

Book Reviews

Editor's Note: Guidelines for Selecting Books to Review

Occasionally, we receive questions regarding the selection of books reviewed in the *Journal of Economic Literature*. A statement of our guidelines for book selection might therefore be useful.

The general purpose of our book reviews is to help keep members of the American Economic Association informed of significant English-language publications in economics research. We also review significant books in related social sciences that might be of special interest to economists. On occasion, we review books that are written for the public at large if these books speak to issues that are of interest to economists. Finally, we review some reports or publications that have significant policy impact. Annotations are published for all books received. However, we receive many more books than we are able to review so choices must be made in selecting books for review.

We try to identify for review scholarly, well-researched books that embody serious and original research on a particular topic. We do not review textbooks. Other things being equal, we avoid volumes of collected papers such as *festschriften* and conference volumes. Often such volumes pose difficult problems for the reviewer who may find herself having to describe and evaluate many different contributions. Among such volumes, we prefer those on a single, well-defined theme that a typical reviewer may develop in his review.

We avoid volumes that collect previously published papers unless there is some material value added from bringing the papers together. Also, we refrain from reviewing second or revised editions unless the revisions of the original edition are really substantial.

Our policy is not to accept offers to review (and unsolicited reviews of) particular books. Coauthorship of reviews is not forbidden but it is unusual and we ask our invited reviewers to discuss with us first any changes in the authorship or assigned length of a review.

Disparate Measures: The Intersectional Economics of Women in STEM Work. By Mary A. Armstrong and Susan L. Averett. MIT Press, 2024. Pp. x, 365. \$60.00, cloth. ISBN 978–0–262–04886–6, cloth; 978–0–262–37794–2, PDF; 978–0–262–37795–9, EPUB. (JEL I23, J15, J16, J21, J31, O30)

Disparate Measures: The Intersectional Economics of Women in STEM Work is a collaboration by two authors from very different backgrounds: one an empirical labor economist, the other a women's studies scholar. The fields use different methods, language, and kinds of arguments. Researchers in women's studies generally investigate intersectionality using qualitative data such as interviews, focus groups, and ethnographies rather than Census data. On the other hand, few labor economists ever discuss intersectionality.

While the book seems mostly to address a women's studies audience, these two scholars make several points that economists and policymakers concerned about women in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) should think about. They argue that achieving proportional gender representation in STEM education and occupations is an inadequate goal. As they elegantly

state on page 2, “Often touted as a panacea for stalled social mobility, STEM work is less a cure than a selective analgesic, less a solution than a formula for partial relief.” They bring evidence that women continue to make lower salaries than White (non-Hispanic) males within each STEM occupation, concluding that, “STEM work does not always shift patterns of economic disadvantage. Instead, in many cases, it reproduces those patterns...” (p. 278).

Their second main point relates to intersectionality. An example explains how they think of intersectionality in this context. “Intersectionality would hold that workplace bias against women with disabilities would be different from bias against men with disabilities because gender would affect how disability itself is experienced and perceived” (p. 19).

After two introductory chapters, the authors devote a chapter to each of eight dimensions of women’s identities: race (Black, Native American, Asian), ethnicity (Hispanic), nativity (US/foreign-born), disabilities, LGBTQ+ status, and motherhood status. (Here I use the book’s terminology for identities.) These eight chapters constitute the bulk of the book. Within each chapter, women in STEM occupations are further divided into different intersectional identity groups (47 in all, by my count), for instance: Black women, women with cognitive disabilities, foreign-born Hispanic/Latina women, women from the Cherokee Nation, mothers of color, et cetera. (Clearly, there are far more than 47 possible combinations of identities. These 47 have sufficient sample sizes in their data and were adequate for making the authors’ points.)

Most of these eight chapters begin with a history of how the US Census Bureau categorized and enumerated that type of identity over time. Some readers may know these histories, but perhaps not all the disturbing details the book presents (particularly related to race and ethnicity). For instance: the 1890 Census used four categories of “Blackness... [B]lack, mulatto, quadroon and octoroon” (p. 52); the first mention of any Asians in the Census was in 1870, when “Chinese” was “offered as a new choice in the Color category” (p. 99); “Neither the decennial census nor the [American Community Survey] ACS has ever asked about sexual orientation or gender identity” (p. 220); and so on. These histories are powerful reminders of how cultural norms shape statistics.

Each of the eight chapters then segues into a section entitled “What Do the Data Say?” For each intersectional identity group within that chapter’s broader identity group (e.g., Black women), they use data from the US Census’s ACS 2012–19 to present data on women’s percentage distribution and median incomes in four broad STEM occupations and six STEM-related occupations, all compared to non-Hispanic White males. Over the eight chapters, these figures are reported for all 47 intersectional identity groups.

As I began reading these data sections, I—an empirical labor economist—was immediately put off. When I see the gap in median earnings of Black women (for example) compared to those of White males, I immediately wonder, “What percentage of the gap is due to her identity as a woman, what percentage is due to her identity as Black, and what percentage to the interaction of the two?” To answer this, I need to know the median earnings of White women in that occupation. Yet the authors do not provide this. They also do not directly compare earnings of the 47 identity groups or enable readers to do so, for instance by combining all 940 statistics (2 statistics x 10 occupations x 47 identity groups) into one or two appendix tables.

In the final chapter, we learn that these were very deliberate choices. The authors explain that they want readers “not to rank forms of disadvantage” or create a “hierarchy of oppressions” (p. 283). They compare each measure to White males to make the point that all of these intersectional identity groups are disadvantaged relative to the group that traditionally has personified STEM; non-Hispanic White males.

For the same reason, while the authors report each intersectional identity group’s wage premium for being in STEM occupations compared to non-STEM ones (controlling for the standard human capital variables), they de-emphasize these numbers, burying them in long paragraphs. In the final chapter they explain this de-emphasis: “Because it compares women to other women, the

STEM premium is a measure of supposed advantage for women that actually relies on women's wider system economic disadvantage" (p. 281). While they acknowledge that overall proportional representation matters, and that women do make considerably more in STEM jobs than non-STEM jobs (30 percent on average), they want us to realize that it is unrealistic to believe we could achieve proportional representation across all combinations of racial/ethnic/nativity/disability/LGBTQ+/motherhood identities. Instead, our focus should be on identifying—and rectifying—inequities in the experiences of women working in STEM occupations in any intersectional identity group. This is an important message.

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Pricing the Priceless: A History of Environmental Economics. By H. Spencer Banzhaf. Cambridge University Press, 2024. Pp. xiv, 281. \$105.00, cloth; \$34.99, paper. ISBN 978–1–108–49100–6, cloth; 978–1–108–79206–6, pbk. (JEL B29, I12, Q50, Q51, Q53, Q58)

In this book, Spencer Banzhaf treats us to a history of environmental economics by tracing its roots through multiple strands of the rapidly growing thought in economics from the mid-nineteenth through the early twenty-first centuries. To set the stage, Banzhaf piques the reader's interest with an endearing story of the so-called "God Committee," designated by Congress to provide flexibility in the Endangered Species Committee when preservation might be deemed too costly. Under discussion in 1973 was the question of whether the Tellico Dam, under construction at the time, should proceed given that it had been found to threaten the existence of the snail darter, a non-descript fish. Employing cost–benefit reasoning, the committee chose to recommend ending construction of the dam, thereby saving the darter. Banzhaf credits this highly visible decision, where economic logic resulted in environmental preservation, as an important turning point toward some acceptance of economics by environmental activists.¹

I learned a great deal from this well-written book about a topic that has always interested me. The details and breadth of thinkers that Banzhaf includes make for a satisfying sense that, having read this volume, one is reasonably educated on the rich and fascinating history of the field. This would be a valuable contribution on its own, but the book delivers much more. Banzhaf intertwines the development of environmental economic thought with the parallel evolution of conservationist and preservationist ideals concerning the natural world, as represented by luminaries Gifford Pinchot and John Muir and their disciples. We learn how their competing ideas directly influenced the emerging thought and practice of the early agricultural and land economists including Richard Ely and Henry Taylor (and later Aldo Leopold), who were busy laying the foundations for land economics and its close cousins, natural resource and agricultural economics, and how the efforts of applied economists reverberated back to conservation thought. These early economists sought to solve practical management problems related to land use, forestry, and water projects as the nation expanded and "economic development" became a universally acknowledged objective.

A major contribution of this work is to tell the story of the evolution of what goods and services are "economic" and therefore belong in planning objectives, and whether those economic goods and services can be adequately monetized for explicit consideration to collapse multiple objectives into one monetary metric. Along the journey, Banzhaf helps us connect the evolution of thought to

¹ While a terrific story, it is also ironic; the committee made its decision primarily on the strength of the quantified benefits and costs, but did not include any value for the preservation of the snail darter. However, the point is well taken. Later examples include McGartland (2013) documenting the role of cost–benefit analysis in speeding up lead exposure standards and McCarthy (2019) lauding the role of environmental economics as a tool for environmental improvement.