New Scars for the New Economy?
Gender and the Consequences of Non-Standard Employment Histories

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Millions of workers are currently employed in positions that deviate from the full-time, standard employment relationship. Little is known, however, about how histories of non-standard employment – part-time work, temporary agency employment, and skills underemployment – shape workers’ future labor market opportunities. Drawing on original field- and survey-experimental data, this article examines three interrelated questions: 1) What are the consequences of having a non-standard employment history for workers’ future labor market opportunities?; 2) Given the gendered history of non-standard employment in the United States, do the consequences of these labor market positions differ for male and female workers?; and 3) What mechanisms account for the consequences of having a non-standard employment history? Results from the field experiment demonstrate that a history of non-standard employment is as scarring for workers as a year of unemployment. However, the consequences of non-standard employment vary in important ways by whether the worker was employed in a part-time position, in a temporary agency, or in a job below his or her skill level as well as by the gender of the worker. The survey experiment provides evidence that employers’ perceptions of workers’ competence and commitment mediate the consequences of non-standard employment histories for job applicants’ hiring outcomes. Together, these findings shed light on the consequences of changing employment relations for the distribution of labor market opportunities in the “new economy,” with important implications for workers’ economic security and career trajectories.