

Norms Formation: The Gold Rush and Women's Roles

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Abstract

We explore the expansion of gold mining in California in the late 19th century to understand how marriage markets and gender norms are affected by the relative scarcity of women, in the short and long term. We use a geographic difference-in-difference methodology, exploiting the location and discovery of the gold deposits and its influence on sex ratios. For the 1880s, we find significant differences across mining and mining counties in the four states. Interestingly, women are less likely to work, and in particular they seem to be able to switch to being housewife or to the service industry when living in mining counties. We also find an increase in their likelihood of being married, and of "marrying up". Furthermore, in a later stage of the analysis we will explore to what extent these new economic and cultural gender norms—female labor market participation, their participation in higher prestige areas, outsourcing of household work, and divorce rates—persist until today in these states.

Keywords: Extractive industries, Labor markets, Gender Relations

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