Explaining female underrepresentation in economics: a pet theory

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Abstract. This paper presents a theory I have that females taken into postgraduate economics then leave, when they abandon the ideology of economics concerning its strengths over the other social sciences.

Draft version: Version 1 (December 10th 2022)

There is some material from an article which I like to quote, to do with why so many female undergraduates leave philosophy. I actually want to talk about another discipline, but let’s start with this material:

Dougherty, Baron and Miller (2015) provide a useful taxonomy of existing explanatory hypotheses concerning the steep decline in the proportion of women between introductory philosophy courses and philosophy honours (majors), which they divide into five broad categories: course content hypotheses, teaching method hypotheses (e.g. implicit bias and Buckwalter-and-Stich-style hypotheses concerning gender differences in philosophical intuitions), hostile atmosphere hypotheses (e.g. discrimination and sexual harassment), internalized stereotypes/gender schema hypotheses (e.g. stereotype threat), and the impractical subject hypothesis. (Beebee and McCallion 2020: 167)

The discipline that I want to talk about is economics. Why is there female underrepresentation in economics? One can propose at least some of these hypotheses for economics as well, but I entertained a different theory. It is not very nice though.
A female is studying economics, which is located in the school of social sciences, and she learns a kind of ideology there, though how is unclear. Put simply:

- We can know what the other social scientists know but they cannot know what we know.
- We can do what they can do but they cannot do what we can do.
- Other social scientists are worse at mathematics.
- People from the other social sciences would be worse at managing the school, being children in comparison.

She leaves when she gives up on this ideology, such as when she finds better mathematicians elsewhere. If the economists are under pressure to increase females in their department, they might well hire a girl or woman or however she wishes to be seen – a male goalkeeper who saves a penalty? – who is predicted to give up. Then it is just a matter of waiting while she assesses the evidence available to her.

My speculation is that it takes some girls five years after becoming lecturers to leave. Also I have the speculation that what she respects apart from economics is classic Disney and I am the closest she has seen to classic Disney, apologies if this insults many people.

**Appendix**

On a show on Joel’s television today, I think I am asking the evil spider in the conversation room why Margaret Thatcher is not evil enough to make him back down. And he says, “If I were in charge of the county, I would open a coal mine and send young boys down the mine to find out how this country became great. Margaret Thatcher would not do that.”

“Only white boys?” I ask.
“Yes, from the appropriate regions” replies the spider.

Reference