

**The Lived Experiences of Top Women Contributors**  
**to**  
**Leading Economic Education Journals**

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**Abstract**

Despite the substantial literature on women in economics, very little qualitative work has been devoted to exploring women's lived experiences, and even less so on their presence in the economic education subfield. Through interviewing top female contributors to the three leading economic education journals, new insights regarding their experiences within the profession are presented, including challenges they have faced and addressed, the roles colleagues and institutions play in their scholarship, and how research itself fits into their overall careers.

**Key Words:** Economic Education, Women, Gender, Research Productivity

**JEL Codes:** A11; A20; I23

## Introduction

Economic education scholarship has seen largely continuous growth since the creation of the first field journal devoted to its study in 1969, the *Journal of Economic Education*. As of 2019, the list of journals focused on economic education-specific scholarship included 10 different outlets (Asarta & Mixon, 2019), with that list growing in 2022 thanks to the creation of a new academic journal: *Advances in Economics Education*. Further, influential economic education scholarship has not been relegated to field journals alone (Lo et al., 2015; Asarta, Jennings, & Grimes, 2016). Although the work by Lo et al. (2015) and Hwang et al. (2019) has taken steps to identify and analyze the most prominent and impactful authors in economic education, there is still much left unexplored. One such area is female economists' contributions to and experiences with the subfield.

A substantial body of literature has found differentials in the publication records of male and female academic economists, particularly within high-ranking journals (e.g., Antecol, Bedard, & Stearns, 2018; Ginther & Kahn, 2004; Schneider, 1998), but few studies have attempted to examine whether this trend extends to economic education scholarship. Since Harter, Becker, and Watts (1999) showed that instructor gender matters when it comes to delivering curriculum at the undergraduate level, it is possible that male and female experiences with scholarship also differ. In fact, a recent paper by Grimes and Mixon (2021) found that less than twenty-five percent of all authors who contributed to the *Journal of Economic Education* from 2010 to 2019 were women. Though these initial findings suggest that female authorship rates in economic education generally replicate women's representation in economics, they still leave us to question what the specific experiences of female researchers are, and what can be done to make the subfield a more attractive and accessible avenue for their scholarship. To this end, very little qualitative research has been

conducted delving deeper into the research process, to not only show *if* there is a publications gender gap, but also how and why it manifests.

In line with *The American Economist's* broader goal of economic education scholarship that is of interest to specialists and general readers alike (Asarta & Mixon, 2019), and in support of the explicit invitation to *receiving manuscripts aimed at presenting effective techniques for building more diverse and inclusive learning environments* (Grimes & Asarta, 2021, p. 5), the overarching aim of this paper is to describe and critically analyze the professional experiences of top female economic education contributors, detailing how their individual experiences with research both differ and share essential commonalities. This process will more clearly identify the participants of the economic education subfield. Further, by presenting a diversity of perspectives and experiences, describing the challenges contributors face, and identifying the resources used to address those challenges, the “legitimization” (Asarta, 2016) of the process is enhanced.

## **Literature Review**

Since the formation of the American Economic Association's Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession (CSWEP) in 1971, the relative underrepresentation of women in economics has become a regular topic of research and contention (American Economic Association, 2017; Kahn, 1995). While there is little debate regarding the low number of women present in economics—women made up about 31% of new economics PhDs in 2017 (Siegfried, 2019), held only 14.3% of full professor positions in 2018 (Lundberg, 2018), and also faced significantly lower rates of tenure at less research-focused institutions (Ginther & Kahn, 2021)—the specific reasons for this remain contested (Bayer & Rouse, 2016). From a lack of mentoring opportunities (Buckles, 2019), to inequitable service requirements (Guarino & Borden, 2017) and

family leave policies (Antecol, Bedard, & Stearns, 2018), to now more formally evident sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination (American Economic Association, 2019; Casselman & Tankersley, 2019), there exist a number of varied (yet intricately related) factors that serve to make economics a generally more challenging and unwelcoming field for women.

This has led to the general adoption of the “leaky pipeline” model, which posits that the barriers women face at each stage of the economics “pipeline” (from student to professional) lead them to “leak” out, either avoiding (or leaving) academia to join the private sector or foregoing the economics field entirely (Porter & Serra, 2017; Bansak & Starr, 2010). While this presents a straightforward and organized conceptual model as to why so few women are present in economics education and academia overall, its lack of systemic critique and overreliance on deficit frameworks still leave many questions unanswered. For example, while this model helps to explain why there exists a smaller number of women in economics *in total*, it is less useful in analyzing why women are clustered in unpromoted and untenured positions (Lundberg, 2018), or why underlying discrepancies, such as the publications gender gap (Ginther & Kahn, 2004), persist. Likewise, the model is fairly reductive in capturing the full breadth of women’s experiences in economics, suggesting that choices are made on a purely mitigative, rather than positive, basis.

In reaction to the “leaky pipeline,” authors such as Cannady, Greenwald, and Harris (2014) and Zeidler (2016) have submitted a number of critiques of the model—specifically within the context of STEM education—for its focus on a rigid and linear “pipeline” from student to professional (rather than the multitude of “pathways” individuals may take), and its overemphasis on what underrepresented groups lack (rather than why they choose to pursue a certain pathway on their own terms). Though references to the leaky pipeline model are less common within the literature on women in economics (save for, most recently, Buckles, 2019), it is evident that, in

practice, the same underlying assumptions are prevalent. Despite the noted lack of explicit frameworks in the literature on research productivity (Nygaard, 2015), it remains clear that, in effect, the same set of core perspectives and interpretations hold throughout.

Among the largely quantitative research on women in economics, particular attention has been paid to individual factors that may differ between men and women as an explanation for their differing outcomes. Focus has historically been placed on individualized, negative discrepancies, such as those related to graduate school placement (Baghestanian & Popov, 2014), time allotments for research (Manchester & Barbezat, 2013), and submissions to highly-ranked journals (Mayer & Rathmann, 2018). While there is no contesting that this line of inquiry has helped shine a light on why, in the current academic system, women may find less success than men, it is considerably less effective in explaining where these differences originate from in the first place. As Schneider (1998) states regarding the gender gap in publications: “Trying to figure out why women write less than men is like searching for a smoking gun on a firing range. There is no single cause.”

It is precisely this complexity (and interconnectivity) that leaves many of the gender-related issues in economics both unexplained and unexplored, a point which is stressed even further within the economic education subfield due to the limited research available on its structure. While authors such as Lo et al. (2015) and Asarta and Mixon (2019) have made progress in describing and analyzing the structure of the economic education subfield, no research has yet been conducted to investigate its gender composition or, beyond that, the contributions of female economists. Thus, in order to begin understanding the role that gender may play within the subfield, and to determine whether the same publications gap that exists in the broader economics field extends to economic education, it is both worthwhile and necessary to investigate the research experiences of female economic education contributors. Further, it is also important to examine

which pathways—separate from the pipeline—women in economic education have taken throughout their careers. Given the minimal changes seen in the profile of the typical academic economist since 1995 (Asarta, Chambers, & Harter, 2021; Harter & Asarta, 2022), an identification, discussion, and appreciation of the different pathways potentially taken by female economists may provide new channels and encouragement for a more diverse population to join the economics profession.

## **Methods and Sample**

### ***Why Use a Qualitative Approach?***

As mentioned in the literature review, the vast majority of research on women in economics is quantitative, typically applying some form of deficit framework to explain why there are significant and persistent gender gaps in enrollment (Ahlstrom & Asarta, 2019; Bansak & Starr, 2010; Calkins & Welki, 2006), publications (Barbezat, 2006; Manchester & Barbezat, 2013), citations (Ferber & Brün, 2011), and tenure (Antecol, Bedard, & Stearns, 2018; Ginther & Kahn, 2004). This tendency has clearly identified the *results* of gender-related barriers in economics—both explicit and implicit—but has done little to explain how these issues manifest and, perhaps most important of all, how women experience and confront them. Qualitative research, however, provides an effective means to bridge that gap in understanding.

Though it lacks a universally accepted definition or set of parameters, qualitative research is at its core predicated on becoming “closer” to a phenomenon and applying an iterative process that continuously creates new distinctions among the variables of interest (Aspers & Corte, 2019). In this way, qualitative inquiry attempts to balance scientific rigor with an acceptance of and respect for the subjective nature of individual reality, applying various theoretical and conceptual

tools (dependent upon the framework chosen) to the stated and/or observed experiences of participants (Denzin, 2008). While this necessarily sacrifices some of the generalizability and stricter methodological uniformity present in quantitative research, it does so on the philosophical grounds that both interpretation and experience are inherently variable and personal, and thus cannot be fully expressed within the removed constraints of quantification alone (Donmoyer, 2008). Thus, in attempting to discern *why* a problem exists—and, beyond that, how it is experienced and understood by those affected—a qualitative approach allows for a more detailed and personal explanation.

Authors such as Ginther and Kahn (2004) and Barbezat (2006), alongside more recent work by the American Economic Association (2019), have made tentative attempts to supplement their quantitative research with some qualitative aspects, often through open- and close-ended surveys asking participants about their professional experiences. However, there has been little to no fully qualitative research on this subject. This could be attributed to the economics field's strong quantitative tradition, which has led to a potential lack of researchers trained in (or inclined towards) qualitative research. Nevertheless, our understanding of women's experiences in economics will continue to be severely limited so long as our broader quantitative findings are not supplemented by equally comprehensive qualitative work, which delves beyond surface-level numeric results and investigates the lived experiences of women in the profession.

### ***Phenomenological Approach***

The phenomenological approach to qualitative research is centered on understanding how individuals explain and perceive a given “phenomena” or event, drilling down to the shared essential elements and themes common among their separate experiences (Groenewald, 2004). While several subdisciplines have developed over time, including interpretative phenomenological

analysis (IPA) and hermeneutic phenomenology, they all share the same base assumptions and focus—that is, there is no one objective reality that can be definitively proven to exist, and so each individual constructs their own reality on the basis of their environment, past experiences, and understanding of the world (Pringle, Drummon, McLafferty, & Hendry, 2011; Lavery 2003). As such, the phenomenological approach does not begin with a stated theory or perspective. Rather, participants are able to explain a given phenomenon in their own terms, which allows deeper meaning to develop organically—whether or not it aligns with prior assumptions or theories (Finlay, 2012).

While grounded or critical theory may at first glance seem more appropriate in attempting to qualitatively assess women’s experiences in economics, building upon the view that inequitable power structures foster gender-based discrimination and inequitable outcomes, it is precisely in reaction to this perspective that the phenomenological approach was chosen for this particular study. There is no doubting that economics is, on the whole, an uninviting field for women to enter, as the substantial amount of quantitative (American Economic Association, 2019; Antecol & Stearns, 2018; Blau et al., 2010) and tentatively qualitative (Ginther & Kahn, 2004) research has made clear that the existing structure of the field has continued to support both explicit and implicit discrimination. However, the near-exclusive use of deficit frameworks has severely limited the scope through which we can understand female economists’ experiences. In using the phenomenological approach, prior assumptions established in the literature—such as how gender-based inequities in economics develop and affect women—are “bracketed,” or placed aside, and a fresh perspective is taken. This does not suggest that the analysis is totally free of any personal bias or preestablished notions. However, bracketing, in conjunction with an “openness” to whatever the data may tell us, allows for themes and conclusions to present themselves with as

little researcher intervention as possible (Tufford & Newman, 2010). Thus, the phenomenological approach does not suggest that there is any pure objectivity in its analysis. Instead, it offers a nuanced look at how the experiences of several individuals within a larger group share certain essential similarities, and what those mean within a larger research context.

With regard to women in economics, specifically economic education research, the phenomenological approach provides the dual benefit of allowing participants to share their experiences on their own terms (sans any assumptions as to what barriers they have faced and their relationship to gender) and to discuss their research in a holistic manner, without a predetermined focus on economic education alone.

### ***Sample Selection & Interview Description***

In order to identify the “top 15” female economic education contributors, as determined by the total number of articles each published, a list of all authors who published in the *Journal of Economic Education (JEE)*, *International Review of Economics Education (IREE)*, and *Journal of Economics and Finance Education (JEFE)* between 1998 and 2018 was compiled. These three journals were selected on the basis that they are the three highest-ranked economic education field journals (Arbaugh et al., 2017). Each author’s publication record was then adjusted so that only peer-reviewed articles related to economic education remained, excluding publications such as editor introductions and book reviews. From there, author gender was determined following a similar methodology as Ferber (1986) and Ferber and Brün (2011), whereby an author’s full first name was used as an immediate (if rudimentary) identifier, and uncertain cases were validated by searching for the author’s online profile and using pronoun references to confirm their gender.

The “top 15” female contributors identified via our sample selection process contributed between four and 15 economic education articles to *JEE*, *IREE*, and *JEFE* between 1998 and 2018.

These individuals were contacted via email, given an explanation of the goals and purpose of the study, and asked to participate in an online interview. Of the 15 individuals contacted, 13 agreed to participate. As can be seen in Table 1, study participants worked at a variety of institutions (based on the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education) at the time of the interviews. Eleven of the participants held tenure-track positions, with nine of them being full professors. Two participants were in non-tenure track positions: one held the rank of senior lecturer and the other worked at a professional economics organization.

**Table 1: Author Characteristics**

<i>Institution Type</i>	<i>n</i>
R1: Doctoral Universities (Very High Research Activity)	3
R2: Doctoral Universities (High Research Activity)	1
D/PU: Doctoral/Professional Universities	3
M1: Master’s Colleges and Universities – Large Programs	1
Mixed Baccalaureate/Associate’s Colleges	4
Other	1
<i>Track</i>	
Tenure	11
Non-Tenure	2
<i>Rank</i>	
Professor	9
Associate Professor	2
Senior Lecturer	1
Other	1

Note: *Institution Type* is determined using the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education.

The interviews were conducted and recorded via an online conference tool (for 12 of the interviews) and a traditional phone call (for one interview), and each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. Interviews followed a semi-structured format, employing a standard interview protocol while allowing for questions and follow-ups to diverge based on each participant’s unique responses, experiences, and interests. Participants were asked about their decision to enter the economics field, their current and past research interests, their experiences in

conducting research, the challenges they have faced, the resources they have utilized while pursuing their research interests, and the role both their institutions and colleagues have played in their research. This broad range of questioning allowed participants to share their research experiences in an incremental way, creating a space for them to highlight and contextualize those aspects they considered most important or impactful.

After all interviews were completed, the audio was transcribed and analyzed following both Groenewald's (2004) and Braun and Clarke's (2006) protocols for phenomenological and general qualitative studies, respectively. First, prior assumptions (whether arising from knowledge of the previous literature or personal experience/expectations) were bracketed and set aside in an effort to analyze participants' responses within their own individualized contexts. For example, although this study was compelled by the numerous documented cases of gender-based discrimination within the economics field, no such assumption extended to the analysis itself. The answer to the question of what role gender played in participants' research experiences (to what extent and in what direction) was allowed to come about naturally. Next, unique units of meaning were highlighted within each interview, reflecting either participants' explicit experiences or their interpretation of and feelings towards these experiences. From this, summaries and themes specific to each interview were developed, linking common units of meaning based on their relation and importance to one another. These summaries and preliminary themes were then sent to each respective participant to check their validity and ensure that what was drawn from the interview was accurate and truthful to their experiences. Finally, after making necessary adjustments and edits, individual themes were compared across interviews, with the most prominent and repeated themes being joined together to create a final list of six common themes that expressed the "essence" of the participants' research experiences. These major themes are presented and

discussed in detail below. Furthermore, to protect participants' confidentiality, pseudonyms are used throughout the remainder of this article.

## **Results**

### ***Theme 1: Interest Through Experience***

One remarkably consistent thread throughout the interviews was *why* participants first chose to pursue a career in economics. While the exact catalyst varied between individuals, most participants pointed out that they only chose to major (and later work) in economics after taking an economics class as an undergraduate student, usually while majoring in a different field. After finding a spark of interest in the subject, most often due to its applicability and relationship to the “real world,” and coupled with an inherent talent for the subject and initial success, they chose to change their major to economics (or add it on to their existing major as an area of specialization). In describing their reasoning, words such as “love,” “passion,” and “interest” were emphasized and used repeatedly, highlighting that the primary drive behind their change and choice of major was interest in and attachment to the material presented. Despite some participants noting a natural predilection towards elements of the subject (such as its role in policy analysis, mathematical rigor, or the level of critical thinking required), nearly all described their first experience with economics as an undergraduate as incidental to their original program requirements.

This theme of interest fostered through direct experience was further built upon when discussion turned to how and why participants began conducting research in economic education. Nearly all the participants called attention to their positive experiences in both learning and teaching economics (when early teaching opportunities were presented, typically as a graduate assistant), explaining that they wanted to help ensure others would be able to have similar positive experiences with the subject. This experience with teaching, coupled with a desire to improve its

effectiveness, opened the door to research in economic education. Many participants were further directed towards research by a combination of guidance from a mentor/advisor and feedback on what participants were already doing in the space, such as creating and running classroom experiments. As one participant, Zoey, shared regarding her preliminary economic education work with her dissertation advisor, “[W]e would walk over to the room regularly together, and we were just speculating about what made students successful in the class, versus students who weren’t successful in the class.” Another, Toni, described a similar introductory experience, stating, “[My advisor] was working on financial literacy research, and so I took a special topics course with him, and it was all about financial literacy, so that’s kind of where I got into it, and got into working with my dissertation and everything.” Alternatively, Julie, in reaction to receiving positive feedback on the unique assignments and lessons she had integrated into her own classroom, explained, “[It was] the first that I got feedback from someone else, like what you’re doing is kinda special, because I just – it was just what I do, I don’t think of it as anything special.”

While these three participants ventured into economic education research in slightly different ways—be it through an advisor’s shared research, taking a class in that area, or producing novel lessons on their own—they, as well as the majority of other participants, emphasized the experiential element of their journey. It was their first-hand experience in economics and, by extension, economic education—as a student, teacher, and researcher (formally or not)—that encouraged an interest in both the field and the subfield. Though participants had to further establish themselves in the subfield through their own efforts (as Toni explained, “I think [my advisor] gave me my start, and I kind of...took it from there”), the initial interest in economic education research was predicated on a strong desire to make economics more accessible and relevant to a general audience, beyond those who planned to specialize in the field. As Natalie

stated in relation to why she conducts economic education research, “I like the idea of teaching people that it’s not about money, it’s really about understanding the world.” Claire echoed this sentiment, saying, “Most people won’t go beyond principles. And I want them to have a really great experience. I’m so tired of meeting all those people who when they find out you’re an economist, the first thing they tell you is that was the worst class I had in college.” Thus, participants highlighted the guiding role positive experiences with and exposure to economics played in their own education and careers, as well as that of their students. While few went into both their education and initial research careers expecting to focus on economics and economic education, respectively, they were led in that direction through a combination of positive classroom experiences, instructor role models, advisors/mentors reaching out, and their own persistent efforts to make the subject more accessible for others.

### ***Theme 2: Economic Education Research Valuation***

Participants described localized institutional support among colleagues, and strong bonds formed within the relatively small, but well-connected, economic education community. However, the same could not be said for their experiences with their department heads and deans (more broadly, “administrators”), particularly as related to research support (such as sabbatical approval and tenure). Even those participants who felt free to pursue economic education as their primary research line, without seeing any negative impact on their careers, noted that they had colleagues at other institutions who lacked the same sort of privilege. Those participants who faced less supportive and more skeptical administrators explained that they only felt comfortable transitioning into a primarily economic education research line after achieving tenure, with the certainty and understanding that it would no longer have negative repercussions for their career. As Brenda stated bluntly, “I wouldn’t have gotten tenure if it [my research] had been education—

I mean, if I was in an education department, yeah, but not economics education.” She later went on to add, “I had a dean who at one point told me I wasn’t gonna get a sabbatical for...a research experiment that I was proposing to do, just because it had a whiff of maybe there was something classroom associated with it.” Sara, though receiving some credit for her education research (which she noted as “unusual”), shared a similar experience, saying, “[O]nce I had tenure, I felt completely at liberty, I didn’t feel like I needed to do the other [non-economic education] research as an insurance policy.”

While there was no clear consensus or explicit reasoning as to *why* economic education research was so undervalued relative to, as one participant termed it, “pure” economic research, Sara suggested that the subfield holds a reputation for being less rigorous than other areas, and so research that is even education- or classroom-adjacent is largely discounted. While Julie corroborated this assessment, offering that some researchers only tap into economic education as a source for “easy” publications, she further explained that many within the subfield still set a much higher standard for themselves. As she stated regarding her own drive to research best teaching practices, “I really care about not just doing it in a better way, but like fundamentally transforming and understanding why we are, where we are, why we do what we do, and why econ[omic] ed[ucation] matters, and that it matters for the world.”

This lack of administrator support was by no means universal. Both Claire and Toni pointed out that not only were there no major institutional roadblocks to their own economic education research, but they also received encouragement and support for such work throughout their careers. Part of this was attributed to the type and size of the school, with smaller, liberal arts colleges having more flexible and less stringent requirements about “what and where” research could be published, but why there exists such a persistent delineation beyond that remained unexplored.

Regardless, those participants who did receive consistent administrative and institutional support (or allowance) to conduct economic education research all expressed a feeling of privilege that they had been afforded the opportunity for career advancement/tenure while primarily researching economic education.

### ***Theme 3: Co-Author Cultivation***

Co-authors, both within and without participants' own institutions, were consistently identified as a significant and reliable resource, as participants described their overall experiences working with others as positive and beneficial to the quality of their own work. While much of this originates from direct collaboration, with participants and their co-authors combining their expertise to generate journal articles or book chapters, participants also cited a number of additional benefits above and beyond publications alone. These ranged from providing feedback and advice on existing and planned projects, to providing access to data that would otherwise be inaccessible or prohibitively expensive to obtain, to even acting as a mentor and advocate into and throughout the economic education community. Likewise, a network of female economic education researchers had been formed online, which, according to Julie, afforded members the opportunity to discuss not only their work, but also the various challenges that they faced as women in the economics field.

Maintaining these positive co-author experiences, however, is reliant upon a continuous process of networking and evaluation. Regardless of their preference for co-authoring versus working alone, nearly all participants indicated that, when working with others, they had to identify who was a good "fit" for their workstyle and personality, and selectively cultivate their co-authoring relationships on an ongoing basis. As Amy stated, "[E]very once in a while you have a co-author that doesn't pull their weight, and then you do a paper or two with them and then you

don't work with them again." Natalie made a similar point, highlighting the need for direction in selecting co-authors: "I think again, trying to be intentional about who you work with, kind of seeing how they work, what kind of—so the people that I've published with mostly have also been very organized, and intentional, and theory-based, and very easy to work with that way." Other participants likewise emphasized the importance of matching not only research interests, but also work ethic and overall research goals.

Still, the ways in which these co-author relationships actually develop are as varied as the co-authors themselves. As Emily described, regarding how she met various co-authors throughout her career, "Some was just being sort of proactive in reaching out, others have been, y'know, just chit-chatting with colleagues, or being in seminars with colleagues, and finding interests that overlap...And I've had some co-authorship relationships where people have reached out to me...There's just been lots of different models." Other participants also relayed the importance of in-person contact and meetings, and the role conferences play in helping to support these introductions and interactions.

#### ***Theme 4: Resource Constraints***

One of the most regularly cited and straightforward challenges to participants' research (whether in economic education or other areas) is access to resources, particularly in terms of data and financial support. Though some participants noted that the size of their institutions did play a role in the funding available (with larger, R1 universities generally having greater means to support research efforts), securing financial support *consistently* remained a concern for participants across institutions. In light of this, many participants have looked to outside funding sources to help support their research agendas. As Natalie, who worked at a small, liberal arts college, related, "[T]he biggest challenge, like big-picture challenge, is always getting funding...I don't know if

it's as big a challenge as it might seem, because we've had four [grants] now. But it is a challenge, of putting together a research team, and a project, and then something big enough to get funding from National Science Foundation." Though the manner in which funding leads the type of research conducted was only touched upon lightly by other participants, Natalie was not alone in endeavoring to construct research projects that are not only interesting topics to pursue on their own, but also meet the requirements for external grants.

In addition, several participants noted that the location of their department (e.g., whether or not it was located within the school of business) and their own position further dictated the availability of institutional funding. To this former point, Zoey explained, "when we moved to the college [of business], it also came with bonuses for publications in top journals, and more research money, more research incentives." On the opposite end, Sara, whose position did not require she produce research, explained that she never felt she would qualify for what institutional funding was available, despite consistently publishing research throughout her career. Thus, the interplay between institutional size and priorities, department placement, and faculty roles and expectations produce as many opportunities for additional resources as they do challenges for those in alternative positions.

Beyond financial resources, access to data is similarly an area of constant consideration, and subject to similar constraints as institutional type and size. Within the realm of economic education research specifically, some participants focus on directly collecting data within their own and their colleagues' classrooms, while others utilize secondary data collected by other institutions or organizations. In either case, ensuring consistent access to both existing and new data is a challenge, yet it is neither insurmountable nor all-encompassing. Whether it is through maintaining contact with colleagues at other institutions who have access to priority data or

working alongside other professors to test experiments and lessons, researchers must, as Brenda stated, “make your own case...the burden is always on you to explain what it is that you’re doing, why it’s important, and...try to identify allies.”

### ***Theme 5: Research and Teaching***

Of the three major requirements for academic participants—research, teaching, and service—research and teaching stood firmly at the forefront of their minds in terms of both priority and time commitment. The relationship between these two areas, however, proved to be much more nuanced and even, at times, paradoxical. While participants largely agreed that research and teaching are—or at least could be—closely intertwined with one another, the extent to which this constructive relationship actually manifested, and in what ways, was less agreed-upon. Some participants viewed research and teaching in a top-down manner, with research both informing educators of the most current knowledge within the field and providing the best methods of content delivery to students. Others saw it as more of a bottom-up relationship, with areas for improvement in teaching serving as opportunities for research and experimentation. There are inherent difficulties in building upon and implementing research in the classroom with either approach; a significant amount of planning and direction is required. As Natalie explained regarding how she uses her own research to improve her classroom, “[E]ven though that’s what I do, it’s, on a day to day basis it’s very difficult, you have to be quite intentional about doing it that way, like making space at the end of the week to say, ‘Ok, what did and didn’t work, and I’ll make notes for next time I teach this class.’ But that has to be something that you want to do.”

This concept of making “space” for research and reflection was likewise touched upon by several other participants, who all indicated that research and teaching, which can and often do serve as complements to one another in the process of creating and disseminating knowledge, also

act as severe rivals for both time and focus. Despite their constructive nature in application, research and teaching were repeatedly referenced as antagonistic in daily practice, with the pressure (or need) to constantly switch between the two reducing the quality of both. Natalie and Zoey emphasized the need to work on research in concentrated and uninterrupted periods, such as over weekends and summers, or by stacking classes on the same days to free up additional time throughout the week. They also noted the important role sabbatical plays for tenure-track faculty in allowing for an extended period of time to focus solely on research. Toni followed up on this point, stating that she treats her research like its own class, ensuring that she gives it the same level of priority: “I’ve never heard of someone saying something like, ‘Oh, I can just never find time to teach my class.’ And it’s because it’s scheduled into your life, and you have to do it. So I...legitimately schedule research all year long.” While participants generally took varied approaches to balancing their teaching and research requirements, the need for research time that was not “interweaved” with teaching was common throughout.

### ***Theme 6: Gendered Expectations***

Although gender was only discussed sparingly across the interviews, its effects and the experiences of those participants who brought attention to it must not be ignored. While several participants who brought up the issue of gender within economics (and, more broadly, academia) did not necessarily suffer from any negative ramifications directly, they nonetheless made clear that they had witnessed its effects throughout. As Natalie explained, “[H]aving been in many institutions, it is obvious the gender paradigm looms large there. Who’s gonna take notes at the meeting, who’s gonna send emails, who’s gonna send the reminders. And then who’s also not gonna get promoted, cause they didn’t do the research.” Julie likewise noted that both she and her female colleagues are expected to handle the majority of familial and household chores, which significantly slows

their ability to conduct research, even while collaborating with each other. In addition, Brenda found that once the administration at her college had switched from primarily male to all-female, women began to receive significantly more recognition for their work, such as being granted titled professorial positions.

Taken together, these varied yet related experiences suggest that the gender-related challenges participants have experienced do not necessarily manifest in the form of direct discrimination, but rather via a pervasive and unspoken set of expectations which fall largely upon women and serve to hinder their research efforts and career advancement. Still, those participants who had encountered or seen this undercurrent of gendered expectations further explained that, at least in the immediate term, identifying the problem is far from a solution. They indicated they have been left with little recourse other than to press on with their work, regardless of what others may say or think. As Julie said regarding the barriers and challenges she has faced, “[Y]ou just kind of shut up and do the work...[G]enerally speaking, I just like say, ‘Well this is the lay of the land,’ right? And me complaining and talking about it is not gonna change anything.” Natalie expressed a similar sentiment, saying, “I’ve done a lot of different jobs. I don’t feel like I’m hanging on to this by my hands so...it’s easier for me to say, ‘I’m not taking notes’ and to just sit there in the room, with the tension....But lots of people can’t or don’t do that, and it’s a burden, it’s a real burden.”

## **Conclusion**

There is little debate as to the existence of gender-based discrimination and harassment within economics—work by authors such as Ginther and Kahn (2004), Manchester and Barbezat (2013), Guarino and Borden (2017), and Antecol and Stearns (2018) have all consistently shown that

women face numerous barriers and challenges to their entry and advancement within the field. This is further corroborated by survey results from the American Economic Association (2019), which show that nearly half of all female academic economists have experienced some manner of discrimination on the basis of their gender. What remains more difficult to identify and explain, however, is exactly how this discrimination manifests, and what effect it has on women in the field. This lack of knowledge is stressed even further within the economic education subfield, which itself has received only limited research into its structure and contributors within the last decade.

To begin to rectify this, the top 15 female contributors to the three leading economic education field journals (*The Journal of Economic Education*, *International Review of Economics Education*, and *Journal of Economics and Finance Education*) were identified and invited to take part in an interview asking about their research experiences; of these 15 individuals, 13 agreed to participate. These interviews were recorded, transcribed, and broken down into basic units of meaning, which were then built back up into themes that were both common and significant across interviews, providing us with a glimpse into the essential research experiences of these top female economic education contributors.

In many ways, the above themes may prove to be unsurprising. Participants described entering both economics and the economic education subfield through a desire to share with students their passion for a subject they believe to be truly fascinating and engaging, even if it is not always effectively presented in such a way. This echoes findings from Emerson, McGoldrick, and Mumford (2012), who found that early engagement with economics classes among female students had significant potential to lead them towards an economics major/pathway. Further, the emphasis placed on often-strained time commitments (theme 5) and higher expectations for family

and home life responsibilities (theme 6) corroborates earlier findings by Harter, Becker, and Watts (2011) that female academic economists tend to spend more time on teaching over research than their male colleagues, particularly at the assistant professor level; a time when, they hypothesize, it is common for individuals to start a family, thus requiring early child care. Additional barriers unique to economic education research also present themselves, chief among them being a lack of administrative support and value. Although the issue is not universal, even those participants who receive consistent support from their institutions for education-related scholarship note that they are well aware of this relative privilege and can identify colleagues who do not share the same support, fitting well within Akerlof's framework of undervalued "soft" economic research (2020).

What can ultimately be taken away from these interviews is that the research experience of these top economic education contributors is one of passion, interest, and a resilient push for change. From their entry into the field to the reason they pursue the research lines that they do, participants all emphasized their love for a subject that they see as being integral to understanding the world around them; one they want to help make accessible and engaging for as wide and diverse an audience as possible. While they may face numerous challenges in pursuing their individual lines of research, they choose to persist regardless, as they see research as an opportunity to improve how we teach, learn, and understand economics. Between their own personal resilience and the added support of colleagues within and without their institutions, the participants in this study have made clear that although there is an undeniable current of gendered expectations which places an undue burden upon women, they will continue pursuing their research regardless, ever aware of the challenges that face other women like them.

### ***Policy Recommendations***

Though our exploration of top female economic education contributors' research experiences did not explicitly focus on interventions, the topics participants brought up and the challenges they described do lend themselves to further recommendations. For example, all participants stressed that their introduction to and interest in economics was started and spurred on by a positive initial experience, especially when working under an advisor or mentor who could help foster their own nascent research interests. To this end, a mentoring program directed towards introducing prospective and current economics students to female economic education researchers/practitioners, such as that described by Li (2018), could help students view economic education as a viable and accessible scholarship path. Likewise, Asarta (2016), in reviewing the challenges economic education faces relative to the broader fields of economics and business and management education, suggests that lower levels of citations and a lack of administrative recognition for related publications further disincentivize economists from contributing to—let alone specializing in—economic education research. However, should academic administrators and economics departments include top economic education field journals in their lists of “qualified” journals, and avoid penalizing researchers who conduct scholarship related to economic education, there is likely to be an expansion in publications and citations alike. As echoed by the American Economic Association's Code of Professional Conduct (2018) and the Committee on the Status of Women in the Economic Profession's CeMENT workshops (2021), ensuring that women have access to and support within mentoring and co-author networks, as well as having their scholarship fairly appraised, will be essential steps towards making both economics and economic education more equitable and accessible areas of research.

### ***Limitations & Future Research***

The major limitation with any qualitative research is its external validity, even within the broader group that the sample was drawn from. This issue is further stressed by the fact that the participants in this study are on the far-right distribution of economic education contributors. While this is not to say that the essential themes presented herein are entirely unique to these participants, or that no broader conclusions can be drawn from this research, it does highlight the need for further research into the experiences of female economic education contributors *across* the distribution curve. Likewise, by selecting a sample based on total publications, rather than individuals electing to participate based on their experiences with gender-based discrimination or harassment, we run the risk of understating the severity of said issues within both economic education and the broader field of economics. As such, future research may wish to take a different approach to participant recruitment and selection, and vary the analytical approach accordingly. Finally, given the lack of change seen in the economics profession (Bayer & Rouse, 2016), the methodology used in this study could be used to identify, discuss, and appreciate the potential pathways taken by economists from other underrepresented groups within the profession. Ultimately, it is our sincere hope that the identification of these pathways will serve as a mechanism by which change can and will occur.

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