

Women in Economics

What Does the Research Say?

Claudia Sahm, Federal Reserve Board
Women in Economics Symposium

The views expressed here are those of the author and not necessarily those of other members of the Federal Reserve System.



The goal of my talk is to you give an overview of the research on women in economics. I have not contributed directly to this literature; I have lived it, at least, in part. I am honored to share with you work from an esteemed and growing group of researchers. I encourage you to read and reflect on this work. The lessons you take away may differ from mine ... I know I thought differently about these topics when I was a student.

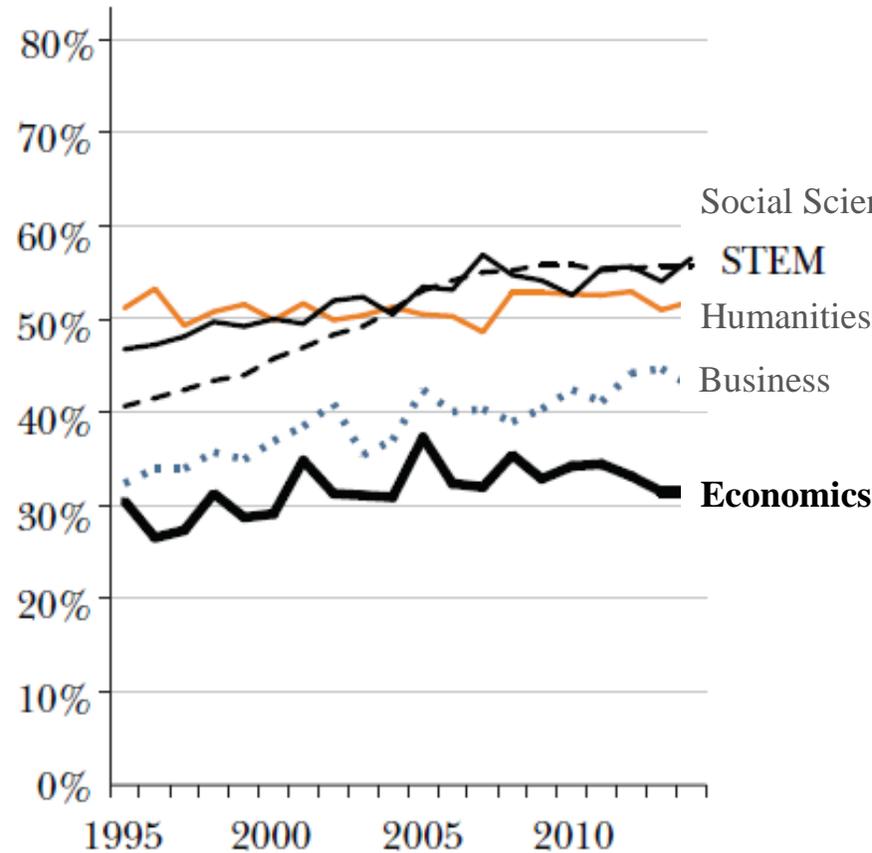
1. Facts and Trends

2. Possible Explanations

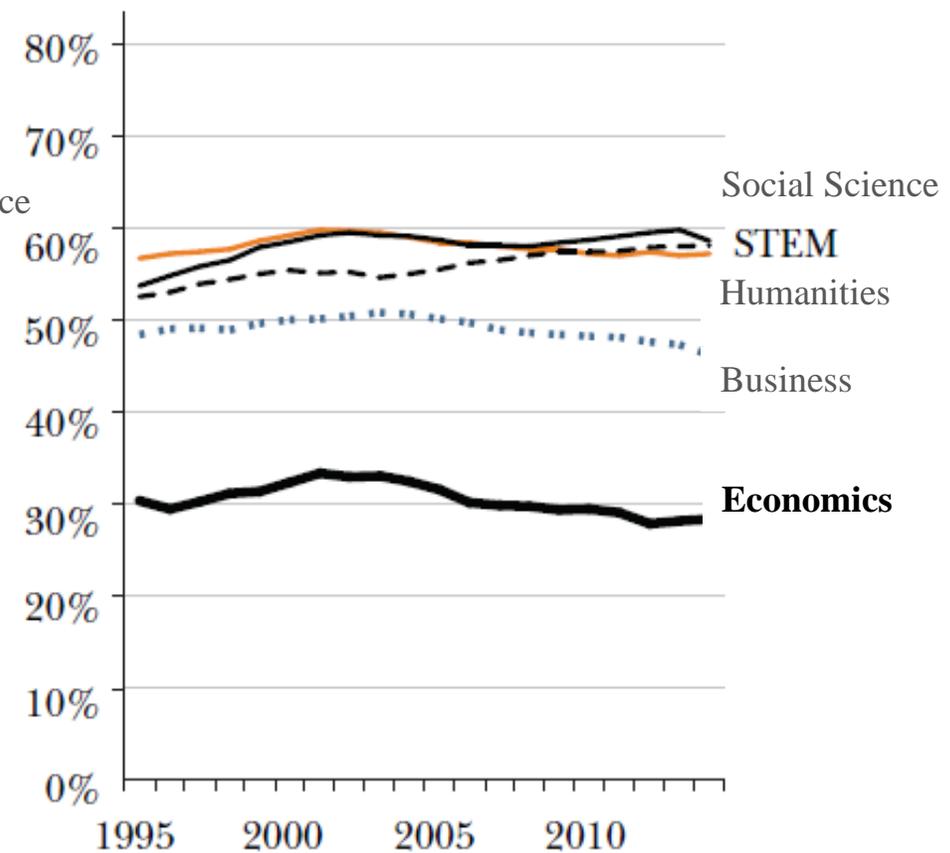
3. What Can We Do Next?

Fact: Women are under-represented among economists, with little improvement in recent decades

A: Percentage of Doctorate Degrees Awarded to Women

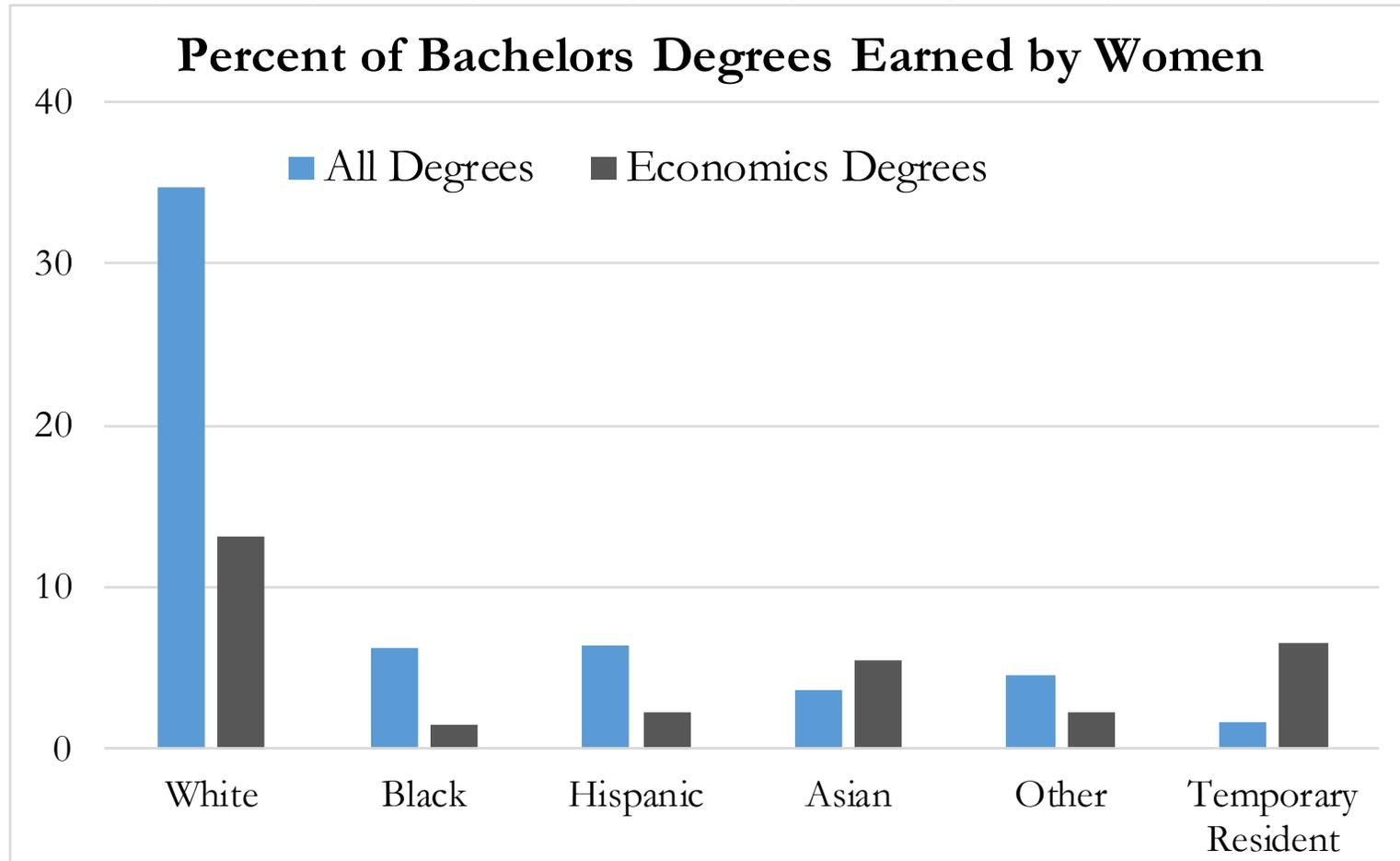


B: Percentage of Bachelor's Degrees Awarded to Women



Source: "[Diversity in the Economics Profession: A New Attack on an Old Problem](#)" by Amanda Bayer and Cecilia Rouse (2016). Note: Authors' tabulations of Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System and include U.S. citizens and permanent residents only. Social Science excludes economics and STEM is Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math.

Fact: Economics is missing black, Hispanic, and Native American women to an even greater extent than white women



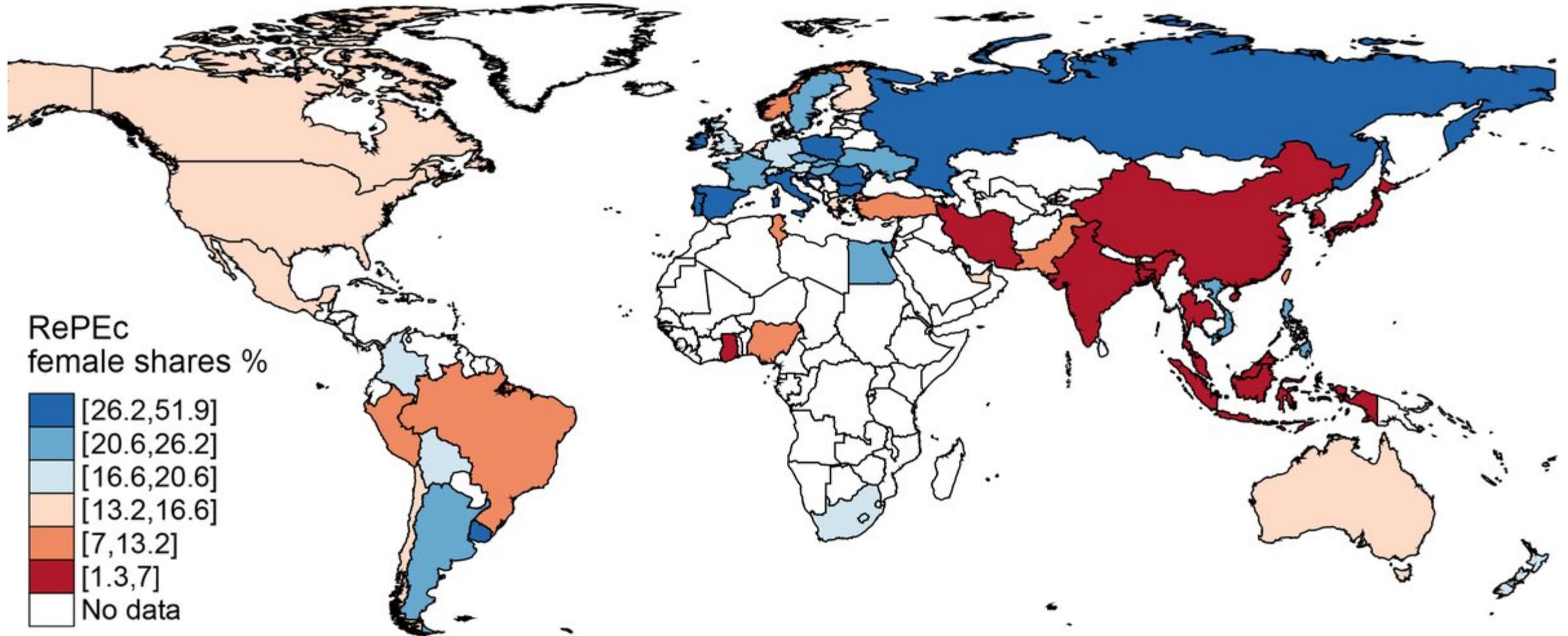
Source: “[The Unequal Distribution of Economic Education](#)” by Amanda Bayer and David Wilcox (2017). Note: Authors’ tabulations of Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System for four-year, not-for-profit colleges and universities in the US, 2011-2015. See also the AEA’s [Committee on the Status of Minority Groups in the Economics Profession](#) (CSMGEP) for more resources.

Fact: We don't even have systematic data on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) women in economics



Note: The recently formed Ad Hoc [LGBTQ Economics Working Group](#) in the American Economics Association has begun publishing a newsletter, [Maynard's Notes](#).

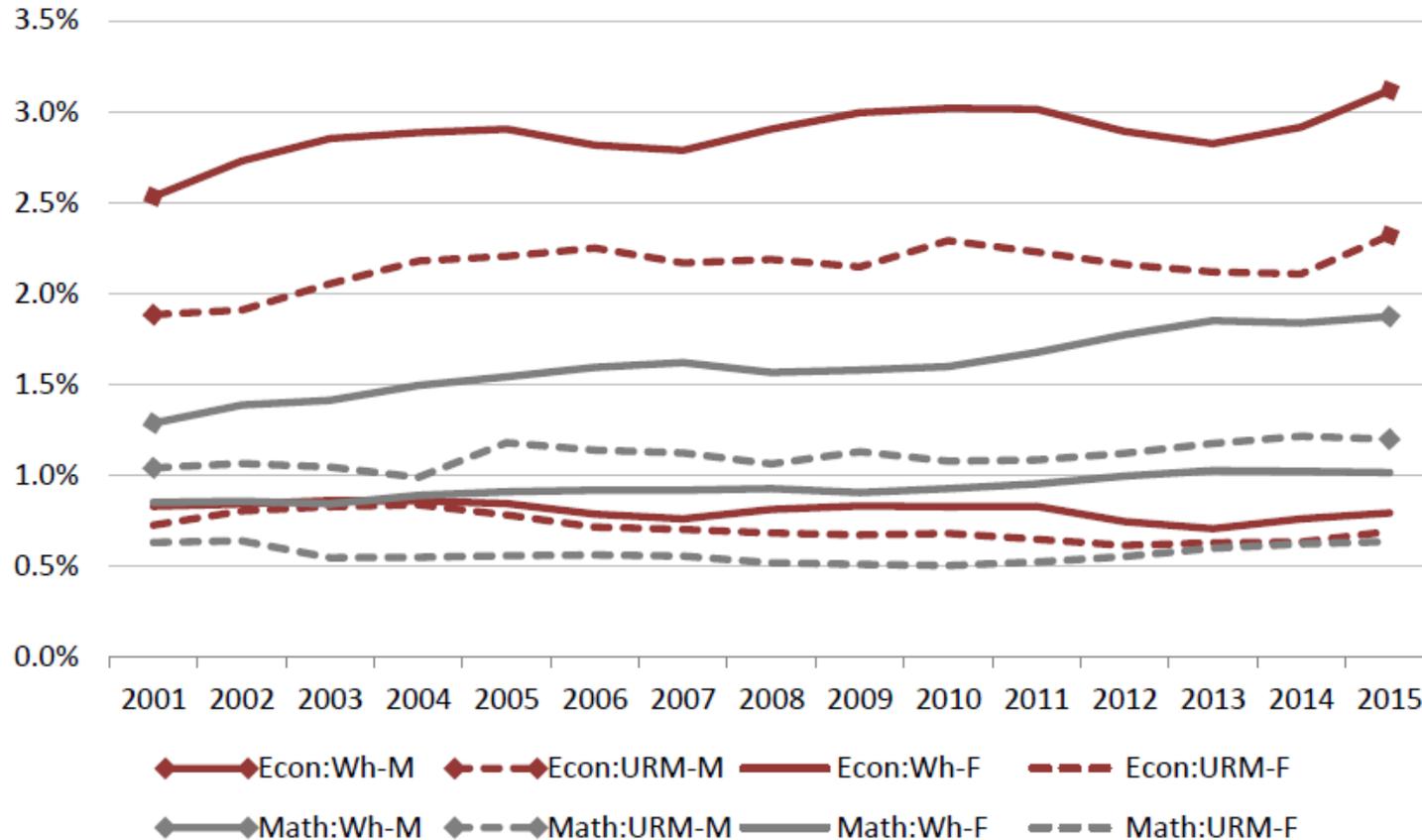
Fact: The share of women in economics varies across the world



Source: Data from [“Female representation in Research Papers in Economics \(RePEc\)”](#) and visualization by [Soledad Zignago](#).
The overall share of women among 50,000 authors in RePEc is 19 percent.

Hypothesis: Math is unlikely to be a key source of the gender gap in economics

Figure 5. The rates at which students in various groups graduate with majors in Economics or in Mathematics or Statistics, 2001-2015

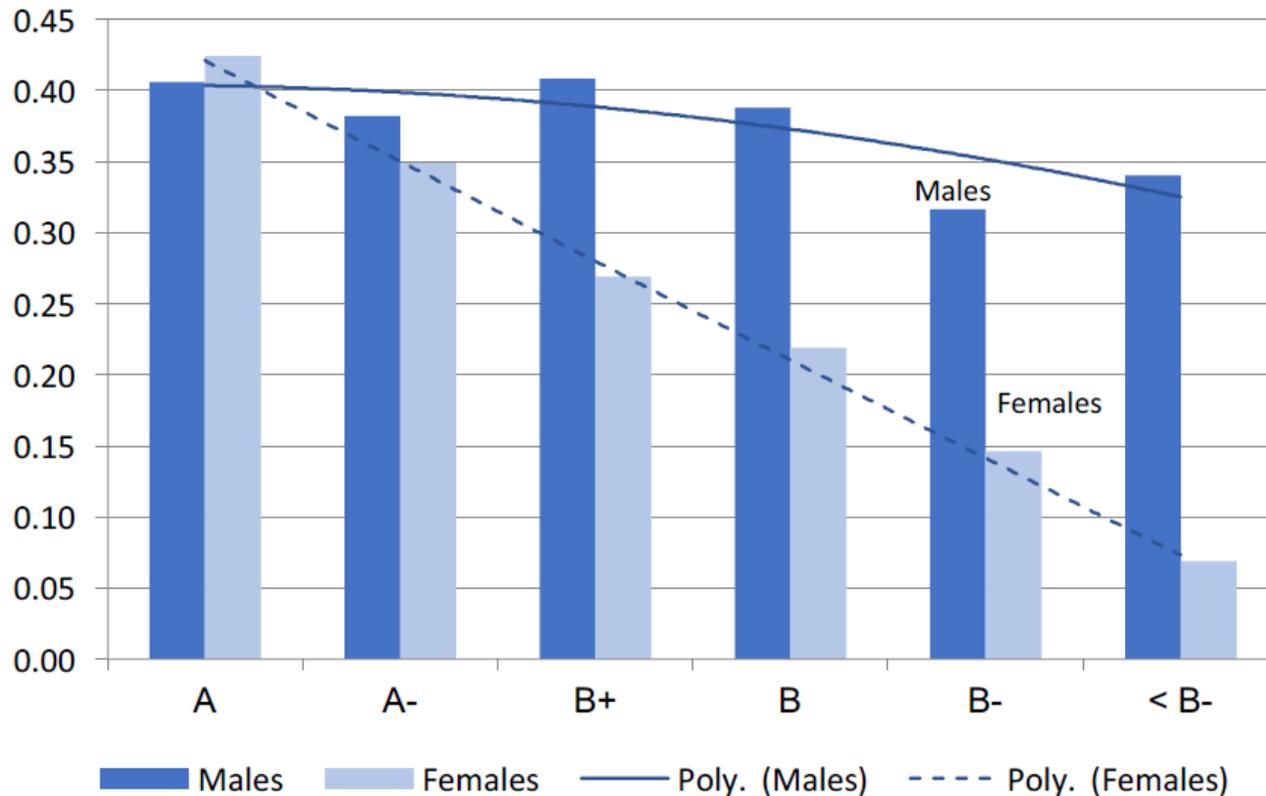


- Differences in rate of majoring in math or statistics across demographic groups smaller than in economics (chart)
- White women major in math at higher rates than in economics, despite math being a less common major overall

Source: “[The Unequal Distribution of Economic Education](#)” by Amanda Bayer and David Wilcox (2017). Note: Authors’ tabulations of Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System for four-year, not-for-profit colleges and universities in the US.

Hypothesis: Women may begin undergraduate studies with less interest in economics and then redirect on grades more than men

B. Fraction Majoring in Economics by Grade in Principles-Spring (or Fall if placed out)



- Women receiving B+ or lower in intro class less likely than men with same grades to major in econ (chart)
- Fewer women enter college with an interest in economics, may reflect narrow notions of the field

Source: “[What Can UWE Do for Economics?](#)” by Tatyana Avilova and Claudia Goldin. Note: Administrative data from institution referred to as “Adams College” where 35 percent of majors are women, similar to peer institutions, such as Stanford, Princeton, and Harvard.

Hypothesis: Sexism, aggressive culture, and implicit bias may be discouraging women from studying and advancing in economics

Table 1: Words with the strongest predictive power for gender

Most “female”		Most “male”	
Word	Marginal Effect	Word	Marginal Effect
hotter	0.388	homosexual	-0.237
hot	0.285	homo	-0.228
attractive	0.260	philosopher	-0.204
pregnant	0.252	keen	-0.182
gorgeous	0.251	motivated	-0.171
beautiful	0.249	fieckers	-0.164
tits	0.247	slides	-0.160
lesbian	0.242	nordic	-0.156
bang	0.229	filling	-0.152
horny	0.224	textbook	-0.148

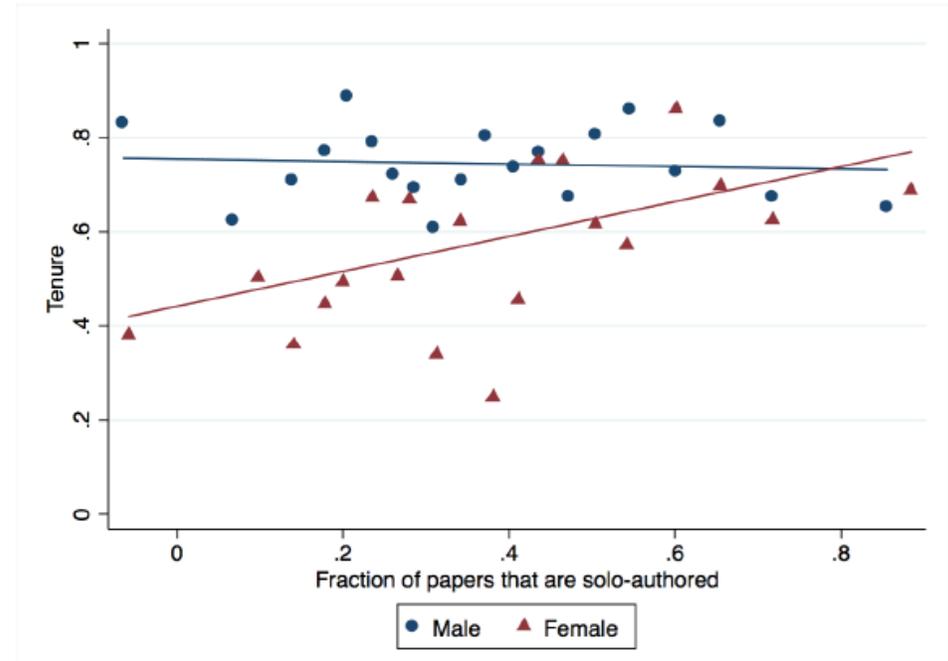
Notes: the marginal effect of word w is the change in probability of a post being classified as *female*, i.e. 1 if it is discussing women, when it contains one more word w .

Source: “[Gender Stereotyping in Academia: Evidence from Economics Job Market Rumors Forum](#)” by Alice Wu

Him: “Our assistant thought your last name was so funny for a candidate.” Me: “How so?” Him: “You know, SAHM: Stay At Home Mom. hahaha” Me: “Oh.”

Source: one of my assistant professor job interview, [2007](#)

FIGURE 4: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PAPER COMPOSITION AND TENURE



Source: “[Gender Differences in Recognition for Group Work](#)” by Heather Sarsons

“Thanks Claudia for the pointer, but your research sucks. You have never published in any semi decent journal without your advisor, so your opinions on economics research do not matter. That’s why no one of importance reads your blog, and not because of your gender.”

Source: EJMR on my research, [2016](#)

Next Steps: Organize, collect data, mentor, and encourage

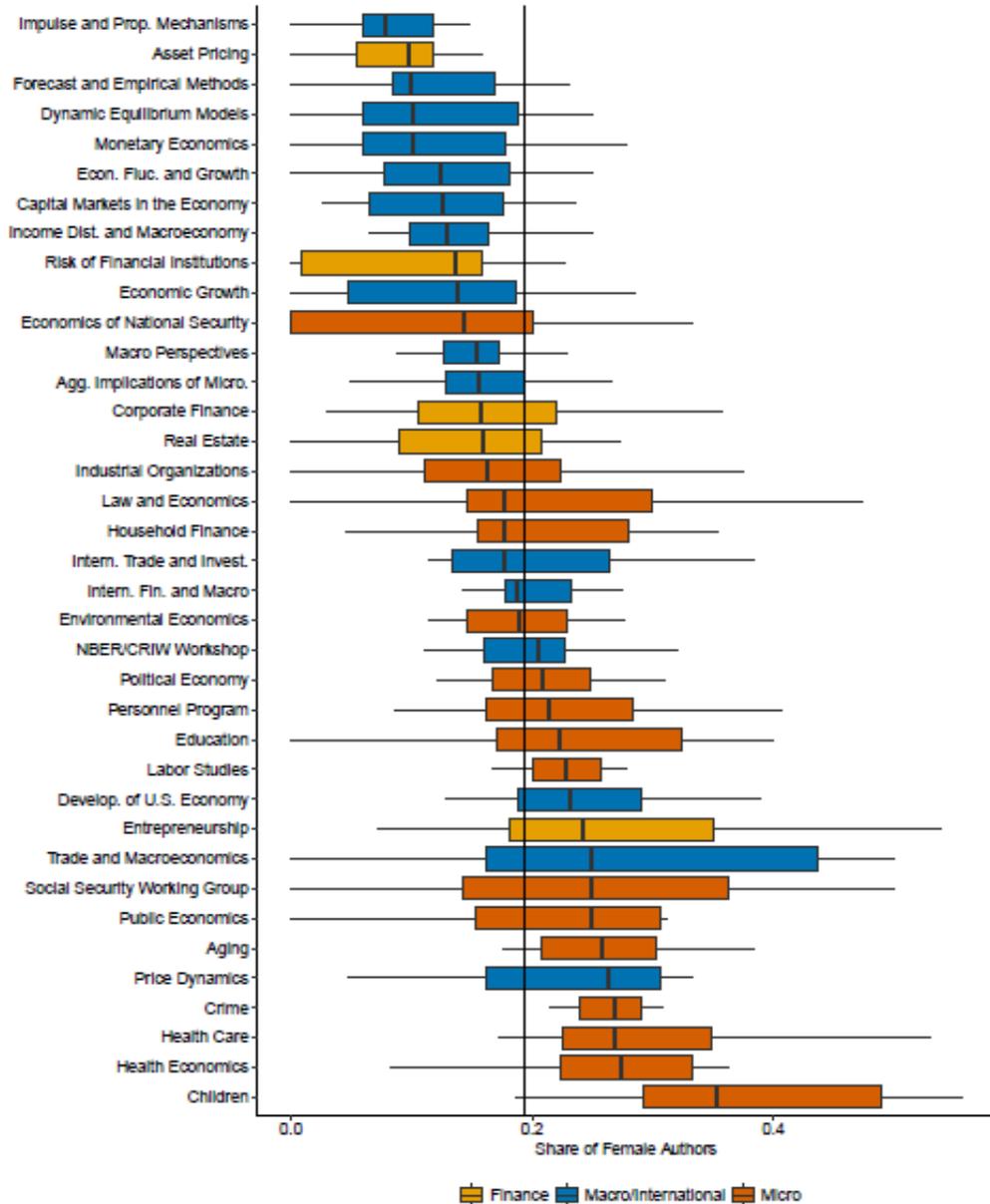


- Form student groups, such as [Women in Economics at Berkeley](#), and attend conferences, such as [Women in Economics Research Conference at Williams](#)
- Learn about the econ department at your school and seek out mentors among your alumni and beyond
- Find ways to support and encourage *your* and others' interests in economics

For some additional resources and ideas, see the AEA's [Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession](#) (CSWEP); their [newsletter](#) is a wealth of information on economics, regardless of gender. Also "[Diversifying Economic Quality: A Wiki for Instructors and Departments.](#)" Note: Photo from *New York Times* "[Wielding Data, Women Force a Reckoning Over Bias in the Economics Field](#)"

Next Steps: Do economics!!

Share of Women Researchers at NBER Summer Institute



- Gender composition varies by field (chart) but women economists study every subject ... follow *your* passion
- The economics profession is a small, privileged slice of the world; [many economic disparities](#) deserve our careful, objective study
- Work hard, be curious, and don't forget to share what you learn: We need to hear women's voices too
- Diverse perspectives will make economics stronger and our policy advice better

Chart source: "[Gender Representation in Economics across Topics and Time](#)" by Anusha Chari and Paul Goldsmith-Pinkham. Note: data from National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) Summer Institutes from 2001 to 2016.

Thank You!