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Value is Subjective and Other Fallacies in Economics

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Value is Subjective and Other Fallacies in Economics

Abstract

“Before I hand back your exams, let’s review the overall performance of the class. Listed here are the median and mean scores. You can also see the grades of five highest scores on exam ...”

I sat anxiously in my chair as my economics professor shared class statistics before finally handing back our tests.

After he distributed them to a number of students, they mingled at the front the room, speculating who earned the top scores.

“Dude, who do you think got the 101?”

“I bet it was *David?”

“Or maybe Mike? He’s always answering questions correctly.”

“Could be. But I think one of them is definitely Seth – that guy is totally on the ball.”

Always attuned to the behavior of the men in this class, I listened closely.

When the professor finally handed back my exam, I was shocked. Not only had I done much better than anticipated, I earned the second highest grade. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

economics, Feminism, Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, inclusion, STEM, technology, women, women in STEM

Disciplines

Civic and Community Engagement

Comments

Surge is a student blog at Gettysburg College where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

VALUE IS SUBJECTIVE AND OTHER FALLACIES IN ECONOMICS

March 5, 2019

“Before I hand back your exams, let’s review the overall performance of the class. Listed here are the median and mean scores. You can also see the grades of five highest scores on exam...”

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Taking my paper, I followed my classmates down the steps of Breidenbaugh as they continued their guessing game, happily confiding that they hit the mean. “At least we are not below average,” they snickered.

Annoyed at their arrogance, I took a different path once we hit the sidewalk. They had not mentioned any of the women in the class. None of the six women even crossed their minds as possible top grade earners.

In a field overwhelmingly white and male and characterized by competitive attitudes, I should be excited to prove myself, but the truth is I always feel as invisible as their conversation made me.

In the last 20 years, there's been no increase in the number of women studying to become economists – it's remained at only [32 percent](#). I am fully aware of this disparity as the people around me, the research we read and the theories we discuss are dominated by male voices.

Always feeling like I don't truly belong, I'm vigilant about my actions. I purposely sit in the front row of classes so I'm not surrounded by men, pretending instead to be alone without care for who is around me. When group work is necessary, I immediately seek out the other women in my class to avoid being placed in a group of men. I always participate so the professor knows I am engaged, but I never raise my hand unless I am certain I have the correct answer. I also work extra hard, putting more time into my assignments than I do for my other classes.

In contrast, the same men who are happy with average grades, walk into the classroom confident and comfortable. They raise their hands all the time, unconcerned if they look dumb when they blurt out the wrong answer. They interrupt the women. They sometimes they even fall asleep. They know they belong; history has told them so.

I feel self-assured in my classes offered within other departments, yet walking into econ classes eats away at my self-confidence. The more advanced my classes become, the worse it gets. This discomfort does not keep me from participating and being engaged in my major, but its constant presence is exhausting.

While the percentage of women in other math intensive STEM fields has increased, in economics it has remained stagnant. That stagnation allows the culture of centering the white male voice to continue unchecked. The challenge is that as these male students become professional economists they take on the role of advising private and governmental entities on policies and practices related to housing, healthcare, education, the environment, immigration and more – all positions that influence the fabric of our globalized world.

Now, tell me, how can we trust men to create equitable solutions to society's most pressing problems when they can't even imagine one of their female peers receiving a top score on an exam? The sex or gender of an economist shouldn't matter, but given the fact that we experience the world so differently makes it seem impossible for men to analyze any more than half the story, no less be trusted to find solutions that benefit anyone other than [themselves](#).

As a woman in economics, I know I have a long road ahead. And, as a white, cis-woman, I also know these dynamics could be worse. Armed with clarity and a heightened awareness, I forge ahead knowing the impact that gender has on my growth as well as the economic growth of the world in which we live.

* All names have been changed for this piece.

Anonymous