information about each contributor’s skills or ability. Solo-authored papers, on the other hand, provide a relatively clear signal of ability. I find that men are tenured at roughly the same rate regardless of whether they coauthor or solo-author. Women, however, become less likely to receive tenure the more they coauthor. The result is most pronounced for women coauthoring with men and less pronounced among women who coauthor with other women. I contrast economics with sociology, a discipline in which coauthors are listed in order of contribution, and find that when contributions are made clear, men and women receive equal credit for coauthored papers.

“Confidence Men? Evidence on Gender and Confidence from Top Economics” (with Guo Xu)

Does a confidence gap exist between men and women who made it to the top of their careers? Using data from a select group of economists working in top U.S. universities, we find that women are still less confident than men along two margins. First, when asked about their level of agreement on survey questions about the economy, women are less likely to give “extreme” answers in which they strongly agree or disagree. Second, women are less confident in the accuracy of their answer. The results persist after controlling for the year the PhD was granted, the PhD awarding institution, the current institution, and the number of solo and co-authored publications up to the point of tenure. We provide suggestive evidence that the confidence gap is driven by women being less confident (or men being overconfident) when asked questions that are outside their field of expertise.

### **Research Papers in Progress:**

“Categorical Thinking: Police Officers’ Reactions to Shootings”

“Coordination and Sexual Assault Reporting” (with Laura Derksen)

### **Publications:**

“Rainfall and Conflict: A Cautionary Tale,” *Journal of Development Economics*, Vol. 115, July 2015: 62-72.

There is evidence that, in some contexts, income shocks cause conflict. The literature demonstrating this relationship uses rainfall shocks to instrument for income shocks, arguing that in agriculturally-dependent regions, negative rain shocks lower income which incites violence. This identification strategy relies on the assumption that rainfall shocks affect conflict only through their impacts on income. This paper evaluates this exclusion restriction in the context of religious conflict in India. Using data on dam construction, I identify districts that are downstream from irrigation dams and show that income in these areas is much less sensitive to

rainfall fluctuations. However, rain shocks remain equally strong predictors of riot incidence in these districts. I explore other channels through which rainfall might affect conflict.

“Recognition for Group Work: Gender Differences in Academia,” *American Economic Review: Papers & Proceedings*, 2017, Vol. 107(5): 141-145.

### **Teaching Experience**

Spring 2015      Race in America (undergraduate), Harvard University, Prof. Roland Fryer

### **Research Experience and Other Employment:**

2011 - 2012      Harvard University, Research Assistant to Professors Raj Chetty, John Friedman, and Joshua Goodman

2011              Researcher at Innovations for Poverty Action

### **Honors, Scholarships, and Fellowships:**

2017              Harvard Dissertation Completion Fellowship

2017              Washington Center for Equitable Growth Doctoral Award

2016              Weatherhead Initiative on Gender Inequality Graduate Fellowship

2016              University of Toronto Rotman Institute for Gender and the Economy Research Grant (with Laura Derksen)

2014 – 2017      Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council of Canada Graduate Fellowship

2014 – 2016      Harvard Kennedy School Inequality and Social Policy Fellowship

2015              Harvard Lab for Economic Applications and Policy Grant (x2)

2014 – 2015      PODER Fellowship, London School of Economics

2014              Harvard South Asia Institute Graduate Student Research Grant

2012              Rotary International Ambassadorial Scholarship

2012              Rita Ricardo-Campbell Fellowship in Economics, Harvard

### **Conferences and Invited Presentations:**

2017: Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, Washington Center for Equitable Growth, Early Career Behavioral Economics Conference (CMU), Brown University, Harvard Kennedy School Women and Public Policy Program, Carnegie Mellon University, University of Lausanne, WZB-Berlin, RESTAT Conference on Publishing

2016: AEA Meetings (Chicago), Early Career Economics Conference (Bonn), Harvard Business School Gender Initiative

2015: AEA Meetings (San Francisco), Society of Labor Economics

2014: NEUDC (Harvard Kennedy School)

2012: NEUDC (Yale)

### **Referee Service:**

*AEJ: Applied Economics, Economic Development and Cultural Change, Journal of Development Economics, Journal of Human Resources, Journal of Urban Economics, Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics, Oxford Development Studies, Quarterly Journal of Economics, Review of Economics and Statistics, Review of Economic Studies*