

# Women in Economics

Edited by Shelly Lundberg



**A VoxEU.org Book**

CEPR Press

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**CEPR Press**

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## 3 Black women economists: At the intersection of race and gender

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### **Rhonda Vonshay Sharpe**

Women's Institute for Science, Equity and Race

Much of the research about the progress of women in economics fails to disaggregate the data using an intersectional approach, i.e. reporting and collecting the data by intersecting race/ethnicity with gender, an approach which may mask the nuances in outcomes specific to each race/ethnic gender group (Sharpe 2019). Consistent with Sharpe and Swinton (2012), Table 1 shows that 63% of men and of women who completed the doctorate in economics in the US between 1965-2015 held an undergraduate degree in economics, compared to 70% of Black women who completed the doctorate in economics and held a bachelor's degree in economics. Despite this, the research on factors that influence majoring in economics does not take an intersectional or feminist approach.

Studies that do not take an intersectional approach assume that all women and all Blacks share the same experiences. The data for economics degrees conferred at the bachelor's level suggest this assumption is flawed. For the 20 years 1998-2017, Black men earned 5,520 more bachelor's degrees in economics than Black women, an increase in the Black-gender gap up from 5,022 degrees for the 1996-2015 twenty-year period. The Black-White gap for women decreased from 65,000 for the 1996-2015 period to 62,682 degrees for 1998-2017. Because the Black-gender gap increased, this suggests race operates differently for Black women than for Black men. Additionally, Black women were the only women with a negative growth percentage for the 20 years, which suggests that gender operates differently for Black women.

The importance of an intersectional approach can also be seen in the data on the top producers for bachelor's degrees conferred to Black women and all women. Spelman College, the number one producer of economics bachelor's degrees conferred to Black women, is ranked 37<sup>th</sup> on the list of top producers for women.

The University of Maryland, College Park ranked 2nd on the list of top producers of economic bachelor’s degrees conferred to Black women, is ranked 13<sup>th</sup> on the list of top producers for women. Rutgers University, ranked 4<sup>th</sup> on the list of top producers of economics bachelor’s degrees conferred to women, is ranked 5<sup>th</sup> on the list of top producers for Black women. Rutgers is the only institution in the top-ten for both Black women and all women.

**Table 1** Undergraduate feeder disciplines for economics by race/ethnicity (%)

Discipline		Maths & Statistics	Economics	Non-S&E Fields	S&E Other and related fields	N/A	Total
Asian	Women	6	64	12	16	2	100
	Men	4	66	16	13	1	100
Black	Women	5	70	15	11	0	100
	Men	4	61	18	16	2	100
Hispanic	Women	3	68	12	16	0	100
	Men	5	67	19	8	1	100
White	Women	8	63	16	12	1	100
	Men	10	62	13	13	2	100
Other	Women	10	46	30	14	0	100
	Men	13	47	21	12	7	100
Total	Women	7	63	14	14	1	100
	Men	8	63	15	13	2	100

Source: Public Use 2017 Survey of Doctorate Recipients

Schools ranked on the top producer lists for women and Black women, also underscore the need for disaggregating the data using an intersectional approach and generate suspicion about the rhetoric that increasing role models for women in STEM disciplines will increase the representation of women (Drury et al. 2011, Herrmann and Adelman 2016, Milgram 2011). Spelman College ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, and North Carolina Agricultural and Mechanical University (NC A&T), ranked 9<sup>th</sup> on the list of top producers of economic bachelor’s degrees conferred to Black women, are the only institutions on the list that historically have had Black women as tenured economics faculty. Howard University, the only historically Black college university (HBCU) with a doctorate programme in economics, and the number one feeder of Blacks who go on to pursue the doctorate in economics (Sharpe and Swinton 2012), has never had a Black woman as a tenured economics faculty member but has historically had White women as tenured faculty

members and has an Asian woman as a tenured faculty member.<sup>1</sup> For economics, the research suggests that increasing women on the faculty may not increase the likelihood that women will major in economics (Emerson et al. 2018). However, for Black women, it is unclear if women, Blacks, or Black women role models have a greater influence on majoring in economics.

**Table 2** Economics undergraduate degree production: 1998-2017

Race, Ethnicity & Gender		1998-2007	2008-2017	Total	Year-Difference	Growth
Black	Female	5,028	4,858	9,886	-170	-3%
	Male	6,372	9,034	15,406	2,662	42%
	Subtotal	11,400	13,892	25,292	2,492	22%
	Gender-Difference	-1,344	-4,176	-5,520	-2,832	211%
Women	Hispanic	3,956	6,786	10,742	2,830	72%
	Native American	260	268	528	8	3%
	Asian	14,173	16,890	31,063	2,717	19%
	White	34,975	37,593	72,568	2,618	7%
	Other	3,289	6,224	9,513	2,935	89%
	Temporary Resident	7,863	18,439	26,302	10,576	135%
Total	Women	69,544	91,058	155,975	21,514	31%
	Men	143,377	203,874	340,190	60,497	42%
	Total	208,201	287,964	496,165	79,763	38%
	Gender-Difference	-73,833	-112,816	-184,215	-38,983	53%

Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Survey

Doctorate programmes in economics have been at the centre of the conversation about diversity, but historically, have had a low representation of non-White economists (Collins 2000). Most have never hired a Black economist (Price 2008, Price and Sharpe 2017, Price and Sharpe 2018). Price (2009) finds an inverse relationship between the supply of newly minted Black economists and the hiring of Black economists on the faculty of doctorate economics departments. Hence, the lack of Black faculty is not a function of the supply of Black economists, but a function of the demand for Black economists, i.e. ‘color line’ problem, in that race appears to be the employment barrier (Price 2009).



The consequences of the interaction of the ‘color line’ with gender were revealed when the 2019 AEA Climate Survey found that 53% of Black women reported experiencing discrimination based on their race, 69% reported experiencing discrimination based on their gender, and 62% reported experiencing discrimination at the intersection of race and gender. Do these findings explain why Black women are substituting away from economics? Or has the void of Black women in the economics profession intensified the hostile environment for Black women economists at all stages of the profession? If the latter is true, then increasing the representation of Black women in the profession may stymie the discrimination experienced by Black women.

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## About the author

**Rhonda Vonshay Sharpe** is the Founder and President of the Women’s Institute for Science, Equity, and Race. She was named a ‘Black Scholars You Should Know’ by TheBestSchools.org and BlackEnterprise.com. She is the co-editor of the *Review of Black Political Economy* and served as the past President of the National Economic Association. In 2019, she was selected to serve on the Center for American Progress’ National Advisory Council on Eliminating the Black-White Wealth Gap.

Rhonda’s research focuses on three areas: gender and racial inequality, the diversity of STEM, and the demography of higher education. Her research has been featured on the PBS News Hour, in the *New York Times*, and on the Kerri Miller Show. She is a recurring guest on the BBC’s Business Matters. Rhonda serves on the boards of the International Association of Feminist Economists and Diversifying and Decolonizing Economics.

She is the co-founder (with Sandy Darity) of the Diversity Initiative for Tenure in Economics (DITE), for which she served as the Associate Director from 2008 to 2014. She is the co-recipient of the 2004 Rhonda Williams Prize from the International Association for Feminist Economists. Rhonda completed her undergraduate studies in mathematics at North Carolina Wesleyan College and her doctorate in economics/mathematics at Claremont Graduate University.

Women are substantially under-represented in the field of economics. Few women reach senior positions in the profession, even though over the last few decades, between 30% and 35% of PhDs in economics have been earned by women. Women in economics face clear barriers to field entry and professional success that are distinct from those in other mathematics-focused fields. Women also appear to face implicit bias in the assessment of their research and other professional contributions that limit their success and persistence in the field

This book, featuring leading experts on the issue of gender in economics, examines the role and progress of women in professional economics, reviews the barriers women that face at various stages of the training and promotional pipeline, evaluates programmes designed to support and encourage female economists, and discusses the benefits of greater gender equality across the economics research professions.

Beginning with an overview of the representation of women in economics departments in the United States and in Europe, the opening chapters highlight the scarcity of Black women in American economics and provide some background on the 'first gender reckoning' of economics. Later chapters examine the forces that discourage women from majoring in economics as undergraduates and how they might be combatted, and on the paths to success for female graduate students. The book also documents differential treatment of women in the evaluation of research for publication and acceptance at conferences, as well as gender differences in collaborative networks that may affect research productivity. The 'leaky pipeline' in economics is reviewed, with a focus on the promotion gender gap in academics and central banking, and institutional factors that contribute to that gap, including gender bias in student evaluations and the inequitable consequences of gender-neutral tenure-clock-extension policies. The concluding chapters returns to policies and programmes that can support women and combat bias at all stages of the professional pipeline in economics.

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