A SURVEY OF FEMINIST ECONOMICS

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ABSTRACT

The roots of the feminist economics which has come in the 1990s, to be widely recognized as a distinct field of economics are to be found in theoretical developments in both neoclassical economics and in feminist theory from around the 1960s. The aims of this paper are to (1) delineate and discuss the four dominant approaches or schools of thought within feminist economics; (2) show how these schools of thought within feminist economics develop neoclassical economics in ways which enrich rather than undermine it, and (3) show how feminist economics can be distinguished from neoclassical economic analyses of women, such as research denoted as the “new home economics” undertaken by Chicago-trained economists. In short, the paper seeks to answer the questions “What is feminist economics?”, and “What difference does it make?”.
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1. Introduction

Both feminist and non-feminist economic literature on women has been growing dramatically since the late 1960s. This growth may be attributed intellectually to the extension of rigorous neoclassical microeconomic foundations to the behavior of families, and socially to the increased visibility of women in the labor market, and disciplinary interest in women following the social revolutions of the 1960s (see Jaggar 1983; Himmelweit 1995: 1). Even though feminist economics as a self-conscious feminist endeavor is a relatively new field of research, two broad stages of feminist analysis or approaches can be demarcated within the feminist literature on economics. Specifically, modern feminist theorists have sought to incorporate women into activities which have traditionally been understood to be those of men (“equity studies”), as well as into the knowledge content of disciplines (“feminist empiricism”). The second approach of modern feminist theorists is to identify androcentric bias within the core assumptions and/or methodological procedures of the disciplinary knowledge in order to examine the ways in which the inclusions of women and their activities into a discipline’s knowledge has led to distortions of that discipline’s understanding of women. In using these two feminist approaches, then, feminist economists argue for the expansion of the content of

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1 Feminist economics as an established field is in a period of spectacular growth. A book-length treatment would be required if all aspects of the field were to be meaningfully discussed. For this reason, the coverage of the paper is limited to the following: (i) neoclassical economics as the object of feminist criticism; (ii) the four dominant areas of feminist economic research which seek to improve neoclassical economics rather than replace it with any of a variety of alternatives (references to alternative approaches are given in footnote 2 below); (iii) feminist economics as it has arisen within the context of second wave feminism rather than that of earlier periods (for an introduction, see Tong 1989); and (iv) a select number of areas of neoclassical economics.

2 A second-wave feminist perspective on economics was developing from at least as early as 1973, although the linking of the terms ‘feminism’ and ‘economics’ seems to have begun in 1977, with the term ‘feminist economics’ emerging in the early 1980s and denoting a recognizable new field within the discipline only from the 1990s (see, for example, Bergmann 1973, [1983] 1990, 1984, 1987c; Bell 1974a; McFarland 1976; Markusen 1977; Phillips and Taylor [1980] 1986; Leghorn and Parker 1981; MacDonald 1984). On theoretical and institutional indications of the recent development of the field as it is now understood, see Strassmann (1995) and Shackleford (1999). For early and/or partial or brief surveys of the field, see Ferber and Nelson (1993a, 1993b); Hyman (1994a, 1994b); Grapard (1995b); Kuiper and Sap (1995b), Nelson (1995); and especially Humphries (1995b), Barker (1999a) and Strassmann (1999). An extended treatment is given in Hewitson (1999: chs 44). For delineations of the primary goals of most feminist economists, which are, broadly, to uncover and eliminate gender biases in economics so that economics is a better reflection of the perspectives and realities of both men and women, to enrich the economics discipline, and to improve the economic condition of women, see Woolley (1993: 497), Hyman (1994a: 53), Day (1995: 139), Kuiper and Sap (1995b: 4), Seiz (1995a: 111), Strober (1995: 1), and especially Strassmann (1995, 1999) (see references cited in footnote 20 for alternative views). An outstanding newly available resource for feminist economic work generally is Peterson and Lewis (1999).
neoclassical economics in order to include women as practitioners and as objects of study, the improvement of neoclassical analyses of women by eliminating bias which enters at the stage of discovery, and the elimination of masculinist bias in neoclassical economics through adjustments to its core assumptions or methodological procedures.

The paper proceeds as follows. In section 2 I survey the writings of those feminist economists falling under the umbrella term of equity studies, as well as briefly reviewing the ways in which women have already been incorporated into neoclassical analyses through insights developed within both feminist and non-feminist work. In section 3 I examine the writings of those feminist economists who may be defined as feminist empiricists and who seek to identify and eliminate androcentric bias which enters as theoretical relationships and empirical analyses are being formed. In section 4, I discuss the work of those feminist economists who have been guided by the second feminist strategy to examine core assumptions relating to the neoclassical economic agent and the ways in which these assumptions have delimited neoclassical economics in ways which distort its knowledge of women, and, indeed, men. In section 5 I examine feminist economic work which focuses specifically on methodological issues which may have introduced gender bias into neoclassical economics. In section 6 I seek to clarify clearly the way in which feminist and non-feminist work may be distinguished. Section 7 concludes the paper.

2. Women as Practitioners and Objects of Knowledge Within Neoclassical Economics

One of the earliest feminist criticisms of Western knowledge production pointed to the exclusion of women from the social environments and institutions in which knowledge is produced. The research underpinning this critique has been labeled “equity studies” (Harding 1986: 21), and entails the documentation of the quantity and forms of discrimination against women, rather than highlighting any biases within the knowledge itself. Feminists in a range of disciplines have documented the absence or underrepresentation of women from academic positions, from journal publications, from the histories of disciplinary thought and from

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3 There are many versions of feminist theory and several feminist methodological approaches. For discussions of this literature in relation to feminist economics, and for references to the feminist literature generally, see in particular, Grapard (1999), Hewitson (1999: chs 1-4), Seiz (1999a) and Strassmann (1999).
textbooks. They attribute these absences either to women choosing not to be part of a workplace which is tacitly hostile to their attributes and skills, or to women actively being excluded from the workplace through discriminatory practices inherent in the disciplinary employment selection procedures, the journal refereeing process and the allocation of research funds. The policy response to the absence of women within the profession is to eliminate sexist practices and encourage more women to enter a discipline. However, it should be noted that an implicit or explicit assumption underlying the documentation of the absence of women within a discipline is that the male domination of a discipline generates bias in the discipline’s content, since women, but not men, look at issues and problems relevant to women. Thus the context of discovery may be biased because of male domination, and furthermore, male domination may also affect the context of justification (see Seiz 1992: 275f). There are at least two reasons, then, for feminist economists to examine the extent of male domination in economics: to satisfy equity considerations, and to establish grounds for an examination of biases within the content of the discipline.

One of the earliest and most frequent observations made by feminist economists in this context is the absence or under-representation of women within the ranks of economists. This observation is certainly justified, with women’s participation in academic positions being in the order of 10–20% in Western economies, and concentrated in the lower level academic positions. Economics also has a very low proportion of women graduating with the degree of PhD compared to other disciplines. To take some US examples for the period 1994-95, 24.8% of PhD graduates in economics were women; in the biological and life sciences the same figure was 40.3; in communications it was 49.3; in education it was 62%, and in law and legal studies it was 29.5% (United States Department of Education 1997). Women’s minority status in the profession of economist is also reflected in the granting of academic awards (see Ferber and Nelson 1993b: 2).

There is a relatively large literature on how women have come to be excluded from the economics profession, with feminist economists rejecting the claim that women’s own choices, rather than such external constraints as direct discrimination and barriers to women’s employment, explain why there have been so few female economists (see Bell (1973a, 1974a, 1974b), Reagan (1975a, 1975b), Strober (1975), Jones and Lovejoy (1980), Ferber and Teiman (1981: 126-8), Blau (1987), Seiz (1992: 285-6), Ferber and Nelson (1993b: 2-4), Hyman (1994a: 70-1), Rosewarne and Meagher (1994), Thornton (1994: 3) and Albelda (1995).
Johnson and Stafford 1974; Reagan 1975b; Ferber 1988). The neglect or stereotyping of women in textbooks has also been identified as an important form of indirect discrimination, since the invisibility of women as role models for students might discourage females from continuing with economics (see Feiner and Morgan 1987; Feiner and Roberts 1990; Bartlett and Feiner 1992).

Further problems for women in economics is the finding of a statistically significant difference in the number of citations to other authors of the same sex in the journal articles of economists (Ferber 1986, 1988; see also Ferber and Teiman 1980; Paludi and Bauer 1983; Paludi and Strayer 1985; Blank 1991; Klamer 1991: 134). Feminist economists have also noted the tendency for those women who have entered the academy to undertake research within ‘feminine’ fields, or female-intensive specializations, such as labor economics (Strober and Reagan 1976; Bassi 1990; Blank 1993). Some feminist economists have also suggested that the intellectual contributions of women and feminists to economics have been invisible, motivating the work by feminist economists and others of recovering the careers of important women within the history of economic thought and analyses of debates amongst (both male and female) economists about women and their roles in the economy (early works include Madden 1972; Thomson 1973; recent important contributions include Folbre 1992, 1993a; Pujol 1992; Nyland 1993a, 1993b; Groenewegen 1994; O’Donnell 1994; Dimand, M.A., Dimand, R.W. and Forget 1995; Hutchinson 1995; Dimand, R.W., Dimand, M.A. and Forget forthcoming).

One of the first courses on women in the economy, entitled ‘The Role of Women in Modern Economic Life’, was taught at Barnard College in 1972 (Lloyd 1975c; see also Bergmann 1990; Quade 1994). Feminist economists have argued that economists in general have failed to incorporate into their teaching women as economic agents in their own right (see Ferber 1984; Bergmann 1987b; Strober 1987). Other classroom issues include the effects of a ‘classroom climate’ which is unfriendly to women (Ferber 1984; Sandler [1988] 1994; Ferber and Nelson 1993b: 3), and the denial to women PhD students of the encouragement given to men by their departments (Strober 1975; see also Berg and Ferber 1983; Shelburn and Lewellyn 1995). An additional indirect form of discrimination may arise from the method by which economics is taught (see Ferber, Birnbaum and Green 1983; Lumsden and Scott...
Some feminist economists have also argued that the excessive use of mathematics in economics makes it less likely that women will be attracted to it, producing a gender bias in the selection process (Alford 1993: 14, 1996: 24; see also Strober 1975; Richardson 1996). However, there is substantial evidence against this line of reasoning, with its questionable assumptions about the relationship between women and mathematics, indicating a more complex relation between masculinity and economics, and between femininity and mathematics, than that suggested by Strober, Alford and Richardson, and the need for further research. For example, in the US the percentages of women completing PhDs in economics and mathematics are comparable. In 1984-85, 16.3% of PhD graduates in economics were women, and this had grown to 24.8% in 1994-95, while in mathematics, the numbers were 15.6% and 22.1% respectively (United States Department of Education 1988, 1997).

Furthermore, at the same time as this growth was occurring, substantial concerns were being raised, by students of both sexes, academics, and employers, about the training of PhD students in economics, and, in particular, about its focus on mathematical rigor and the absence of an empirical and applied basis, and hence its removal from real economic problems (Krueger et al. 1991). Should curriculum changes which reduce the formalism of training and raise its connection to real world problems be undertaken, other things constant and according to the argument of Strober, Alford and Richardson, we should see more women entering economics PhD programs. How this effect can be disentangled empirically from alternative explanations is a question yet to be addressed by those advocating this position.

It is apparent from this brief overview that there is a rich and lengthy literature in which the absence of women within economics as a profession, particularly in the United States, has been documented, criticized and theorized. The majority of the early literature implied or stated that discriminatory barriers were responsible for women’s virtual absence from professional ranks of economist; hence the solution was to demand equal opportunity and the elimination of discriminatory behavior and institutions (see, for example, Bergmann and Adelman 1973: 513). The Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession was established expressly for this purpose (American Economic Association 1972). However, the project of developing equal opportunities for men and women is not as
straightforward as some feminist economists may have assumed. In order to establish themselves within the academy and other forums, women may well have to conform to norms based upon men’s experiences, as noted by the economist Bassi (1990; for a more comprehensive discussion of this idea, see the excellent analysis of the assumed masculinity and its effects on academics within the discipline of law in Thornton 1989). Yet it must be emphasized that few contemporary feminist economists limit their explanation of the androcentrism of neoclassical economics to the various forms of the under-representation of women economists, seeking only to have women integrated into an array of institutional structures supporting the discipline of economics. Most have also contended that women have been inadequately incorporated into neoclassical economics. Before turning to these arguments, a brief overview of the way in which women and their economic activities have been incorporated into neoclassical economics is in order.

Women as objects of study were excluded from the formally-defined domain of economics for a large part of the history of the discipline, an omission which arose in the nineteenth century when economics was defined explicitly to exclude the home, housework, reproduction and childrearing (and hence activities primarily associated with women) as sites of economic activity. Specifically, political economy was defined as the study of any activity relating to the production or distribution of wealth. Under this definition the study of female labor market activity is included within the scope of political economy, while the study of female activity within the home is excluded, since the former and not the latter result in transferable objects for an explicit exchange price (see Senior [1836] 1965: 1ff25). This exclusion of the private sphere from political economy was formally redressed in 1935, when Robbins successfully redefined economics as “the science which studies human behaviour as a

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5 Much deeper analysis of the question of the nature of personhood, and the source(s) of differences between men and women would have to be undertaken before, if ever, a definitive answer to this issue could be given. This is because in suggesting that important changes will occur if women and men are equally represented, in the present case, amongst the ranks of economist, one must understand why and how these positive changes would take place, and hence, what are the differences between men and women, and what is the nature of these differences. Feminist theorists, like feminist economists, have different answers to this question. ‘Second-wave’ feminist theory, initially developed in the 1960s, adopted a conceptual tool known as the sex/gender distinction, itself the subject of quite extensive feminist discussion and criticism (see Hewitson 1999: 32 and ch. 4). For the way in which the terms sex and gender are used in this paper, see Blau (1987: 492), where she argues that the term gender is used to denote the social distinctions between men and women which are built upon biological differences (for a more extended discussion of gender, see Barker 1999b).

6 Thanks are due to Gregory Moore for this reference.
relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses” ([1935] 1948: 16; see also Becker 1976b: 14). Thus, from a definitional point of view, women and their activities seem to be fully incorporated into neoclassical economics. Indeed, postwar neoclassical economists (particularly Chicago economists) have developed theories in which women’s presence is essential.

The formal incorporation of the female labor supply decision within the neoclassical framework began with Mincer ([1962] 1993), in which he explained the development of women as a focus of labor economics as the result of the realization that the wages of both married men and women were important in determining married women’s labor supply. Married women chose between hours of paid work and leisure, as in the conventional model, as well as work in the home (see Cain 1966; Mincer and Polachek [1974] 1993; Schultz 1973, 1974a, 1974b; see also Kahne and Kohen 1975; Lloyd 1975b; Humphries 1995b). The ‘new home economics’, which was nascent within Becker (1965), formalizes the role of women in the home. Becker (1965) extended the neoclassical paradigm to add time to the resource constraint faced by the household, permitting the integration of labor economics and home economics through a unified theory of economic decision-making, thereby significantly raising the respectability of the household as an object of economic analysis (Lloyd 1975b: 8). The new home economics fully developed when the theory of the allocation of time was combined with human capital theory, and hence nonmarket exchanges, such as the decision to marry, could be theorized as the utility-maximizing choices of individuals, and decisions such as those to have children and the allocation of market and nonmarket work within the family could be theorized as the utility-maximizing choices of families. The family seeks to maximize the utility of its altruistic head by producing market and homeproduced goods and services (see Samuelson 1956 for the earlier consensus model of the family). Because women usually have a comparative advantage in housework, they will specialize in housework while men specialize in market work.7 This research area also enabled economists to consider the question of the relative earnings of men and women. In a classic early paper Mincer and Polachek ([1974] 1993) used the neoclassical framework to demonstrate that female workers devote less time to

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human capital investments, such as education and on-the-job training, and hence earn lower wages. They argued that the decision to invest in human capital is costly in terms of forgone earnings, and therefore individuals take into account the period of time over which the benefits of such investments will be reaped. Women expect to have discontinuous labor market participation and hence choose lower levels of investment in education and on-the-job training than men. The model therefore explains occupational segregation by sex in terms of individual optimization (see also Polachek 1975, 1979, 1981; for appraisals of this work, see Amsden 1980b: 16ff; England 1982; Mincer 1993b). If labor markets value the human capital of men and women equally, then women’s lower earnings can be attributed in full to their individual optimizing decisions. This model leaves little role for discrimination in the determination of women’s wages. However, empirical work consistently showed that the difference between male and female earnings could not be fully explained by human capital and other supply-side variables. It appeared, then, that sex discrimination was a salient reality in the operation of labor markets, and an issue demanding theoretical attention (for an introduction to the earnings discrimination literature, see Kahne and Kohen 1975; Gunderson 1989; Blau and Ferber 1992). Early work on discrimination had focused on racial discrimination (Becker 1957, 1971). Applying this model to sex discrimination, the argument of Becker’s foundational race-discrimination model was that either employers, employees or customers have a preference for associating with men (whites) rather than women (non-whites), and hence have a ‘distaste’ for women (non-whites) and a ‘taste’ for discrimination. Such individuals require some form of compensation in order to overcome this distaste. The resulting wage and price differentials, however, cannot persist in a competitive system. Nevertheless, despite this prediction, it became clear that discriminatory behavior, and the associated male/female wage differential, was not being eliminated by market forces even in

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8 Becker (1957: 3) maintained that his analysis of race discrimination applied also to sex discrimination. Thurow, however, argued that physical-distance theories make no sense in the case of sex discrimination, since men want to live with women rather than achieve physical distance from them. It follows that the more income women earn, the higher are men’s own consumption possibilities (1975: 162). However, as Bergmann has pointed out, there are other plausible, ‘social distance’ reasons for men’s taste for sex discrimination. For example, men may not be keen to have their wives and mothers in jobs as good as their own. Furthermore, although it may not be rational for a man to discriminate against his own wife or girlfriend, he may discriminate against strangers’ wives and girlfriends (1986: 96).
the long run (Arrow 1972; Mueser 1987).9

Although housework had been viewed since the 1960s as an activity with economic relevance, the next step of valuing that unpaid work and including it in the national accounts has been slow to be realized. In fact, one of the most frequently cited claims of the exclusion of women as objects of research is the omission of unpaid work in the home, around three quarters of which is undertaken by women (Bittman 1991), from national accounting systems.10 However, satellite accounts are now being routinely produced in a number of Western nations (United Nations 1993).

In this section I have considered the various ways in which feminist economists have pointed to the under-representation of women in economics, as well as a number of research areas within the discipline of economics from which women have traditionally been excluded as objects of study. However, I have also pointed out that the definition of the scope of neoclassical economics, which includes all actions undertaken within a framework of choice, no longer formally excludes women or their activities, and that women have been explicitly incorporated within several areas of economic analysis which have previously been the subject of this criticism. Indeed, it is interesting to note that it was a number of well-known, male, Chicago-based economists who have been responsible for enlarging the domain of economic research to incorporate areas of traditional interest to women, including the family, married women’s labor supply and labor market discrimination. A vast literature has also grown up exploring alternative methods of estimating the value of women’s work in the home. Thus, although women’s representation in the discipline is still relatively low, the problem of the absolute exclusion of women or their interests from the discipline or from the content of economics is a problem of the past rather than the present. Yet, for all this, feminist

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9 The literature was developed in a number of ways in response to this empirical finding (see, for example, Becker [1985] 1995: 153; Hoffman 1991; Yachetta 1995: 1334).

economists have not been completely satisfied with the neoclassical account of women as economic actors, on the grounds that the neoclassical explanations of women as economic actors are biased in the context of discovery, and this bias may not necessarily be eliminated in the context of justification. The arguments of these feminist economists are the subject of the next section.

3. Feminist Empiricist Economics

The term ‘feminist empiricism’ arose within the feminist philosophy of science literature to describe the work of feminists in the sciences who believe that androcentrism in its various forms can be eliminated through the more rigorous deployment of the scientific method (see Harding 1986; Grapard 1999). Feminist empiricist economists, then, are those who implicitly or explicitly attribute what they view as the inappropriate inclusion of women and their activities within the theoretical relationships of neoclassical economics to ‘bad science’ in both the context of discovery and the context of justification. Gender bias arises within the discovery process because questions, data and hypotheses relating to women are misguided or incomplete, while bias arises in the justificatory process because neoclassical economists fail to see that the conclusions they draw are biased against women. Thus, such feminist economists seek to adjust and supplement the theoretical and empirical relationships of the neoclassical framework in order to eliminate these distorted inferences. ‘Bad science’, then, arises not from the absence of women from the neoclassical framework as objects of research, but from the incorporation of women and their activities into the subject matter of neoclassical economics in unrealistic ways. They believe that the means by which this can be accomplished is through the more rigid adherence to the scientific method, so that gender bias entering at the stage of discovery is eliminated at the stage of justification (see Cohen 1982: 156; Humphries 1982; Blau and Ferber 1992: 35; Blank 1993).

The depiction of the sexual division of labor as the result of rational economic calculations has perhaps raised the greatest concern amongst feminist economists. These calculations are premised upon the initial distribution of endowments, and hence on comparative advantage. In order to explain why it is women who have a comparative
advantage in home-produced goods, new home economists either simply assume this
distribution of endowments and provide no explicit explanation, or they cite ‘natural’
differences between men and women (see, for example, Becker 1991: 37). Feminist
economists’ arguments against this explanation of the sexual division of labor can be divided
into three categories. The first criticism is logical in nature. Sawhill ([1977] 1980), in a widely
cited paper, pointed out that the sexual division of labor was taken as an exogenously-given
explanatory variable in order to explain the wage differential between men and women, but the
wage differential between men and women was taken as an exogenously-given explanatory
variable when economists sought to explain the sexual division of labor. A second criticism is
that neoclassical economists have ignored a number of costs associated with the traditional
sexual division of labor,11 leading Bergmann to argue that the perspective of the typical new
home economist is that of a male household head (1981: 81). Relatedly, feminist economists
have argued that the assumptions that the skills and expertise developed within the household
are not transferable to the market, and that there are increasing returns to specific human
capital, are required to inflate what may be insignificant differences in the productivity of
household partners into “an irreversible widening of relative comparative advantages”
(Gardiner 1993: 6), and are simply not empirically substantiated. The third criticism is that the
explanation of the persistence of the sexual division of labor is biologically reductionist. Under
the assumptions of the new home economics, women’s choice to work in the home or in
lowly-paid employment appears to be the result of rational calculations based on certain
biological imperatives (Cohen 1982: 153; see also Jennings 1993: 126). Thus the socialization
of women into a particular role within the economy is ignored and the benefits which accrue to
men from the sexual division of labor are hidden.12 Feminist economists have contended, in
contrast, that biological difference is not required as the basis for the sexual division of labor,
which then implies that such specializations are social as opposed to natural.13

Feminist economists have also taken issue with the degree to which neoclassical
economists have attributed gender wage relativities to a voluntary choice on the part of

women to under-invest in human capital. They argue that a large part of wage relativities, as well as the division of labor, can be explained by societal discrimination, or “the multitude of social influences that cause women to make decisions that adversely influence their status in the labor market” (Blau and Ferber 1992: 140), which, although sometimes acknowledged, has generally been ignored or taken as given by neoclassical economists. However, the concept of societal discrimination captures supply-side variables related to gender-defined roles, preferences, aptitudes and abilities which constrain women’s labor market choices, support the existing sexual division of labor, and interact with direct discrimination in a mutually reinforcing manner. An example is a woman’s expectation of disutility if she were to enter traditionally male fields of specialization. This expectation will either cause such a woman to under-invest in particular forms of human capital, or lowers the expected return to such investments (see Mincer and Polachek [1974] 1993: 133; England 1982; Berg and Ferber 1983; Bergmann 1986: 65ff; Blau and Ferber 1992: 140ff).

Feminist economists have also argued that neoclassical economists have failed to emphasize the role played by direct discrimination and occupational segregation in determining wage relativities (see, for example, Blau and Jusenius 1976; Cohen 1982: 155). In the 1970s a number of feminist economists drew on the work of Sanborn (1964), who showed that the more detailed the occupational breakdown used in empirical work on earnings determination, the more of the earnings differential between men and women could be explained. They developed explanations of occupational segregation which used some kind of ‘gate-keeping’ function on the part of consumers, employees or employers, often pointing to the role of men’s interest in maintaining the sexual division of labor. Bergmann, for example, who formalized the ‘crowding hypothesis’ in relation to race (Bergmann 1971), and then in relation to sex ([1974] 1995), suggested that women are systematically excluded from certain occupations by men, generating an artificially expanded supply of labor and low wages in those occupations into which they are ‘crowded’.14 Bergmann implicitly expanded the role of the attribution of gender characteristics by sex and the sexual division of labor on the demand side of the labor market by arguing that “attitudes concerning which occupations are ‘proper’

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14 See Pujol (1992: 94) on the origins of the ‘crowding hypothesis’.
for women … are part of the social system and are learned, and most employers have learned pretty much the same thing” ([1974] 1995: 313). Nevertheless, feminist economists have also shown that when women are in exactly the same fine occupational grouping as men, doing the same tasks and adjusted for experience, they are paid less than men, and reject Becker’s ([1985] 1995) assertion that women have less energy and hence lower marginal productivity than men (Börgmann 1989; see also Rimmer 1991).

Feminist empiricist economists have also criticized neoclassical economists for empirical studies which, they argue, underestimate the degree to which discrimination and occupational segregation determine gender wage relativities because gender bias enters the neoclassical account of discrimination in the context of discovery but is not eliminated by the justificatory procedures. These feminist scholars do not question the necessity of all possible alternative explanations of the male/female wage gap being ruled out before rejecting the null hypothesis of no discrimination. Instead, they point to ways in which gender bias entering at the stage of discovery fails to be eliminated at the stage of justification. For example, neoclassical economists have, perhaps unwittingly, sought explanations of the wage gap through identifying factors which may explain women’s lower marginal productivity, while taking as given that men earn their marginal product. That is, by taking the level of men’s wages as given, and hence by not including within their analyses variables relating to, for example, men’s greater tendency to alcohol and drug abuse, heart attacks and back problems, they fail to incorporate factors which would raise the probability of the null being rejected in the justification stage (Börgmann 1989: 45ff). Bias may also enter at the stage of discovery because of missing data, which may itself be a function of social processes which deem some data significant and other information not sufficiently important to warrant collection, such as discriminatory actions by employers (Börgmann 1986: 81), and reasons for various education and employment choices having been made. Inclusion of such variables may increase measured sex discrimination (employer discrimination may also be proven to be statistically significant: see Phelps 1972; Börgmann 1986: 835). Other evidence which bolsters the likelihood of the null hypothesis of no discrimination being rejected includes Börgmann’s (1989) evidence

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that the presence of children does not explain women’s lower earnings, with Bergmann suggesting that 94 percent of the male-female gap remains once the presence of children is accounted for (see also Madden 1979; Blau and Jusenius 1976: 187; England 1982).

In this section I have delineated a number of works to show that there is a tradition of feminist empiricist economics in which theorists seeks to overcome the inadequate incorporation of women within the subject matter of neoclassical economics. Since economists already treat women and their activities extensively, in large part these analyses have meant the development of new implications arising from the existing theoretical framework, and empirical analyses showing that the theoretical models do not adequately account for reality. Again, however, there are feminist economists who insist that even this work is not sufficient to reveal and analyse the implications of androcentrism within neoclassical economics. In the next section I discuss feminist economics which examines the core assumptions of neoclassical economics, those which produce the rational economic agent at the core of the theory.

4. The ‘Separative Self’ at the Core of Neoclassical Economics

The feminist economists considered in this section argue that the core neoclassical assumptions are androcentric and give rise to theories which distort the realities of women’s (and men’s) lives. Although many of these scholars may also doubt the gender neutrality of the empiricist criteria by which these doctrines have officially been judged, the questioning of such traditional epistemological and methodological principles is not the focus of their research. The feminist economists discussed in this section identify and examine the implications of the theoretical distortions arising from the neoclassical assumptions about the individual, and contend that such assumptions have been accepted by economists because they justify, to their advantage, existing gender relations. More specifically, it is argued that the neoclassical assumptions devalue the contributions typically made by, and the traits deemed socially appropriate for, women, and extol the contributions usually made by, and the traits normally associated with, men (England [1989] 1995: 43). This depiction of the world renders invisible both the important role played by women in economic activity (especially in the private sphere) and the many advantages and sites of dominance bestowed on men. The feminist
economists who take this approach therefore endeavor to identify and revalue female characteristics and contributions and to alter the neoclassical assumptions in order to integrate such characteristics and contributions. These adjustments may be either minor and easily incorporated within the neoclassical framework, or fundamental and requiring the replacement of neoclassical economics with an alternative framework, such as feminist institutionalism or feminist Marxist/socialist economics (see footnote 20 below for references to the works).

The assumptions underpinning the neoclassical representation of the economic agent have been deemed androcentric by some feminist economists on the grounds that such an agent is a selfish, radically separate individual divested of those traits and uninvolved in those activities traditionally associated with women (for an overview of nonfeminist economists’ criticisms of the neoclassical depiction of the individual, see Hollis and Nell 1975; Hargreaves Heap and Hollis 1987). This interpretation of rational economic man to some extent mirrors the feminist interpretation of the individual as understood within social contract theory and liberalism (see, for example, Pateman 1988), and within sociology (see Hartsock 1983: ch. 2; England [1989] 1995). The agent is depicted as an autonomous male who enters contracts to produce a civilized society, even though he is in fact dependent upon the caring but invisible activities of women, who are confined to the devalued and uninteresting sphere of natural functions. Moreover, when this sphere of natural functions is theorized within economics, as in Becker (1981a, 1991), the imposition of the model of what England (1993) has called the ‘separative self’ imposes a structure to the theory which inevitably excludes important aspects of the reality it is attempting to grasp.

A number of assumptions construct this separative self. Feminist economists have identified gender bias in the ordinal conception of utility and its associated assumptions. This is because interpersonal utility comparisons are not possible, which means firstly that issues such as endowments, wealth and income distributions have a low or zero weighting, and secondly that there is no theoretical basis for arguing that existing arrangements benefit the rich more than the poor, and, more generally, men more than women (England 1993: 43; see also Nelson 1993b). England suggests that a more reasonable assumption is that individuals can make interpersonal utility comparisons by assuming “the sort of emotional connection that facilitates empathy [which would mean] being able to imagine how someone else feels in a given
situation”. The question of a standard measure would then become a practical measurement problem analogous to calculating shadow prices (ibid: 42; see also Jennings 1993).

Feminist economists have also challenged the wisdom of assuming that rational economic man’s preferences are exogenous and stable. Economists typically take preferences as given, leaving the question of their formation to sociobiologists and psychologists (Becker 1976b: 13-4; for non-feminist criticism of this postulate, see, for example, Bowles and Gintis 1993). Feminist economists argue that even if preferences are fixed, economists should be interested in the formation of gendered preferences. Albelda (1995: 270), amongst others, points out that to explain gender inequality in economic status in terms of differences in preferences of men and women is to beg the feminist question of why these differences exist in the first place. McCrate (1988) has drawn on Sen’s ([1977] 1990) notion of metapreferences to construct a framework in which this question may be analyzed. She argues that individuals have preferences over their own identities as well as goods and services, but that these preferences are both produced and constrained by institutions of socialization in a male dominated society (see also Agarwal 1997). Although the resulting identities and associated tastes are endogenous, they do not respond simply to changes in relative prices, since “men and women rationally make large and longterm investments in sex-typed preferences or identities, developing very different capacities for tastes, and severely restricting the possibility that they may elect at some future point to invest in significantly different tastes” (McCrate 1988: 237). England also argues that by ignoring the endogeneity of preferences, the economist “obscures some of the processes through which gender inequality is perpetuated”.

If, for example, women develop preferences for occupations in which women already dominate in response to labor market discrimination, then markets create gender-related preferences which perpetuate women’s lower earnings (1993: 44). Indirect discrimination therefore entails a change in preferences in addition to women simply responding to the higher costs of entering male-dominated occupations, and in this sense it can be interpreted as a challenge to one of the core assumptions of the neoclassical framework rather than a mere extension of that framework.

Another matter of concern to feminist economists is the neoclassical assumption that rational economic man’s utility function is independent of all other utility functions in the
public sphere. Specifically, economists have traditionally assumed that individuals within the public arena have preferences which are independent of others, and which relate wholly to their own consumption of goods and services. Exceptions include the economics of voting behavior, blood donation, and other charitable activities (see, for example, Stewart 1992; Sen [1977] 1990; Frank 1990), but feminist economists are unique in pointing to the gender implications of independence. Seguin et al. (1996), for example, confirm earlier experimental evidence that economics students are more self-interested than others (see Marwell and Ames 1981; Frank et al. 1993), and show in addition that gender is an important, though not conclusive, determinant of such self-interest. England, on the other hand, argues that the assumption of independent utility functions conceals the “within-sex altruism” of men as well as the altruism of women. Discrimination arising from such selective altruism will not be eradicated by competitive market forces (1993: 467).

The assumed dominance of altruism in the family has also been questioned by feminist economists. Utility functions are assumed to be interdependent in the home because of the existence of a benevolent dictator (the market worker) who ensures that everyone acts in the best interest of the family (Becker 1981a, 1981b, 1991). Although the altruistic benefactor is much more likely to be male than female, feminist economists criticize the general association of altruism with the family (see McCrate 1987; Folbre and Hartmann 1988; Jennings and Waller 1990; England 1993). Furthermore, feminist economists have argued that the single utility function formulation of family preferences constructs the family as a ‘black box’ in which the distribution of income within the household is invisible, so that family members are rendered indifferent between a range of utility-maximizing distributions of production and consumption activities within the family. This means that the question of unequal bargaining power within households cannot be addressed (see McCrate 1987: 75; Sawhill [1977] 1980; Manser and Brown 1979, 1980; McElroy and Horney 1981; Edwards 1985a; Folbre 1986; Folbre and Hartmann 1988; England 1993; Phipps and Burton 1995; Ott 1995). The ‘black box’ approach, then, hides the extent to which disharmony, inequality and conflict exists within households (see Folbre 1986; Haddad and Kanbur 1990; Browning et al. 1994; Phipps and Burton 1995; Findlay and Wright 1996; Lundberg and Pollak 1996). To some extent,
these problems have been overcome by the use of game-theoretic models of the family.\footnote{For excellent discussions with extensive referencing to important feminist and non-feminist works on the neoclassical modeling of conflict and distributional issues within the household, see Agarwal (1997) and Seiz (1999b).}

Furthermore, although applauding the valuation of women’s domestic labor, feminist economists have also argued that the assumption of the separative self model, and hence a market-based definition of work used to value housework, limits the extent to which the traditional female activities of the private sphere, such as caring, can be included. The related question of the differences in decision-making and exchange which might exist between the market and the family is an area of new research by feminist economists (see Agarwal 1997, Beasley 1994, 1996; see also the early commentary by Cohen 1982: 1543). The recognition that some elements of women’s activities are marginalized when valued first emerged during the ‘domestic labor’ debate (see Gardiner 1993; for further references, see footnote 20). Feminist economists have pointed out that household work studies exclude from the categories of analysis those aspects of domestic labor which are neither work nor non-work. Himmelweit, for example, maintains that the application of the market model to the private labor of women marginalizes the personal, relational, self-fulfilling and caring aspects of these activities to the point where they are made invisible (1995: 2-4, 9-11; see also Folbre 1995).

The solution which most of these feminist economists suggest to overcome these problems of the separative-self model is to retain neoclassical economics, but in a less rigid, axiomatic and androcentric form. England, for example, suggests that the neoclassical model can be changed substantially, but that although relaxing the assumptions which construct the separative self will “entail a loss of deductive certainty”, the final outcome will “illuminate rather than ignore gender inequality in the social and economic world” (1993: 4850). The androcentrism of this model is due to its origin in the existing system of gender relations, and it is to the work of feminist economists who focus more specifically on the methodological implications of gender bias in economics, and in particular the masculinity of the separative self, that I now turn.
5. Feminist Methodological Criticisms

Feminist economists have also focused more specifically on the methodological implications of gender bias in the context of discovery and justification, and the core assumptions of neoclassical economics in order to show how the acceptance of the existence of that gender bias can be used to improve neoclassical analyses. There are a number of approaches within which such works have been developed, and in this section, using selected examples, I discuss the ways in which feminist economists have combined feminist standpoint theory with the idea of the gendered rhetoric of economics to suggest specifically methodological ways in which neoclassical economics can be improved.

The feminist philosophy of science known as feminist standpoint theory seems, from the number of citations to the literature and the importance of the support of well-known feminist standpoint theorists, to have been an important entry-point for feminists thinking about neoclassical economics, although feminist economists have yet to set forth analyses which are explicitly and exclusively based upon feminist standpoint theory. Since the feminist standpoint literature is particularly prominent, at least as an implicit basis or entry point, to some feminist methodological investigations of neoclassical economics (see, for example, Ferber and Nelson 1993a), it is important to begin this section by briefly outlining its main points before turning to the ways in which feminist economists have combined some of its insights with the idea of the gendered rhetoric of economics.

Feminist standpoint theorists drew on the revolutionary work of philosophers of science in the 1950s and 1960s, such as Kuhn and Feyerabend, to establish that the scientific process was a social activity unable to provide a single, value-neutral, empirical truth (Keller 1989: 178). This was an essential preliminary step in feminist standpoint theory, since standpoint theorists could hardly argue that science is in some way gendered without first

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17 An excellent introduction to feminist epistemologies generally is Alcoff and Potter (1993); see also Barker (1999a) and Grapard (1999).
18 Institutional indications of the importance of feminist standpoint theory to feminist economics are the following. One of the most well-known feminist standpoint theorists, the prizewinning feminist philosopher of science Harding (1986), gave a plenary speech at the first international conference on feminist economics in Amsterdam (Harding 1993b) and wrote the first paper in the journal Feminist Economics (Harding 1995). Another important figure in the field published in what I believe to be the first anthology of feminist economics works (Longino 1993). Furthermore, Harding, Longino, as well as the equally well-known Nancy Hartsock have been on the editorial board
showing that traditional scientific claims of objectivity and neutrality were already controversial. They therefore argue that social factors enter the scientific process in both the context of discovery and the context of justification. Bias enters the discovery process in the selection of research agendas and problems to be studied, in the choice of theories to be considered as explanations, in the choice of facts considered relevant, and in the language used to describe the problems. Bias enters the justificatory process, since preconceptions formed in social contexts shape and order the facts which are used to test hypotheses. Note that emphasis is placed on both steps of the scientific process and that the discovery step is included within the analysis because bias at this stage cannot be eliminated by a justificatory step which is itself biased (see Seiz 1992: 289; Hardig 1995). Furthermore, the bias arising from these social influences is intrinsic to the scientific process and cannot be eliminated. Feminist standpoint theorists therefore reject the feminist empiricist position in which masculine bias is attributed to ‘bad science’ and can be eliminated by a stricter adherence to scientific practice and a removal of the social influences which shape the identity of the knowledge producer. In contrast, they seek to use the identity of the scientist to produce more ‘objective knowledge’, where ‘objectivity’ ceases to connote the Archimedean standpoint, or ‘view from nowhere’, of traditional scientific practice. The identity of the knower is relevant because individuals of different gender, race and class have different visions of reality upon which, ultimately, the more objective knowledge is based. Science as traditionally practised has been dominated by a masculine standpoint, leading to congruity between the scientific method and norms of masculinity, and between non-science and norms of femininity. These connections have led not only to the historical exclusion of women from the processes of knowledge production, but also to the absence of a feminine perspective or standpoint from these processes.

The question arises as to the ways in which these different standpoints emerge, and the ways in which they shape conceptions of science. Some feminist standpoint literature draws upon object relations theory, a theory of how current gender identities develop and hence an explanation of the development of feminine and masculine standpoints (see Chodorow 1978). Briefly, object relations theorists argue that the process of individuation of infants from their
primary care-givers, usually women, operates differently in relation to boys and girls. The
individuation of boys involves conflict with the female primary care-giver, and this conflict is
resolved by a repudiation of their early identification with her, and hence, of femininity itself.
Girls, on the other hand, are able to experience a sense of selfhood without repudiating
femininity. Hence, boys (men) value autonomy, distance and separation, while girls (women)
experience empathy and connectedness with others. A range of dualisms, such as objectivity
and subjectivity (in knowledge production), fact and value, and reason and emotion, which
structure scientific knowledge production, arise from this development of gendered selves.
Hence the particular gender system which supports the construction of a scientific method
characterized by objectivity, dispassion and reason is a social construction rather than a
biological given (see Keller 1985: ch. 4; Bordo 1987).

The question to be answered is, if it is not possible to establish a value-neutral,
objective knowledge because the influence of gender and other social aspects of researchers
cannot be eliminated from the research process, which means, in short, that neoclassical
economics is imbued with a masculine perspective because of its disciplinary history of
domination by scholars with masculine standpoints, how can research be undertaken? Feminist
standpoint theorists reconceptualize the notion of objectivity and indeed redefine what is
regarded as science so that it ceases to be distorted by masculine bias. Thus, for example, the
notion of objectivity is reformulated such that ‘weak objectivity’, or the ineffectual attempt to
produce value-neutral knowledge independent of the context of discovery, is replaced by
‘strong objectivity’, which increases objectivity by identifying the cultural values and interests
that differ between researchers and research communities. Hence, the existence of different
cultural values actually encourages scientific progress by increasing the probability that
previously hidden values will be uncovered, so that the standards of objectivity are
strengthened rather than weakened by a feminist standpoint (see Harding 1993a, 1995).

As noted, feminist economists have cited rather more than explicitly employed these
theoretical insights in their criticisms of the methodology of neoclassical economics. Seiz
(1992) has, however, delineated its use to feminist economists. She maintains that those
scholars who adopt the feminist standpoint in economics will be able to work on a number of
fronts. They can, for example, provide analyses of particular economic texts and research
programs in which they “reveal the operation and weaken the authority of gender ideology in economic discourse”. Such studies would show precisely where and how androcentric bias enters economic research, why ‘bad’ arguments are retained over time, and why theories are ultimately accepted or rejected. Seiz believes that the work undertaken by McCloskey and others on the rhetoric of economics is ideally suited to this sort of research, and she herself combines these two areas of thought to delineate the ways in which readers bring various unstated assumptions to their readings of economic texts (ibid: 28991).

There are a number of feminist economists who, like Seiz (1992), have brought together insights from feminist standpoint theory and from the field of the rhetoric of economics in order to show how bias enters neoclassical economics at the discovery stage and also fails to be eliminated at the justification stage, and to argue for methodological changes to be made to academic economic practices. These feminist economists argue that the rhetoric of neoclassical economics, with its gendered categories, assumptions and relationships, is persuasive to, and accepted by, male economists because they support their interests as men and husbands; that is, the neoclassical framework reflects a masculine standpoint. An alternative view presented by Deirdre McCloskey’s early or non-feminist work (Donald McCloskey 1983, 1985) is that, once the shift is made from allegiance to the traditional economic methodology to the rhetoric of economics, knowledge is seen to be produced within a marketplace of ideas which is in the hands of thousands upon thousands of honest and intelligent economic scholars, and hence, can be relied upon to produce competitive outcomes.

Strassmann (1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1996) and Strassmann and Polanyi (1995) reject the idea that the gender-biased neoclassical paradigm has come to dominate the discipline through competition in the marketplace of ideas, whether the determinant of its success is alleged to be its scientific method or the persuasive force of its superior rhetoric. Strassmann (1993a, 1993b, 1996) points to the blind spot in this analysis. Specifically, the scientific community, as

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19 Briefly, McCloskey (1983, 1985) argued that the official, modernist methodologies which purportedly establish economics as a science bear no resemblance to the actual, unofficial, “workaday” methodological procedures followed by economists. The actual procedures employed by economists include a broad array of rhetorical devices which persuade others to accept or reject particular economic theories. Rather than rejecting mathematical modeling, statistical testing and other modernist paraphernalia, McCloskey maintains that attention to language would increase the rigor of the disciplinary “conversation”, since all science is literary in any case, and hypotheses do not in fact stand or fall on tests of significance (other important works in the field are Klamer, McCloskey and Solow 1988; McCloskey 1990a, 1990b, 1995; M1993, 1995; Backhouse 1994).
a community dominated by white middle-class men, is not characterized by the ‘reasonable person’ upon whom the early McCloskey relies, but by the ‘reasonable man’ with all his attendant interests, views, experiences and biases, and the community of readers is therefore, in short, a community dominated by the masculine standpoint (see McCloskey 1983: 482, 1985: 28-30, 1990b: 72-3). Thus, instead of neoclassical economics becoming dominant through competition between ideas via competitive processes of theory verification/falsification or rhetorical ploys, neoclassical economics has come to dominate economics because it has been created and validated by a male-dominated scientific community which legislates on ‘persuasiveness’ and actively restricts the acceptable rhetoric by which this framework may be challenged. The masculine bias of the economic community’s accounts of the world, is, in turn, persuasive to young male economists of the same background. Feminists and minorities who have had different experiences from the dominant group, and hence a different standpoint from which reality is viewed, on the other hand, experience “dissonance” with these theoretical claims. However, reflecting the failure of the competitive process in the marketplace of ideas, such people are not able to challenge the economists’ standard accounts of reality. They are trained to accept as an invulnerable core of the conventional set of assumptions of neoclassical economics, and they are restricted in terms of the forms in which arguments can be made. As Strassmann points out, if the marketplace of ideas is to operate competitively, it must be equally open to all accounts.

The implication of this failure of the supposedly competitive marketplace to operate is that economics as currently constituted is a reflection of an androcentric and Western perspective on selfhood and agency, so that neoclassical economics is a partial rather than a complete account of economic reality (Strassmann 1993a: 55; Strassmann and Polanyi 1995: 130-2). Thus, Strassmann and Polanyi seek “to promote economic accounts truer to the lives and experiences of women” (1995: 132). Economists may fear that acknowledging the role of their “story-telling” will lead to relativism, but Strassmann and Polanyi use the notion of strong objectivity to reject this possibility (ibid; see also Harding 1993a). Neoclassical economics can only be improved by the incorporation of a multiplicity of perspectives if this does not occur, neoclassical economics will inevitably remain the outcome of a partial viewpoint and hence biased and unable to accurately represent the “complexity and diversity
of economic activities” (Strassmann 1993a: 65).

The focus of another paper within this genre of feminist economics (Folbre and Hartmann 1988) is the rhetorical force of the assumption that there is ‘Altruism in the Family and Selfishness in the Market Place’ (Becker 1981b). Folbre and Hartmann argue that “certain assumptions embodied in the rhetoric of economics have deafened most economists to the possibility that economic motives help explain inequality between the sexes” (1988: 185). More specifically, the gendered rhetoric of neoclassical economics which has associated altruism with the family, and hence with women, has historically enabled economists to use, consciously (in the case of, for example, James Mill) or unconsciously (in the case of many modern neoclassical economists), the concept of the moral, altruistic family to legitimate inequalities between men and women. Furthermore, many modern neoclassical economists fail to recognize that, as men, it may be in their own self-interest to maintain this rhetorically produced, gendered, conceptual schema: “economic self-interest has influenced the way economists think about the concept of self-interest” (ibid).

Folbre and Hartmann argue that it is the assumption of a joint utility function which has been, historically and in the present day, the most powerful of the rhetorical tools by which self-interest is removed from the sphere of the family. Although neoclassical analyses of conflict within the household is well under way, the assumption that selfishness in the family appears only in the form of “the immature behavior of kids” (ibid: 188) which can be controlled by the benevolent dictator continues to underlie many recent analyses of issues such as fertility decline and the analyses of women’s labor supply decisions (ibid: 1890). The history of this assumption and its rhetorical associations has generated unstated, and self-serving, conclusions that women are, in effect, irrational and noneconomic, choosing to support men’s market activities through their unselfish adoption of the role of housewife. As Folbre and Hartmann (ibid: 1978) note, the metaphor of feminine irrationality is so powerful as to be unnoticed by Elster in the title of his 1979 work, *Ulysses and the Sirens: Studies in Rationality and Irrationality*, in which he argues that people are imperfectly rational. The modeling of women’s economic behavior, when underpinned by the unstated implication of the joint utility assumption, renders invisible advantages which accrue to men as wage earners, and is used within the neoclassical framework to rationalize women’s limited opportunities...
In short, implicit or explicit claims that women are less self-interested than men “persuade more than others partly because they deliver greater benefits to those who decide the outcome of the debate” (ibid: 185).

The work of Nelson (1996) also draws on ideas from feminist standpoint theory and the rhetoric of economics to argue for the revaluation of some qualities traditionally deemed to be feminine and the integration of these qualities into the methodological procedures of neoclassical economists. She contends that cognitive facilities are dominated and constrained by hierarchical dualisms which have been metaphorically linked to gender, with the positive or valuable aspect being named as masculine and the negative aspect being named as feminine. She suggests that her “gender/value compass” or the orthogonal gender/value diagram (see Nelson 1992a, 1992b) will enable economists to see the value of a synthesis of masculine and feminine traits and to reject the dualistic, hierarchical metaphors which currently dominate understanding of the definition, content and methodology of economics.

The first step in Nelson’s argument is that metaphor is essential for understanding and for communication (1992a: 138, 1992b: 104, 1996: 4). She contends that although metaphorical associations are inevitable, they often take the form of hierarchical, and gendered, dualisms which limit understanding (1992a: 138). Thus positive values such as reason and hardness are associated with masculinity, and negative values such as emotion and softness with femininity, with the former privileged over the latter. Nelson does not seek to eliminate all gender associations, but rather she argues that neoclassical economics will benefit from the separation of value and gender. Her ‘gender/value compass’ shows that both masculine- and femininidentified attributes and qualities have a negative and a positive aspect. She contends that the pairs of positive masculine and feminine qualities are complementary and should be synthesized. Thus the traditional dichotomy of masculine hard and feminine soft is usually seen, as in the traditional view of economics and sociology, as masculine=hard (science)=good and feminine=weak (non-scientific)=bad. However, a synthesis of the positive aspect of each term, that is, masculine strength and feminine flexibility, both important elements of a methodological approach, yields the concept of durability (1993b: 29, 1996: 13). Similarly, the masculine-positive concept of logical reasoning is normally contrasted with the feminine-negative concept of illogical. However, the feminine
positive component is dialectical reasoning, which refers to reasoning by analogy, or to the intuition presented alongside formal models. Dialectical reasoning complements logical reasoning, and both are necessary for the achievement of good argument. The exclusion of illogical argument and the desire to exclude from economics all but those concepts which can be manipulated by formal logic (the feminine and masculine aspects) should, of course, be supported by everyone (1992b: 110-13).

Sexism entails an ability to see only the combination of masculine-positive and feminine-negative, and the feminist project therefore entails “the exploration and valuation of the feminine-positive and the exposing of the masculine-negative” (1992a: 146). Hence the rejection of the metaphors which map gender onto hierarchical dualisms and the adoption of the new metaphor of complementarity and synthesis will eliminate the gender bias in the methodology of neoclassical economics, and change the way in which economics is practised as well as the way in which its theoretical relationships are judged. Specifically, the incorporation of all aspects of knowledge which are helpful in understanding a particular problem, regardless of their gender associations, would extend the scope of neoclassical economics. For example, the very definition of neoclassical economics as the study of choices made subject to constraints will be extended to include the study of the provisioning of human life, or material well-being. This will require a distinction to be made between needs, required for human life, and wants, and the prioritizing of needs, as well as the inclusion within analyses of important aspects of material well-being such as gift-giving and coercion (1992b: 123; 1993b: 32-3).

McCloskey (1993) has ‘gendered’ her earlier work on the rhetoric of economics by developing a gender analysis of the official and unofficial methodologies of economics. She contends that scientists argue by necessarily using, not just fact and logic, but also metaphor and story. Philosophers of the modernist age have divided this rhetorical ‘group of four’ or tetrad into two distinct sets: the methodological dyad of fact and logic, and the creative dyad of metaphor and story. McCloskey borrows a diagrammatic parable from Klamer (1990) to represent the rigorous, axiomatic approach of the methodological dyad as a masculine square and the metaphorical, story approach of the creative dyad as a feminine circle. She criticizes this traditional depiction of science for confining the methodologies of the square and the circle to
two non-overlapping spheres, arguing that both the square and the circle are necessary for the successful undertaking of scientific activity, that both shapes are integral to methodology and creativity, and that the pervasive role of the circle in the so-called sciences has been overlooked (ibid: 69-71). McCloskey is careful to point out that it is irrelevant whether or not women are in fact more disposed to communicate through metaphor and men more inclined to convey information via unnarrated facts: “Regardless of what men and women actually do statistically speaking, the claims about what they do exist as cultural objects” (ibid: 69). Thus all that is required for gender bias in economics is that the methodological and creative dyads are produced as stereotypical dispositions of men and women, with the former valued by economists and the latter devalued (ibid: 6970). McCloskey calls upon economists to self consciously embrace the full tetrad of fact, logic, metaphor and story, and reject the counter productive modernist distinctions of square/circle and objective/subjective. She contends that, in any case, there is neither objective nor subjective as these terms are usually understood, only the “conjective”: something becomes knowledge or ‘objective’ when a community with a common language agrees that it constitutes knowledge (ibid: 76). McCloskey’s aim is not to displace the present masculine form of neoclassical economics, but to enrich it by undertaking a feminine revision. The resulting conjective economics would entail a rejection of the masculine fixation with methodological rules, mathematical formalism and the confrontation of highly abstract models with statistical data, and the adoption of a multi-dimensional approach. There would be a greater use of interactive research practices, such as questionnaires and empathetic investigative techniques, and conversation, story telling, anecdote, listening, cooperation and synthesis would replace the simpleminded falsificationist, verificationist and other modernist corroborationist schemes.

The feminist economists who undertake methodological critiques of neoclassical economics drawing upon, to varying degrees, ideas from both feminist standpoint theory and the rhetoric of economics, then, agree with McCloskey that economists persuade each other by employing a diverse range of rhetorical devices, and that economic truths are established by communities of economists drawing upon these rhetorical devices. They further argue that the male-dominated community of economists has been persuaded to accept various methodological and theoretical aspects of the neoclassical research program because of their
affinity with the interests of masculinity. The marketplace of ideas is therefore not competitive. The feminist economists discussed in this section, then, maintain that the general acceptance of both the methodological and theoretical tenets of the neoclassical framework is a product of an imperfect and androcentric market selection process. They follow other heterodox economists in claiming that the marketplace is dominated by social relations (see, for example, Mirowski 1992: 239), but focus specifically on the important role played by gender in restricting open and honest conversation.\(^{20}\)

\(^{20}\) It should be noted that an alternative analysis and hence characterization of the feminist works discussed in this section is as postmodern or poststructuralist, or at least moving in the direction of questioning such major underpinnings of neoclassical economics as the existence of a meaningful ‘reality’ outside of language. However, as noted in footnote 1 above, this paper focuses upon neoclassical economics and its supportive feminist critics, and that is the way in which I have chosen to represent the works discussed in this section. Nevertheless, the interested reader may wish to pursue this line of thinking, and excellent works within the field of postmodern or poststructuralist feminist and related examinations of economics which question the truth claims of neoclassical economics include Amariglio and Graham (1993), Cooper (1993), Williams (1993), Hewitson (1994, 1999), Feiner (1995), Grapard (1995a, 1995b, 1996), Graham and Amariglio (1996), Amariglio (1988, 1990); Barker (1998), Cornwall and Badgett (1999), Amariglio and Ruccio (1999), Garnett (1999), Woodmansee and Osteen (1999) and Cullenberg, Amariglio and Ruccio (forthcoming). Two other subfields of feminist economics which have not been discussed here for the reasons outlined in footnote 1 are Marxist or socialist-influenced, and institutionalist feminist economics. For good early papers by economists dealing with issues arising from the ‘domestic labor debate’, see the four special issues of the *Review of Radical Political Economics* on the political economy of women (1970, 1972, 1977, 1980), Hartmann (1976, 1981a, 1981b), Himmelweit and Mohun (1977), Humphries (1977), Hartmann and Markusen (1980); for more recent works in Marxist or socialist feminist economics, see Roberts and Feiner (1992), Beasley (1994, 1996), Mathaei (1996), Albelda (1999), O’Hara (1999) and Peterson and Lewis (1999). On institutionalist feminist economics, sedennings and Waller (1990), Waller and Jennings (1990, 1991), Jennings (1994), Peterson and Brown (1994), Mayhew (1999), O’Hara (1999) and Peterson and Lewis (1999).
6. Feminist and Non-Feminist Analyses of Women

It is well known that neoclassical economists have incorporated women as an essential component of their analyses of the labor market and families (see, for example, Becker 1981a, 1991). There must be within the field of feminist economics as discussed in this paper, therefore, a mechanism by which to distinguish between such neoclassical analyses of women and feminist work on the same topics, and this point will now be specifically addressed. Most, if not all, neoclassical economists are undoubtedly sympathetic to ‘Women’s Quest for Economic Equality’ (Fuchs 1989) and do not support discrimination against women. I will begin my discussion by using Fuchs (1989) as an example of the way in which, despite such sympathy and even his acknowledgement of the impact of socialization on women’s choices, his analysis can be distinguished from feminist economics (note that I am not implying that he intended it to be ‘feminist’). The key issue is that Fuchs naturalizes, or takes as given, women’s roles as wives and mothers, despite his discussion of gender (ibid: 28-9), by indicating that it is women’s biology that is the final determinant of their choices and hence their labor market outcomes. For example, he argues that married women with “a small child at home” prefer part-time work because a “husband’s presence makes part-time work more feasible (less need for fulltime income) and increases the demand for her nonmarket work” (ibid: 29), here implying women’s essential role in the home rather than the labor market not just during breastfeeding (which is, of course, a case to be argued rather than assumed), but also while children are within the undefined category of ‘small’. In short, it is ‘natural’ sex, and not ‘social’ gender, which is accepted as the determinant of economic agency (see Blau 1987; Barker 1999b). Bergmann argues a similar case in her discussion of Fuchs (1989): Fuchs affirms “what he elsewhere denies, that the major source of women’s disadvantage in the labor market is the behavior of employers who, against the dictates of the law, take account of their sex in deciding what jobs and what pay to offer them” (Bergmann 1989: 48). One way to distinguish between nonfeminist and feminist neoclassical analyses of women, then, is the way in which gender roles are incorporated into the analysis. More strongly, it is the failure of non-feminist neoclassical economists, however sympathetic they may be to women or however they may view themselves in terms of feminism, to question the gender
roles which are in place, and hence their implicit approval or legitimation of those roles and the supposed biological imperatives which underlie them. Fuchs (1989: 33) asks “What is about being a woman that leads to lower earnings?”, but does not, in the end, ask the feminist questions behind this question: “Why are women’s tastes and preferences different from men’s?” (Albelda 1995: 270) and what can be done to change the gender system which gives meaning to the sex of a person and which creates these economically disadvantageous tastes and preferences?21

A more recent, and more explicit, example of the defining feature of non-feminist, as opposed to feminist, neoclassical analyses of women—the dependence upon, or ultimate basis within, assumed biological imperatives, and hence the presence of androcentric bias or non-feminist conclusions—is that of Siow (1998). Siow models the way in which differential fecundity interacts with marriage, labor and financial markets to affect gender roles in monogamous societies in which divorce is allowed. This analysis is premised upon a number of assumptions regarding the biologies of men and women, and the assumed inherent meanings of these biologies. He begins with the unquestionable assertion that women experience menopause. In lives consisting of three periods, then, men are able to reproduce in a maximum of two periods, childhood being ruled out, while women may only reproduce in one period. Simplifying, Siow assumes that all children are born within marriage, and that the only reason to marry is to have children (ibid: 336). Thus, young men, young women, and divorced old men may marry if partners are available, but divorced old women will remain single. A further assumption is that “women prefer to marry rather than remain single, which means that all young women will marry” (ibid: 337). In a stationary equilibrium with equal numbers of young men and young women, all women have a child (twins, in order to maintain the equilibrium), but some men remain single and others marry either once or twice (ibid).

Although Siow explicitly denies that he is assuming any sex-based differences apart from different periods of fecundity, and in particular, he excludes the possibility of women having a comparative advantage in childrearing (ibid: 346), women in fact not only always marry and have children, but also implicitly have an innate desire to rear children. This is

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21 As noted in footnote 4 above, within the broader context of feminist and feminist economic theorizing, this question does not have a definitive answer. See also footnote 20.
because, although the opportunity cost of time spent with the child is assumed to be equal for
the mother and the father, the father will work and the mother will not. The rationale is that
the father may need to compensate a fertile new wife should his current marriage disintegrate,
a use of future earnings not available to the mother (ibid: 337, 346). The agreement of a
mother to this arrangement implies that she maximizes her utility through childrearing and it is
for this reason that women under-invest in human capital (ibid: 337-8).

Using the criteria delineated above, feminist economists would reject this research as
feminist, even though the model accounts for many observable gender differences in economic
behavior. Feminist empiricist economists may argue that gender has entered at the
discovery stage through a failure of the researcher to identify the ways in which the underlying
premise with respect to the gendered meanings of sex have guided the formation of the model
and its claims to scientific worthiness. Feminist economists concerned with the masculinity of
the separative-self model employed in Siow’s analysis may also reject this work as feminist.
They could point to the selective relaxation of the assumptions which construct the rational
economic agent when considering young mother’s labor market behavior. They would view
young and old men as rational, selfish and radically separate agents who express exogenously
determined preferences in the market and are devoid of characteristics traditionally associated
with femininity, such as emotion, altruism, caring and connectedness, and, in particular, a
desire to spend time with their children. They simply want as many as they can get. Therefore,
it could be argued that it is the separative-self model, applied to men but implicitly relaxed
when applied to women, which is driving the conclusions of the model. Feminist economists
who examine methodological issues could point to numerous ways in which Siow (1998) is
telling a story using conventional masculine-identified methodological rhetorical ploys, such as
mathematical rigor which makes the analysis appear as if it is a narrative of facts alone.
Furthermore, they could argue that a better model would result if the researcher were to
recognize the ways in which men’s interests, as defined within the current gender stereotypes,
are being satisfied by the conclusions of the model, and hence actively incorporate his
masculine perspective. In short, the feminist economists discussed in this paper would all
argue in their own way that Siow’s (1998) analysis distorts significant aspects of reality,
especially those elements which have an important bearing on the economic position of
women.$^{22}$

7. Conclusion

A number of approaches to the improvement of neoclassical economics from a feminist perspective have been discussed in this paper. In section 2 the focus was on gender bias in the form of women being excluded from or underrepresented within, economics. In the feminist empiricist work discussed in section 3 was based on the identification and elimination of gender bias entering at the discovery stage. The works of those feminist economists who identify gender bias in the rational economic agent at the core of neoclassical economics suggest that neoclassical economics will be improved by developing this agent in ways which reflect the ways in which men and women actually operate within families and within markets. Finally, those feminist economists, discussed in section 5, who adopt aspects of feminist standpoint theory and the idea of the gendered rhetoric of economics seek to have the inevitable gender bias which enters at the stages of discovery and justification incorporated explicitly into the methodological procedures of neoclassical economists. Clearly, then, there are a number of different approaches to the question of gender bias in neoclassical economics, and there is also overlapping to a greater or lesser extent between the different groups of feminist economists discussed in this paper. It is my view that no single approach should dominate, since each has a role to play in meeting the broad aim of improving the economic lives of women. A perusal of the journal Feminist Economics will substantiate that feminist economics welcomes the “multiplicity of feminisms currently present in economics as well as those that may emerge when new voices are drawn into the forum” (Strassmann 1995: 2). To summarize, the feminist economists considered in this paper argue that neoclassical economists’ accounts of the world in one way or another often distort their representations of women’s experiences. Their analyses suggest that neoclassical economists must recognize the existence and implications of the two genders in more significant ways than has often been the case. This can only improve neoclassical economics.

$^{22}$ For a detailed discussion of a neoclassical model of surrogate motherhood, see Hewitson (1997, forthcoming). Another relevant and very useful discussion is given in Sharp and Donath (1995).
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