

Gender and the Dismal Science: Women in the Early Years of the Economics Profession. By Ann Mari May. New York: Columbia University Press, 2022. 256 pp. Hardcover, \$125.00. ISBN: 978-0-231-19290-3

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Reviewed by Cléo Chassonnery-Zaïgouche

Ann Mari May's deep dive into the history of the status of women in the early days of the economics profession sheds new light on an old, and still current, issue: the underrepresentation of women in economics. May opens her preface with the story of a folder from the American Economic Association archives entitled "Trouble." Chapter 7 is devoted to this: Lucile Eaves, an "archetype of a female scholar in the Progressive Era," successfully published her PhD dissertation as a monograph in 1910, which received a skeptical review published in the inaugural issue of the *American Economic Review* (AER) (Ira B. Cross, "A History of California Labor Legislation by Lucile Eaves [1911], pp. 106–109). Eaves found the review of her book an "unjust attack," and while the editor and most colleagues summoned in the controversy found the reviewer's criticisms rather petty and picayunish, it is *his* career that they collectively defended (pp. 105–118). The entire chapter is worth reading for what it tells of "the politics of the craft"—writing science—but the main outcome of the controversy is a discussion about "the utter badness and hopelessness of [our] standard of Economic Reviewing" (p. 114). The main contribution of Ann Mari May's book is well illustrated by this specific chapter; it shows how, then and now, "trouble" first encountered by women are, in fact, issues related to professional standards in general.

Gender and the Dismal Science describes the status of women in the emerging economics profession in the United States from the 1880s to the 1940s. The author first scrutinizes every facet of becoming a professional economist during this period, starting with (lack of) access to graduate education (chapters 2 and 3). Chapters 4 and 5 are devoted to women and their membership to the main professional society, the American Economic Association (AEA), created in 1885: the chapters shows how the AEA explicitly deprived itself from a "natural constituency"—women economists—while systematically seeking to increase businessmen's membership. The next chapters explore what May beautifully labels the "trade in words"—publishing monographs (chapter 6), reviewing scholarly works (chapter 7), and the relatively new activity of publishing peer-reviewed articles (chapter 8). This latter chapter explores the "old boys' network" enabling economists to access the AER and Harvard's *Quarterly*

Journal of Economics. Chapter 9 describes the double standard women faced on the labor market and the central choice women economists had to make whether “to work or to wed” (p. 141).

Finally, Chapter 10 delineates the contours of the *persona* of the professional economist, a man, while home economists, women, are disqualified as economists.

Business historians, historians of economics, economists, and anyone interested in the history and functioning of professions, especially intellectual professions, will learn a lot from Ann Mari May’s well-researched book. Three specific contributions of the book stand out in comparison to the current literature in the history of economics.

The first striking innovation of the book is the choice of empirical method, offering a view of the status of women beyond individual biographies, but not limited to a quantitative overview. The wealth of historical anecdotes is complemented with an exhaustive data set of women’s outputs (doctorates, academic articles, book reviews, etc.). A randomly selected sample of men’s outcomes is then compared to the matching sample of women for each period. For example, comparing the marital status of 302 women who earned a doctorate in economics from 1890 to 1948 to a sample of 302 randomly selected men of the same period shows that most men were married while half of the women were not; thus, work was “a gender-based privilege” (p. 155). This matching technique works as a revelator of women’s characteristics and provides a description of the professional context they faced. Individual biography is the norm in the history of women in economics, while prosopography (collective biography) is very limited in the field, and if used does not usually rely on matching techniques.

The second element that makes this book stand out is the systematic study of all aspects of the profession, from education to jobs, from publishing to reviewing. This comprehensiveness illuminates one of the main characteristics of women’s trajectories: they face barriers at every step, and one needs to understand how each type of discrimination articulates to a general pattern of exclusion. Each element has usually been studied, but in separate contributions.

The articulation of all these elements allows May to enlighten the gendered nature of professionalization itself. This is the third major contribution of the book. The creation of standards and jurisdiction of the economics profession have not been studied in conjunction with the presence (and absence) of women. May clearly shows the role of gender in the rise of professional authority: the professional standing of economics rose as women got segregated in separate spheres—in women’s colleges and in home economics departments. Women were also excluded from the profession by legislation, the so-called “marriage

bars” imply the termination of a woman employment on her marriage and was a current practice from the 19th. This distinction between men and women is also seen through the impact of gender on the boundaries of the discipline itself: “gender schema [...] allowed academic economists [...] to characterize women with doctorates in economics as sociologists and men with doctorates in sociology and history as economists” (p. 28).

Overall, the book fulfills its goal to provide a comprehensive overview of the status of women in the early days of the economics profession in the United States. While the impact of gender on professionalization is at the heart of the book, gender is not used to analyze knowledge production itself. For example, the exploration of women’s topics of research (e.g., in dissertations, books, and articles) could have shed some light on the evolution of subfields as well as objects of study, and their respective prestige in the profession; for example, how consumption theory was shaped by women home economists and became a topic on its own when men economists took over.

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Reviewed by Douglas E. Haynes

Until the last ten years or so, historians of India generally eschewed examinations of the post-independence period, leaving that chronological terrain to the political scientists, sociologists, and economists. This tendency has changed recently, as young historians have taken up the study of India during the 1950s and 1960s in earnest. Some important works include those by Ornit Shani (*How India Became Democratic: India and the Making of the Universal Franchise*, 2018), Rohit De (*A People’s Constitution: The Everyday Life of Law in the Indian Republic*, 2018), and Benjamin Robert Siegel (*Hungry Nation: Food*,