THE PREVALENCE OF GENDER TOPICS
IN U.S. ECONOMICS JOURNALS

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ABSTRACT

This study complements existing research on the contributions and rankings of female economists with a descriptive analysis of the prevalence of gender issues in U.S. economics journals. Assuming that labor economics and development economics are the fields most likely to examine gender issues, I compare the incidence of gender-related articles in the last decade in leading U.S. general economics journals with top journals in the labor and development fields. I also examine the gender composition of authors of gender-related articles in all journals. Results indicate that the highest ranked field journals publish a higher percentage of articles on gender than do the leading general journals from among their labor and development papers. And unlike the common perception, a disproportionate number of the gender articles are written by men rather than women, particularly in the labor and general journals.

The results suggest that departments that use publication in general journals as a proxy for overall research quality, and which do not consider alternative evaluations of research as potential full substitutes, may be using biased measures of the quality and importance of research on gender. The publication policies of general economics journals and the promotion policies of certain economics departments may have a direct effect in reducing both the number and perceived prestige of voices addressing issues of gender in economics.
KEYWORDS

gender topics, U.S. economics journals, publication trends, female economists
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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WORD COUNT

2128 (this includes the text body, acknowledgements, references, and endnotes).
INTRODUCTION

The economics profession continues to generate research on economics journals and trends in topics, institutional affiliation of authors, citation-based rankings, and gender bias in publication rates. Recent contributions to work on these issues include David Laband (1987), David Colander (1989), Marshall Medoff and I. Lee Skov (1990), Raymond Cox and Kee Chung (1991), Jean Louis Heck and Peter Zaleski (1991), Michael Piette and Kevin Ross (1992), Diana Strassmann (1993), John Siegfried (1994), and Randy Albeda (1995). Collectively, this literature provides a fairly clear picture of trends in who and what gets published in economics journals. However, most articles on economics journals and gender focus on the sex of authors rather than topics related to gender issues.¹ This study complements existing research on the contributions and rankings of female economists with a descriptive analysis of the prevalence of gender issues in U.S. economics journals.² Do the leading U.S. general economics journals publish proportionately fewer gender topics compared to the highest ranked field journals?

A systematic exclusion of articles on gender issues from top general journals could have strong implications for tenure and salary decisions.³ Some departments may include publication in highly ranked general journals as a requirement for tenure. Then scholars, especially women, who wish to pursue research on gender would be less likely to attain tenure in such departments, regardless of the quality of their research. The same would hold for salary raises and other institutional forms of recognition of research success.
Assuming that labor economics and development economics are the fields most likely to examine gender issues, I compare the incidence of gender-related articles in the last decade in leading U.S. general economics journals with top journals in the labor and development fields, as ranked in David Laband and Michael Piette (1994: 648-51). For the general journals I examine all gender-related articles as well as those just classified as labor or development. I also examine the gender composition of authors of gender-related articles in all journals. Results indicate that the highest ranked field journals publish a higher percentage of articles on gender than do the leading general journals from among their labor and development papers. And unlike the common perception, a disproportionate number of the gender articles are written by men rather than women, particularly in the labor and general journals. Only the *American Economic Review Papers and Proceedings* stands out for having a far larger number of female than male authors of articles on gender. However, much of this space given to women in the *A.E.R. Papers and Proceedings* is through institutional allocation. The Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession (C.S.W.E.P.) has a certain amount of space reserved in the proceedings issue every year for its sessions, and most papers in C.S.W.E.P. sessions are written by women.

THE DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The data set includes all full-length and short articles (excluding regular book reviews) from January 1984 to December 1994 entered in EconLit on CD-ROM. I performed searches for the top five general economics journals and two additional
general economics journals that have wide readership due to the inclusion of their subscription in the A.E.A. membership fee; the A.E.R. Papers and Proceedings as a separate category; the top three labor journals; and the top three development journals. Table 1 reports the journals by category.

The first step involves tabulating for each general journal the total number of articles and the number of articles classified under labor and development. Note that although the J.E.L. classification codes were revised beginning with all 1991 records, EconLit continues to report the old codes. For consistency I use the old codes for the field tabulations. The next step is to tabulate the total number of articles in the six labor and development journals. Next, I search for all gender-related articles in the general and field journals, using terms such as "gender," "female," "women," and "feminist" as key words anywhere in the EconLit entry, not just in the title. This search procedure should capture research focusing specifically on gender issues as well as feminist research, where the latter may not specifically focus on gender. I also examine J.E.L. codes of the gender-related articles from the general journals to determine whether they are classified within the labor and development fields. Finally, I tabulate the number of male and female authors of all articles on gender topics.

RESULTS

The first four columns of Table 2 report the share of total articles devoted to gender issues in the four categories of journals: the general journals, the A.E.R. Papers and Proceedings, the labor journals, and the development journals. The
labor journals stand out for consistently publishing the highest proportion of their articles on gender topics, while the seven general journals publish the lowest share. The *A.E.R. Papers and Proceedings* and the development journals have fairly similar publication rates for gender topics. The table also depicts a rising trend in these publication rates for the field journals but fairly flat trends for the general journals and the *A.E.R. Papers and Proceedings*. The corresponding period averages are highest for the labor journals at 16.2 percent and lowest for the general journals at 1.3 percent.

Perhaps a more accurate comparison is to take the share of labor articles in the general journals devoted to gender topics and compare that with the labor journals, and similarly for development. Table 1 reports this comparison for the field of labor and shows that although the seven general journals still fall behind the labor journals in every year except 1989, the *A.E.R. Papers and Proceedings* generally publishes the highest share of gender topics among all articles that are classified as labor. The period average for the *A.E.R. Papers and Proceedings*, at 26.6 percent, exceeds the labor journals by ten percentage points and the general journals by almost nineteen percentage points. A similar comparison for articles classified as development (not reported in Table 1 due to zero entries for many years) indicates that the development journals publish proportionately more gender articles than the general journals or the *A.E.R. Papers and Proceedings*, although the shares are rather small across categories. From 1984 to 1994, the share of development articles devoted to gender issues averages 2.8 percent for the *A.E.R.*
Papers and Proceedings and 1.8 percent for the general journals. This compares to 4.7 percent for the development journals.

Exactly which journals within each category publish the largest absolute number of gender-related articles? The data indicate that among all general journals, including the A.E.R. Papers and Proceedings, the A.E.R. Papers and Proceedings clearly publishes the largest number of gender topics in most years and in total with forty-three articles from 1984 to 1994. Next comes the American Economic Review with a total of nineteen and the Journal of Political Economy with a total of twelve. The Rand Journal of Economics, with zero gender-related articles, publishes the fewest. Among the labor journals, the Journal of Human Resources publishes the largest absolute number of gender articles in most years and in total with ninety-nine articles; among development journals it is the Population and Development Review with thirty-eight articles altogether. The data do reveal a rising trend across categories in the absolute number of articles on gender.

Finally, of the articles on gender, Table 3 reports that female authors much outnumber male authors only in the A.E.R. Papers and Proceedings, and the ratio for development journals is close to one. Male authors of articles on gender issues far outweigh female authors for the general and labor journals, by as much as a factor of four. Interestingly, women have a greater likelihood of publishing gender-related articles that are coauthored with men rather than with women, even in the A.E.R. Papers and Proceedings.
CONCLUDING REMARKS

Most researchers on gender issues who have published in leading U.S. journals have either published their work in the A.E.R. Papers and Proceedings or have resorted to a field journal. Aside from the obvious distinction between labor and development, casual inspection of the gender article titles does not yield a noticeable difference in the types of gender topics that receive the attention of the different categories of journals. The study also shows that female authors of gender-related papers are disproportionately represented among authors who present at the annual A.E.A. meetings and publish in the Papers and Proceedings, often in space reserved for C.S.W.E.P.

The results are highly suggestive that the leading U.S. general journals have marginalized work on gender issues and feminist research, especially if the authors are female. Editors of the general journals may claim that they are interested in publishing work of the broadest appeal to economists, but their relatively low publication rates of gender-related articles could have disturbing career consequences for those who pursue such work. Departments with explicit or even implicit lists of publication requirements may deny researchers of gender issues the salary and promotion rewards that go along with publication in prestigious general journals. The apparent relegation of articles on gender issues to lesser journals may then have a direct effect in reducing both the number and perceived prestige of voices on such subjects.
Departments that use publication in such journals as a proxy for overall research quality or as a requirement for tenure (and which do not consider alternative indicators and assessments of research as potential full substitutes) may be using biased measures of the quality and importance of the research of scholars who conduct research on gender. Given the fact that women in economics are disproportionately inclined to pursue gender-related research, the use of such proxies in departmental evaluations may also constitute gender bias. As a result, the publication policies of general economics journals (whose editorial boards contain few if any women CHECK) and the promotion policies of certain economics departments may have a direct effect in reducing both the number and perceived prestige of voices addressing issues of gender in economics.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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REFERENCES


### Table 1: Journal Titles

**General Journals: Category I**

- *Journal of Political Economy*
- *Quarterly Journal of Economics*
- *Review of Economic Studies*
- *American Economic Review*
- *Rand Journal of Economics*
- *Journal of Economic Literature*
- *Journal of Economic Perspectives*

**General Journals: Category II**

- *American Economic Review: Papers and Proceedings*

**Labor Journals**

- *Journal of Labor Economics*
- *Journal of Human Resources*
- *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*

**Development Journals**

- *Journal of Development Economics*
- *Population and Development Review*
- *Economic Development and Cultural Change*

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**Note:** Ranked within categories according to Laband and Piette (1994: 648-51).
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<td>4.1</td>
<td>7.3</td>
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<td>7.0</td>
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<td>19.6</td>
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<td>15.3</td>
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<td>16.3</td>
<td>8.7</td>
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<td>19.3</td>
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<td>30.2</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>7.3</td>
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Average | 1.3 | 5.0 | 16.2 | 4.7 | 7.9 | 26.6 |
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<th>Category</th>
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<th>Total Female Authors</th>
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<td>15</td>
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<td><em>A.E.R. Papers and Proceedings</em></td>
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<td>18</td>
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<td>Labor Journals</td>
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<td>212</td>
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<td>Development Journals</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>43</td>
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NOTES

1. For earlier work on gender bias in acceptance and publication rates for authors, see Marianne Ferber and Michelle Teiman (1980) and William Lott (1983).

2. A useful study would be to include leading international journals in the analysis.

3. I thank Diana Strassmann for the points raised here and in the conclusion concerning the implications of the results.

4. Data on journal acceptance rates by subject classification would contribute to a more thorough examination, but several inquiries indicated that most journals either do not track submissions by topic or would not make such data available. Orley Ashenfelter does state regarding the A.E.R.: "It remains my impression that the distribution of published papers reflects fairly accurately the distribution of papers submitted and has not changed much recently," (1995: 471).

5. I search for each journal name in the descriptor for source, from publication year 1984 to 1994. Several journals require an extra step. I exclude the Scottish, Australian, and European issues of the Journal of Political Economy; I exclude the Quarterly Journal of Business and Economics; the American Economic Review search excludes all May issues while the Papers and Proceedings search includes only May issues; the Journal of Economic Literature search excludes book reviews; and the Population and Development Review search requires an explicit limit to journal articles.
6. The labor articles are classified as J.E.L. codes 8000-8510 and the development articles are classified as J.E.L. codes 1110-1246.

7. The search terms include gender, sex, female, females, women, womens, woman, womans, feminist, feminists, feminization, and feminism. A separate tabulation was performed for articles on family. Because few of the articles under family and not one of the gender terms explicitly examine women’s roles, I do not report these results.

8. I was not able to determine the sex of 5.6 percent of all authors of gender-related articles.