Review of Political Economy

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/crpe20

Teaching Heterodox Economics in a Feminist Perspective by Using Students' Written Diaries on Consumption

Marcella Corsi & Giulia Zacchia

To cite this article: Marcella Corsi & Giulia Zacchia (2023): Teaching Heterodox Economics in a Feminist Perspective by Using Students' Written Diaries on Consumption, Review of Political Economy, DOI: 10.1080/09538259.2023.2183671

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/09538259.2023.2183671

Published online: 20 Mar 2023.

Submit your article to this journal

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=crpe20

REVIEW OF POLITICAL ECONOMY
https://doi.org/10.1080/09538259.2023.2183671

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Check for updates

Teaching Heterodox Economics in a Feminist Perspective by Using Students' Written Diaries on Consumption

Marcella Corsi and Giulia Zacchia

Sapienza University of Rome, Rome, Italy

ABSTRACT

Teaching heterodox economics, under a feminist perspective, involves motivating students to add complexity to human nature, to critically reflect on the social nature of economic processes, and to recognize the coexistence of several models, challenging the mainstream idea of the existence of only one economic model, that of rational choice. This paper argues that the use of students' written diaries can serve as a useful feminist pedagogical tool for reaching these learning goals. Students' written diaries on daily consumption allow them to create a more inclusive learning environment engaging all students in 'practicing' economics and helping them to understand the implications of unrealistic theoretical hypotheses, empirically ascertaining that consumers' choices could not be explained as a process of optimization but as a social process where identities, social values and norms should be considered.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 13 March 2022
Accepted 30 December 2022

KEYWORDS
Students' diaries; consumption; feminist economics; feminist pedagogy

JEL CODES
A20; B54; D12

1. Introduction

The experience of recent financial, economic, environmental, health and care crises has raised philosophical and ethical issues among economists, arguing that economics, characterized by an over-hierarchization (Fourcade, Ollion, and Algan 2005; Corsi, D'Ippoliti, and Zacchia 2018; Zacchia 2021) and dominated by a mainstream (Roncaglia 2019; D'Ippoliti 2020), is failing to recognize and disseminate the plural, interdisciplinary, social, caring, ethical and political nature of economics. In particular, students affected by the events of 2007/2008, formally organized themselves since 2011 to call for a fundamental change in economics' teaching that would include pressing real issues like financial crisis, income and power distribution and inequalities (Dimmelmeier et al. 2017; Fisher et al. 2017).[1] The group of Reteaching Economics, composed by early-career economists,[2] supported students in the call for a pluralist approach to economics that would require a broader way of teaching than the one offered by conventional economics' courses.

CONTACT Marcella Corsi marcella.corsi@uniroma1.it Sapienza University of Rome, viale Regina Elena 295, Rome 00161, Italy

[1]We mainly refer to Rethinking Economics (www.rethinkeconomics.org), a student-led non-profit international organisation founded in 2011, but also to the Institute for New Economic Thinking's Young Scholar's Initiative (https://ysi.ineteconomics.org/).

[2]See http://www.reteacheconomics.org/.

© 2023 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

Not surprisingly, heterodox economists played a key role in interacting with the students' movement asking for a real intellectual exploration of the relationship between society, history, and economic institutions, in the context of teaching economics (Dow 2021; Decker, Elsner, and Flechtner 2018). For heterodox economists we refer to the broad definition provided by Lee (2009) and Jo, Chester, and D'Ippoliti (2018) that envisions, together, economists of several schools and traditions of economic research that propose an analysis of social provisioning 'focusing on a wide range of economic and social activities in a socio-historical context, including both market and non-market, paid and unpaid activities, undertaken by human beings and going-concerns to ensure their survival and reproduction' (Jo, Chester, and D'Ippoliti 2018, p. 10).

The bipartition between mainstream and heterodox economics is evident when it comes to teaching, especially at the undergraduate/intermediate level, where mainstream economists claim that students must know only the core of the discipline and not alternative approaches (to be eventually exposed in advanced stages of students' studies). For example, Mankiw (2019), a widespread mainstream textbook, describes the role of professors as ambassadors for the economics profession that must disseminate 'the foundational ideas that have been broadly established and accepted' (p. 1) by most professional economists and not different views of how the economy works. By contrast, heterodox economists focus on transmitting the importance of the '2Rs' of economic analyzes to new generations of economists: rigor and realism. Economic theory must be internally consistent, but it must also capture the essential characteristics of that part of reality that is under investigation (Sylos Labini 2002). Therefore, heterodox economists, in contrast with mainstream economists, help their students to understand the social implications of theoretical hypotheses. If this is not done, students may infer that the orderly world posited by mainstream models is the real world, or worse, the only possible world.

Exploring heterodox ideas on teaching economics through interviews with senior heterodox economists, Mearman, Berger, and Guizzo (2022) identifies their common idea on teaching as a process of critical questioning of all ideas (open-mindedness), including the mainstream, for 'achieving and transmitting a good (i.e., unbiased and correct) understanding of real-world economic problems' (p. 55). Not surprisingly most of the interviewers refer to the importance of exposing students to feminist economics for understanding the gender dynamics in the society, in the households as well as in the economics discipline itself, to identify and eventually undermine the power relations within society. In fact, feminist economics, since its institutionalization in the early 1990s, despite the heterogeneity of the approaches under its umbrella, questioned not just the organization of the economics discipline but its theories and methodologies, firstly within the microeconomics of the household and labor markets and then in macroeconomics, international trade, development, poverty, finance, and all fields of traditional economic analysis (Becchio 2020; Espinel and Betancourt 2022). Questioning disciplinary boundaries of economics and mainstream economic assumptions entails a pedagogical challenge using teaching methodologies which pay attention to the complexity of the real world in terms of the intersectional nature of identity, and the role of social norms and emotions in economic activities and behaviors.

Teaching economics following feminist pedagogy involves not only systematically integrating gender into economics courses but also letting students recognize that economic ideas and theories are not 'natural' but historically and socially constructed

(Corsi 2019). This implies the inclusion of topics that are not usually considered by mainstream economic models (i.e., care work and time use) and the use of teaching methods that are not traditionally used in the economics classroom. This includes classroom activities, students' assignments and pedagogical tools that engage students in learning, creating an effective learning community where the relevance of economics in people/students' lives becomes clear.

In this paper we describe the feminist pedagogical tools that are currently used in economics classroom by feminist economists,[3] and we concentrate on our experience in the use of students' written diaries on daily consumption in economics courses. In our opinion, students' written diaries can be considered a useful feminist pedagogical tool in economics classes since their use celebrates the subjectivity of all economic behaviors by valuing students' personal and private experiences. Complementing economics courses with students' written diaries on daily consumption exposes students to the complexity of consumption rather than reduce it to mathematically elegant formula. In this diary activity, students are involved in the process of generating quantitative data on consumption at the individual level, letting them understand both the heterogeneity of economic behaviors (in the specific consumption behaviors), and the processes underlying economic outcomes without which their understanding would be incomplete. This exercise stimulates the active and critical engagement of students, so that they become active agents in the construction of economic knowledge, situating it in the real world, challenging the dominant view of economics as the study of the behaviors of generalized, abstract and rational economic agents.

2. Feminist Pedagogical Approach in Economics

The term feminist pedagogy was firstly used during the 1980s to describe different teaching methods and approaches in the classroom that were used by feminist scholars in gender studies programs. As pointed out by Maher (1987) feminist pedagogy applies a set of diverse teaching practices inspired by both the critical or liberatory pedagogy conceived by Freire (1970),[4] and the feminist theories of women's development that challenge the universality and objectivity of the scientific methods to concentrate on all those aspects of gender identity that come from social norms and roles in the private and public sphere of life as developed by bell hooks' pedagogical philosophy (Shackelford 1992; hooks 1994).

The discussion about the implementation of feminist pedagogy in economics courses developed with the birth of the International Association for Feminist Economics (IAFFE), originating in the 1992 ASSA conference session on 'Alternative Pedagogies and Economic Education' held in New Orleans. IAFFE in fact represents, since its

[3]To account for the conceptual pluralism in the field of feminist economics is beyond the scope of our analysis, however we are aware that to teach feminist economics implies a set of approaches. For sure it is important to make students familiar with the fact that, since its institutionalisation, feminist economics has rejected a single definition, favouring the diversity of methodological approaches and research topics that are integral to the development of a feminist economics. It can be seen as a forum or better a home for diverse dissident feminist views, methods and patterns in economics. Consequently, in the multiplicity of approaches to feminist economics, it is inevitable that each proposed teaching method will adopt only some of these approaches and not others.

[4]Critical or liberatory pedagogy pursues the classroom empowerment of oppressed/silent students, namely people who are non-white, working class, poor, female and culturally different.

creation, a space for developing more inclusive materials, teaching resources and alternative pedagogical tools to be used in economics classrooms (Aerni and Nelson 1995; Shackelford 1999; Espinel and Betancourt 2022). Feminist economists believe that not only the content of economics courses, but also the teaching style should be revised to empower students and let them become critical and creative learners.

As stressed by Nelson (1995), 'Fostering the ability to think critically, analytically, and creatively about economic issues requires a different pedagogy' (p. 145). This means that students construct, rather than memorize, their economic knowledge, and that the knowledge becomes more meaningful, because it is about them and therefore more important to their lives. Incorporating feminist economics texts and using pedagogical tools such as assignments and classroom activities with an explicit gender focus, introduce students to the importance of gender differences in economic behaviors and outcomes and simultaneously help them to reach an in-depth understanding of economic concepts and to critically reflect on key economic questions. Through feminist pedagogy, feminist economics 'envision[s] the discipline of economics becoming more diverse both in the people who practice it and in the ideas which it encompasses' (Aerni and Mcgoldrick 1999, p. XV).

2.1 Inclusive Economics Courses with Feminist Lenses

The creation of an inclusive economic content through a feminist pedagogy means challenging the conceptualization of the genderless and raceless economic agent in the standard microeconomics theory course and transcending the analysis of aggregates in conventional macroeconomics — i.e., GDP, (paid) national employment rates, the consumption by all genders — introducing gender differences and inequality more generally (Seguino 2020). In fact, feminist economists, in their different approaches, propose a redefinition of the economy as a combination of provisioning activities, rather than optimizing behaviors, and they foster the centrality of gender in shaping economic outcomes (Dow 2020). The institutionalization of such an approach requires three key aspects:

1. *Centrality of the concept of 'gender' that goes beyond biological sex*. Feminist economics uses the concept of gender in its broadest sense, not identifying it as a dichotomous variable (man/woman) but adding complexity to human nature. Consequently, gender is understood as a social construct seen in terms of power relations, crucial to being integrated into any analysis of social and economic phenomena.
2. *Different levels of economic analysis*. Rather than focusing on markets, rational behaviors/choices and scarce resources, following Nelson's definition of 'economics for humans', economics is conceived as the study of all activities that are necessary 'for the survival and flourishing of life' (Nelson 2022, p. 273). Consequently, an integral part of economic analysis is the study of how our behaviors are shaped by power relations and social norms that operate in everyday lives. Feminist economics opposes the androcentric assumptions typical of neoclassical models, that separate the market economy from social reproduction and the environment, with the recognition of the interdependent relationship between the productive and reproductive spheres, between paid and unpaid work, between formal work and care work. In general, feminist economists posit a critical reflection on the complex nature of economic processes by considering their social dimension and the role of emotions and social

norms, in contrast with the mainstream hypothesis of *homo oeconomicus*, as a representative genderless and raceless agent guided only by self-interest (without family/emotional ties), and rationality (able to optimize his own utility).

3. *Methodological pluralism*. Feminist economics recognizes the coexistence of several economic concepts and models, challenging the mainstream idea of the existence of only one economic model, that of rational choice.[5] Therefore, while mainstream economics increasingly proposes formalized and abstract econometric models, identifying the quality of the method with mathematical rigor, feminist economists use different models and methods of analysis or a combination of them to capture the complexity of the social phenomena observed and respond adequately to the research questions posed. Consequently, methodological rigor is not identified with econometric-mathematical consistency, but, using the words of Sen (1992), 'objectivity (rigor) begins with knowledge based on the observation of reality' (p. 1). Scientific rigor is therefore not the separation of the researcher from the object of analysis (mathematical rigor) but the connection of the researcher with the observation of the reality. The illusion of rigor without realism is 'actually based on a particular stereotype of masculinity, and misleadingly keeps many highly relevant aspects of human behavior and economic life from being recognized. It also bans many very helpful ways of gaining knowledge' (Nelson 2022, p. 272).

These postulates lead to a redefinition of the concept of economics. In fact, while for the dominant (mainstream) economics, the economic discipline is the study of the processes through which goods and services are exchanged in the markets, for feminist scholars economics is the study of the processes through which goods and services are provided (not exchanged).[6] This implies the overcoming of the distinction between what is conventionally considered economic (market-oriented) and what is not considered economic (unpaid, mainly household-oriented), introducing a permanent interdependency between economic activities/behaviors and social processes. Clear evidence of that interdependence emerges for example from the analyses of the COVID-19 pandemic that let remerge the issues that feminist economists have long explored and investigated: the interconnected nature of health, care, social, economic, and financial factors, at the individual, household, national and international level, that highlights, as never before, how women are automatic shock absorbers and stabilizers during the crises due to their simultaneous role as paid workers and unpaid workers.[7]

Berik and Rodgers (2021) provide a good practical example of how to embrace the three key aspects above in teaching economics courses, using a combination of gender-aware scholarly articles, classroom activities, and assignments. They dismiss the traditional 'add gender and stir' approach, which usually limits the discussion of

[5]For example, Lucas (1987) does not fail to point out in his analyses that the neoclassical model is the only construct of truth we have in economics (p. 108).

[6]The definition of economic activity encompassing unpaid work as well as paid work is at the basis of the social provisioning approach (SPA) outlined by Power (2004) that in feminist economics provides a useful methodological starting point to analyse power differentials, agency, and how economic outcomes and processes are shaped by gender, which intersects with other social identities (Berik and Kongar 2021). SPA is a classical concept linked to the idea of social reproduction in the political economy of the labour markets (Picchio 1992) and its value (Mezzadri 2019).

[7]Please refer to the various articles published in 2021 in Feminist economics' special issues on feminist economic perspectives on the COVID-19 pandemic, available here https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rfec20/27/1-2

gender inequality to the context of poverty, farm productivity, labor market status, health, and education, and the demographic transition. Instead, they expand the discussion to include gender differences in nearly every topic and assignment of the course. All the content are supported by a list of classroom discussion questions, exercises, and assignments that professors may find helpful for adding gender to their development economics course, such as for example to conduct case studies of export-led growth strategy and implications for women workers, or to explore sex-disaggregated data on COVID-19 and different economic outcomes for countries during the pandemic. In fact, diversity of content alone is not sufficient and pedagogical tools are necessary to bring greater inclusiveness in the economics courses. Let's remember that 91% of instructors in undergraduate introductory economics classes in the United States said they never incorporated any activity or lesson that addressed diversity, inclusion, or gender issues (Asarta, Chambers, and Harter 2021). Aerni et al. (1999) suggests the use of different teaching techniques, as the 'chalk and talk' method is a limited method of teaching and learning. Bartlett (1999) invites economics professors to complement lectures with laboratories to give students, grouped in teams, a 'hands-on' applied experience with the theoretical material they learnt in lectures. Also, case studies can move the classrooms beyond the Sage-on-the-Stage method of teaching toward one that develops groups and community learning, where 'students work together to actively 'produce' an analysis of the case that reflects their own experiences. This gives them a sense of their ability to 'do' economics rather than simply 'learn' economics.' (McCormick Diduch 1999, p. 203). Jacobsen (1994) underlines the importance of using an assignment where all students write on the same topic, although with different approaches, methods, and data so that all students may understand the topic and have opinions about it. Recently, Saave (2021) describes a mixed method of guided activities in groups or pairs based on: teaching the historicity and spectrum of feminist economics, building skill and confidence to enter a discourse, work with student's personal experiences (i.e., care activities), teaching in a feminist way/holding space to question existing (economic) power structures and systematically leaving room for students to develop their own questions. Sternio (forthcoming), instead, to create a more inclusive economics classroom, proposes the 'Great Economists' assignment. She asks students to work together in group to gain familiarity with some of the prominent figures in economics to make connections between the topic/concept to which they significantly contributed and their biographies. This assignment introduces students to a wide range of economic thinkers, allowing students to see also the social dimensions of the discipline. Finally, emphasizing the view that knowledge comes out of a process, Miller (2013) proposes students' written diaries as a didactical tool to complement lectures: 'As students write in their own voices, […] they are empowered to add to the construction of the knowledge base within their classroom' (Miller 2013, p. 98).

3. Current Use of Feminist Pedagogical Tools in Economics Courses

To explore the current use of feminist pedagogical tools in economics courses we conducted an online survey among a sample of 39 academic feminist economists teaching different economics courses (i.e., Macroeconomics, Econometrics, History of Economic Thoughts, Economics of Organizations, International Economic Relations, Economics of Development and Growth, Gender economics etc.). The sample was constructed partly

by convenience, via the IAFFE network and was constrained by interviewees' availability.[8] Even though the sample is not representative of the international community of academic feminist economists, the geographical coverage respects the affiliations' distribution of members of the IAFFE with the majority (41%) of interviewees based in the UK and USA. However, we also got answers from South America, Africa, Asia, and Europe. 36% of the interviewees hold an untenured professorship position and 28% are under 40 years old. Eighty percent of the interviewees declared to use feminist pedagogical approach in their economics courses with a common vision of it that can be summarized by the description provided by one of the interviewees: 'a gendered (and racialized) lens on economic activity in addition to requiring students to improve their empirical and critical writing and thinking skills' (Int. Id. 2). Among those who stated that they do not use a feminist pedagogical approach in their economics courses, only two respondents confirm the lack of importance of such an approach while all the others, despite the lack of practice, consider the integration of feminist pedagogical tools necessary 'to understand and address inequities' (Int. Id. 21) and to apply 'a womanist perspective'[9] (Int. Id. 21) in the economics teachings.

Among the responders there is a common view that feminist pedagogical approaches in economics courses can make economic concepts appear more familiar for students, creating a more inclusive environment reshaping the hierarchies and relationship between students and teachers as in critical or liberatory pedagogy conceived by Freire (1970). As stressed by one interviewee, 'Pedagogy and teaching-learning-situations are like a lab for societal interactions. This is where students not only learn about the world (knowledge), but also which kind of interactions are accepted/desired/penalized. Feminist pedagogy can and should aim at turning teaching-learning-situations into emancipatory spaces, whether the people learn about economics or other things.' (Int. Id. 29). In other words, feminist pedagogy in economics courses is useful 'for better understanding, to develop a critical approach, to be more realistic' (Int. Id. 30). It is interesting noting that mainly among the younger, untenured professors a student-centered approach is performed transversally addressing 'the diversity of the backgrounds within the students' (Int. Id. 37) and 'incorporating the knowledge that the students bring to the class as relevant material from which to learn' (Int. Id. 4). As stressed by one interviewee 'work with student's personal experiences (e.g. in the field of care work)' is a way of teaching economics in a feminist way 'holding space to question existing (economic) power structures and systematically leave room for students to develop their own questions' (Int. Id. 29).

Concerning the pedagogical tools, the interviewees provide examples of different practices used in classrooms. For example, written reflections on readings and informal conversations on students' personal experiences are classroom activities to flesh out theories and concepts from applied knowledge. Mainly interviewees declare to integrate lessons with real world examples/lectures, and to increase students' participation engaging them in presentations and active discussion sections ensuring that students of all genders are able to

[8]The survey was conducted in January 2022; for further information contact the authors.

[9]Womanism is a theoretical perspective that originated in feminist theory that incorporates intersections of sex, race, economics, culture, politics, and social norms that 'constantly engaged in the work of dismantling and fighting all sites of oppressive social structures that restrict and circumscribe the agency of black/African women' (Phillips 2006, p. xxiv).

explore their ideas in small-group and in class-wide settings. Others require students to improve their empirical and critical writing with assignments that require empirical research, using a variety of methods /not only quantitative. Finally an interviewee describes her feminist pedagogy approach in the economics courses that she teaches as a combination of different activities such as: '(1) a standard in-class written exam to cover basic concepts; (2) applications assignments: short written responses to a documentary or assessment of descriptive statistics; (3) experiential knowledge: interviews with friends/family to understand experiences of friends/family related to course concepts/theories; in-class small group work to check in students' own economic experiences; (4) policy paper to craft a solution to a problem of inequality (e.g., gender wage gap) from among a menu of current policy choices. (5) small group work to discuss a question to start out each class meeting.' (Int. Id. 39). Finally, only two economists in our sample declare to have used students' written diaries in their macroeconomics, history of monetary thought and feminist economics courses as a feminist pedagogical tool.

3.1. Students' Written Diaries as a Feminist Pedagogical Tool in Economics Courses

Despite their scarce use in economics classes, students' written diaries, with their personal, emotional, and experiential emphasis can be considered a useful pedagogical tool to value knowledge that is gained directly by the different experiences and identities of students (Barnhardt and O'Quinn 2003). Brewer and Jozefowicz (2006) recommend the use of them to make economics more relevant to students' lives, allowing for gender differences and interconnected factors that can impact on their experiences and opportunities.[10]

Diary approach allows students to notice and reflect on the social contexts in which they live and interact and how social norms impact on the individuals' choices and behaviors reinforcing gender inequalities (England 1993). In this way, students may be more likely to challenge the legitimacy of relying only on the rational choice model, and to look at models of human behavior that also recognize the social contexts and social connections within which humans interact.

In our view, students' written diaries are a useful tool to employ feminist pedagogy in the economics classroom following Shackelford's advises to allow 'students to analyze as well as synthesize and just as importantly to explore ways of discovery. Providing some context for understanding the economics content' (Shackelford 1992, p. 572). We propose the use of students' written dairies in the form of daily consumption diaries as a complementary feminist didactic tool to expose students to the complexity of consumption behaviors and to the social relevance of consumption, originally conceived by women economists in the 1920s and 1930s (Trezzini 2014), as opposite to the ideas of utility and its intertemporal maximization on which the marginalist analysis of consumption is based.

While consumption has played a minor role in political economy theory, pivoting in the realm of the households, women economists wrote extensively about it. 100 years ago,

[10]Students narrate their own experiences by proposing examples that consider their sex, cultural and social backgrounds that can be used to explain, in class, economic and social phenomena with an intersectional perspective.

Hazel Kyrk in 'A Theory of Consumption' (1923) conducted pioneering theoretical and empirical research on consumption becoming the epicenter of the field that would later be known as the 'economics of consumption' (Hirschfeld 1994; Phillipy 2021). Kyrk's theory of consumption foresees consumption as a separate field of economics study that requires an interdisciplinary approach to analyze the consumer's interaction with the market, how consumers behave and how consumers' desires are formed. Her theory of consumption implies a critique of the mainstream economics of her times since preferences are not individually formed but they have a strong social component. In fact, in contrast with the neoclassical analysis of consumption that considers consumers' preferences as given, Kyrk states that they are formed and created from impulses, habits, norms, prejudices, and other 'irrational' behavioral patterns. As stressed by Kuiper (2022), Kyrk's theory is still relevant as a comprehensive framework to capture many of the complexities of consumer behavior, paying attention to: '(a) the larger context in which the consumption process takes place, (b) the way the consumption process is controlled and guided, (c) on what basis, in terms of norms and values, choices are being made, and (d) to what extent and how human welfare is a function of wealth' (Kuiper 2022, p. 135).

Rooted in Kyrk's perspective on consumption, students' written diaries on daily consumption can help to empirically expose economics students to the importance of social factors (identities, values, imitation, advertisement, standards of consumption etc.) other than economic ones (income, price, monopolies etc.) in economics analyses since consumers' choices could not be explained as a process of optimization but as a social process where social values, identities, instinct, and social norms should be considered. For example, mutual norms of social worthiness, prescribing appropriate personal attitudes, can also constrain consumption behaviors. Such empirical exercise in economics classrooms implies to reach the following didactic goals:

- students should be able to consider diversities among economic agents and their behaviors;
- students should be advised to critically consider the assumptions of economic theories based on the concept of rational behaviors and given preferences in a world where social norms affect behaviors and where individuals are different and act irrationally;
- students should be advised of problems in data-gathering, aggregation of individual microdata that results in a generalization/simplification of individuals' behaviors.

In fact, censuses and surveys typically measure consumption at the level of the household, rather than for specific individuals. As a result, since it is impossible to say with any certainty how consumption is distributed by gender within households, it is usually assumed an equal distribution of resources within the households. Feminist economists contrast this mainstream view insisting that individual data should be considered since the power dynamics within households and communities, gendered social norms and bargaining power shape the opportunities that people have and the choices that they make in consuming goods and services (Agarwal 1997; Botti, Corsi, and D'Ippoliti 2016). Using the household as unit of analysis has also made women invisible in statistics, deemphasizing the information power of the collected data since the characteristics of the whole household are identified with those of the 'head of the household', usually a man,

therefore insufficient information is obtained to adequately describe the range of gender relationships existing among household members and their individual economic and social behaviors.

The students' written diaries on daily consumption give students the opportunity to see all stages of the data value chain, from definitions of concepts (how given a budget the daily choices of consumption can be framed), through collection of individual data to the analysis and presentation of the aggregated consumption function for all the students in the class and its sex disaggregation. This process allows the professor to remind students the main goal of producing statistics (or better gender statistics) from a feminist perspective, namely to:

- uncover stereotypes hidden in definitions and/or processes in data gathering;
- raise awareness of inequalities through the reading of data;
- inspire the formulation of policies for change;
- monitor and evaluate policies and measures in place or to be undertaken;
- monitor progress toward full gender equity.

This applies a way of thinking about data informed by direct experience, commitment to action, and feminism, known in the last years as the *data feminism* movement (Criado Perez 2019; D'Ignazio and Klein 2020).

3.2. Students' Written Diaries on Daily Consumption in Practice

We used students' written diaries on daily consumption as a complementary students' activity in the economics course for undergraduate students in their first year of the degree in Statistics, Economics and Insurance and in the Labor Economics and Gender course in the master's degree program in Statistical Science, Demography and Economics in Sapienza University of Rome.[11] Students are asked to complete an online form firstly declaring their gender and age[12] and then annotating daily, for all the semester, their consumption. In detail, each student has to fill in the form with the share of their budget that they use daily in nine different macro-categories of consumption: food and beverages; tobacco; personal care and hygiene (including gym); newspapers, books, and stationery; telephony and internet; transport; medicines and medical expenses; games and entertainments (cinema, theater, concerts etc.); maintenance and repairs. At the end of each week a reminder to those who have not updated their consumption diaries is sent by the professor to have all the students engage in the process. Moreover, a careful data cleaning activity is conducted at the end of each week to verify all the information collected from students.

Each month and mainly at the end of the course, the data collected, protecting the statistical confidentiality and the privacy of the students, are analyzed disaggregated by sex. The average propensity to consume and the distribution of consumption among different macro-categories of goods and services are then presented to students disaggregated by

[11]The exercise was proposed for 3 years (A.Y. 2014/2015; 2015/2016; 2016/2017) involving a total of 136 students of whom 46% were women.

[12]More personal characteristics can be asked to students according to the level of diversity of the class (i.e., nationality, race, migrant status, religion etc.).

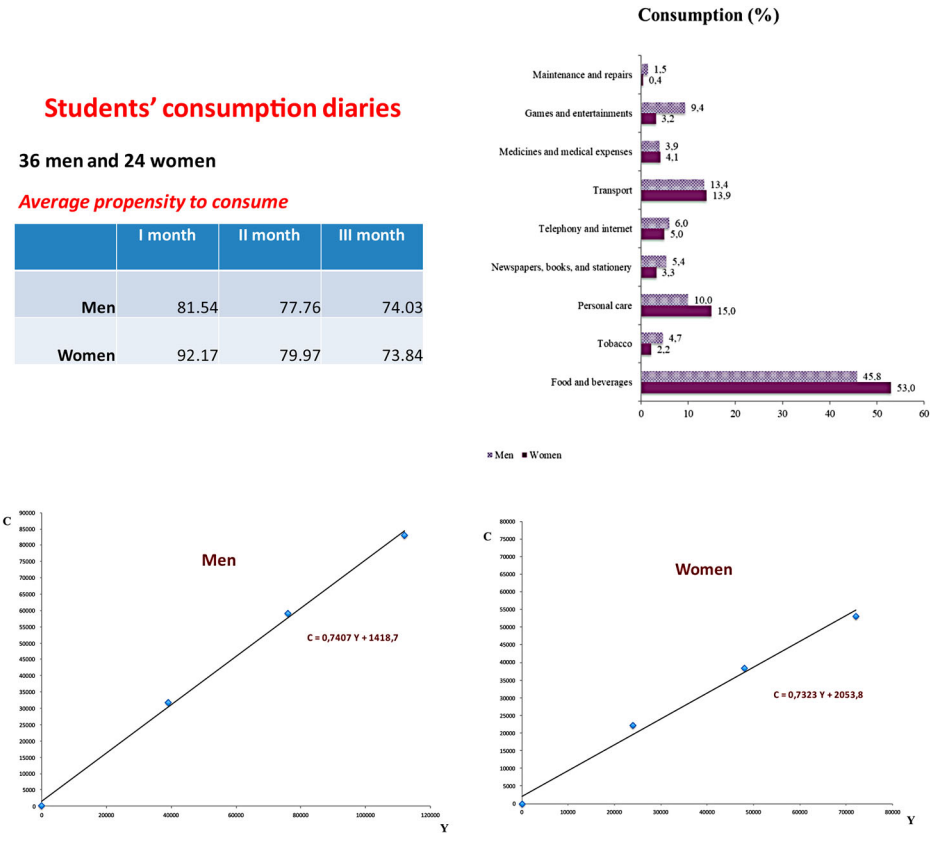


Figure 1. An example of elaboration of data collected by students' written diaries on daily consumption.

sex. This allows to test with real data, coming from the direct consumption behaviors of students in classroom, how aggregate measures tend to hide the diversity in consumption behaviors, and the gender differences in the average consumption propensity.

In Figure 1 we provide an example, from the academic year 2016/2017, of how the data collected at the individual level through the students' written diaries on daily consumption are elaborated and presented to students in class. Relevant differences emerge both in terms of the types of consumption which characterize women and men (i.e., in Figure 1, men tend to spend more in games and entertainment and tobacco compare to their female colleagues), and in terms of their propensity to consume (i.e., in Figure 1 male and female students show different propensities to consume over time, although on average we recorded an higher propensity to consume for men than for women), assuming a standard Keynesian equation of short-term consumption aggregate behavior.[13]

Thanks to the results of the data collected though students' diaries, we aim to engage students in the empirical construction of the evidence that the demand for consumption

[13]The Keynesian consumption function, expressed in the formula , predicts that consumption is a linear function of income (Y) with a positive intercept at $\bar{C}$. The *c* coefficient, which varies from 0 to 1, is the marginal propensity to consume that expresses the share that is consumed on each additional euro of income.

of goods and services derives mainly from their social significance in terms of how consumption can often respond to the social needs and aspirations of individuals rather than to their utility, giving a grassroot impetus to feminist criticisms against the view of economics concerned with human behavior in the distribution of scarce means between alternative uses. As Wootton (1938) would say, mainstream economists have no interests 'to enquire why women now habitually pay substantial sum of money to have their hair permanently waved, whereas twenty years ago they saved their money and went about (in this respect) as Nature intended that they should' (p. 245) but on the other hand 'they are deeply engrossed in observation of the (…) mechanism by which just so much and no more of the resources of society have been converted into the shop-premises, machines, electrical supplies and operative skill necessary to satisfy this new demand' (p. 246).

With this simple didactic tool, we can teach students to challenge the stance to take preferences as given in a world where social norms affect behaviors and where individuals are different and act irrationally. Considering consumption as an active process, as underlined by Hirschfeld 1997, implies that the study of consumer behaviors calls for an alternative feminist methodological stance, what Hirschfeld calls 'conversational or democratic stance', where 'the individuals who constitute the economy are not passive objects of study. Instead, they are viewed as the intended audience for economic theorists. Findings about the economy are shared with individuals within the economy who can use that knowledge in shaping their own lives or as they participate in the political process to shape their society' (Hirschfeld 1997, pp. 192–193). Therefore, under the 'conversational or democratic stance', students filling in their diaries, being acknowledged for their consumption behaviors, learn also that as consumers they have an active role in the economy and in the society since they can play a substantial role in determining the direction of the economy and the connected equitable consumption for a more sustainable and equal economic system. Therefore, students' written diaries on daily consumption can be considered a feminist pedagogical tool *a la* Shackelfold since they expose students to an alternative narrative 'which avoid[s] overly simplistic reductionist explanations and creates a more inclusive study of economics' (Shackelford 1992, p. 571).

4. Conclusion

Teaching heterodox economics with a feminist approach involves course material, content and pedagogical activities that differs significantly from mainstream economics courses, empowering students to be critical and creative learners. Although they are not much used in practice, we argue that students' written diaries can be considered a useful pedagogical tool for teaching economics with feminist lenses. In particular, students' written diaries on daily consumption create a more inclusive economics classroom where students can appreciate the validation of forms of knowing other than 'objective,' 'hierarchical,' or 'authority-laden' 'models' (Shackelford 1992). We propose the use of students' written diaries as a feminist pedagogical tool to let students 'practice' economics, with the opportunity to collect their private experiences and to convert them into data to better understand and situate consumption in economics. Students' written diaries on daily choices of consumption respond to the features of feminist pedagogy in terms of contrasting the process of universalizing the experiences of one particular group, allowing students to be 'actively engaged in the production of knowledge, as

opposed to being the passive recipients of teacher imparted truth' (Shackelford 1992, p. 571). Moreover, the collection and analysis of students' diaries expose students to the importance of the process of collecting disaggregate consumption data at the level of the individuals, rather than household as conventionally done in censuses and surveys, to apply rigor and realism to economic analysis and be critical in the use of data, since 'While economists differ in the methods used to analyze the data, they share a lack of awareness of the problems of data-gathering and a common faith in the superiority of official data sets' (Berik and Rodgers 2021, p. 9). However, the main learning outcome for this assignment is for students to gain familiarity with the implications of theoretical/unrealistic assumptions such as assuming that all economic agents act in the same way (rationally, maximizing their utility, the concept of the *homo oeconomicus*) and have same preferences while in the real world all the processes are gendered, and social norms and irrationality affect economic behaviors.

We fully agree with the exhortation that 'changing how economics is taught will surely change economics' (Aerni et al. 1999, p. 41) and we think that students' written diaries on daily consumption can be a good step forward in the direction to create more inclusive economics classes and consequently a new generation of economists more aware of social processes and gender dynamics.

Acknowledgements

The authors are deeply grateful to two anonymous referees for their comments and suggestions. They have also benefited from comments received at the 30th IAFFE Annual Conference (Geneve, June 2022) and the 1st International Conference in Education and Scholarship (London, November 2022). Usual disclaimers apply.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Marcella Corsi http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5693-6236
Giulia Zacchia http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0151-9184

References

Aerni, A. L., and J. Nelson. 1995. 'A Brief History of the International Association for Feminist Economics.' *International Association for Feminist Economics Newsletter* 5 (1): 1–5.

Aerni, A. L., and K. M. Mcgoldrick. 1999. *Valuing Us All Feminist Pedagogy and Economics*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Aerni, A. L., R. L. Bartlett, M. Lewis, K. M. Mcgoldrick, and J. Shackelford. 1999. 'Toward A Feminist Pedagogy in Economics.' *Feminist Economics* 5 (1): 29–44. doi:10.1080/135457099338139.

Agarwal, B. 1997. 'Bargaining and Gender Relations: Within and Beyond the Household.' *Feminist Economics* 3 (1): 1–51. doi:10.1080/135457097338799.

Asarta, C. J., R. G. Chambers, and C. Harter. 2021. 'Teaching Methods in Undergraduate Introductory Economics Courses: Results from a Sixth National Quinquennial Survey.' *The American Economist* 66 (1): 18–28. doi:10.1177/0569434520974658.

Barnhardt, K. D., and E. J. O'Quinn. 2003. Making a Space for Girls: Feminism, Journal Writing, and the English Classroom. *WILLA*, XII: 10–17.
Bartlett, R. L. 1999. 'Putting Economics to Work.' In *Valuing Us All Feminist Pedagogy and Economics*, edited by A. L. Aerni, and K. M. Mcgoldrick, 224–240. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
Becchio, G. 2020. *A History of Feminist and Gender Economics*. London: Routledge.
Berik, G., and E. Kongar. 2021. 'The Social Provisioning Approach in Feminist Economics: The Unfolding Research.' In *The Routledge Handbook of Feminist Economics*, edited by G. Berik, and E. Kongar, 3–21. London: Routledge.
Berik, G., and Y. Rodgers. 2021. Teaching Development Economics from a Gender Perspective. *Mimeo*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/357226399_Teaching_Development_Economics_from_a_Gender_Perspective.
Botti, F., M. Corsi, and C. D'Ippoliti. 2016. 'The Gendered Nature of Poverty in the EU: Individualized Versus Collective Poverty Measures.' *Feminist Economics* 22 (4): 82–100. doi:10.1080/13545701.2016.1146408.
Brewer, S. M., and J. J. Jozefowicz. 2006. 'Making Economic Principles Personal: Student Journals and Reflection Papers.' *The Journal of Economic Education* 37 (2): 202–216. doi:10.3200/JECE.37.2.202-216.
Corsi, M. 2019. How to Reduce the Androcentric Bias in Economics, *inGenere*, https://www.ingenere.it/en/articles/how-reduce-androcentric-bias-economics.
Corsi, M., C. D'Ippoliti, and G. Zacchia. 2018. 'A Case Study of Pluralism in Economics: The Heterodox Glass Ceiling in Italy.' *Review of Political Economy* 30 (2): 172–189. doi:10.1080/09538259.2018.1423974.
Criado Perez, C. 2019. *Invisible Women. Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*. New York: Harry N. Abrams.
Decker, S., W. Elsner, and S. Flechtner. 2018. *Advancing Pluralism in Teaching Economics: International Perspectives on a Textbook Science*. London: Routledge.
D'Ignazio, C., Klein, L. F. 2020. *Data Feminism*. MIT Press.
Dimmelmeier, A., F. Heussner, A. Pürckhauer, and J. Urban. 2017. 'Making the Incommensurable Comparable: A Comparative Approach to Pluralist Economics Education.' *European Journal of Economics and Economic Policies: Intervention* 14 (2): 250–266. doi:10.4337/ejeep.2017.02.07.
D'Ippoliti, C. 2020. *Democratizing the Economics Debate: Pluralism and Research Evaluation*. London: Routledge.
Dow, S. 2020. 'Gender and the Future of Macroeconomics: An Evolutionary Approach.' *Review of Evolutionary Political Economy* 1 (1): 55–66. doi:10.1007/s43253-020-00001-8.
Dow, S. 2021. 'Economic Methodology, the Philosophy of Economics and the Economy: Another Turn?' *Journal of Economic Methodology* 28 (1): 46–53. doi:10.1080/1350178X.2020.1868771.
England, P. 1993. 'The Separative Self: Androcentric Bias in Neoclassical Assumptions.' In *Beyond Economic Man. Feminist Theory and Economics*, edited by M. Ferber, and J. A. Nelson, 37–43. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Espinel, C. O., and R. G. Betancourt. 2022. 'A History of the Institutionalization of Feminist Economics Through Its Tensions and Founders.' *History of Political Economy* 54 (S1): 159–192. https://doi.org/10.1215/00182702-10085682.
Fisher, L., J. Hasell, J. C. Proctor, D. Uwakwe, Z. Ward-Perkins, and C. Watson. 2017. *Rethinking Economics: An Introduction to Pluralist Economics*. London: Routledge.
Fourcade, M., E. Ollion, and Y. Algan. 2015. 'The Superiority of Economists.' *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 29 (1): 89–114. doi:10.1257/jep.29.1.89.
Freire, P. 1970. *Pedagogy of Oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder.
Hirschfeld, M. 1994. *The Old Home Economics: Hazel Kyrk's Institutionalist Theory of Consumption*. Paper Presented at the History of Economics Society Conference at Babson College, Massachusetts.

Hirschfeld, M. 1997. 'Methodological Stance and Consumption Theory: A Lesson in Feminist Methodology.' *History of Political Economy* 29 (suppl_1): 189–211. doi:10.1215/00182702-1997-suppl_1014.
hooks, b. 1994. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. London: Routledge.
Jacobsen, J. P. 1994. 'Incorporating Data Collection and Written Reports in Microeconomics.' *The Journal of Economic Education* 25: 31–43. doi:10.1080/00220485.1994.10844812.
Jo, T.-H., L. Chester, and C. D'Ippoliti. 2018. *The Routledge Handbook of Heterodox Economics. Theorizing, Analyzing, and Transforming Capitalism*. London: Routledge.
Kuiper, E. 2022. *A Herstory of Economics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Kyrk, H. 1923. *A Theory of Consumption*. Princeton: Houghton Mifflin.
Lee, F. 2009. *A History of Heterodox Economics: Challenging the Mainstream in the Twentieth Century*. London: Routledge.
Lucas, R. 1987. *Welfare Cost of Business Cycles*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
Maher, F. A. 1987. 'Toward a Richer Theory of Feminist Pedagogy: A Comparison of "Liberation" and "Gender" Models for Teaching and Learning.' *Journal of Education* 169 (3): 91–100. doi:10.1177/002205748716900308.
Mankiw, N. G. 2019. 'Six Guidelines for Teaching Intermediate Macroeconomics.' *The Journal of Economic Education* 50 (3): 258–260. doi:10.1080/00220485.2019.1618768
McCormick Diduch, A. 1999. 'Teaching Case Studies in the Principles of Economics Classroom One Instructor's Experience.' In *Valuing Us All Feminist Pedagogy and Economics*, edited by A. L. Aerni, and K. M. Mcgoldrick, 202–214. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
Mearman, A., S. Berger, and D. Guizzo. 2022. 'How Different is Heterodox Economists' Thinking on Teaching? A Contrastive Evaluation of Interview Data.' *Review of Political Economy* 34 (1): 45–68. doi:10.1080/09538259.2020.1869402
Mezzadri, A. 2019. 'On the Value of Social Reproduction: Informal Labour, the Majority World and the Need for Inclusive Theories and Politics.' *Radical Philosophy* 2 (4): 33–41.
Miller, G. R. 2013. 'Teaching Feminist Economics Through Student-Written Diaries.' *Forum for Social Economics* 42 (1): 88–112. doi:10.1080/07360932.2012.685746
Nelson, J. A. 1995. 'Feminism and Economics.' *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 9 (2): 131–148. doi:10.1257/jep.9.2.131.
Nelson, J. A. 2022. 'Economics for (and by) Humans.' *Review of Social Economy* 80 (3): 269–282. doi:10.1080/00346764.2020.1792966.
Phillips, L.2006. *The Womanist Reader*. New York: Routledge.
Phillipy, D. 2021. 'Ellen Richards' Home Economics Movement and the Birth of the Economics of Consumption.' *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 43 (3): 378–400. doi:10.1017/S1053837220000115
Picchio, A. 1992. *Social Reproduction: The Political Economy of the Labour Market*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Power, M. 2004. 'Social Provisioning as a Starting Point for Feminist Economics.' *Feminist Economics* 10 (3): 3–19. doi:10.1080/1354570042000267608
Roncaglia, A. 2019. *The Age of Fragmentation: A History of Contemporary Economic Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Saave, A. 2021. 'Teaching Feminist Economics. Conceptual Notes and Practical Advice for Teaching a Subject in the Making.' In *Wirtschaft neu Lehren. Sozioökonomische Bildung und Wissenschaft*, edited by J. Urban, L. M. Schröder, H. Hantke, L. Bäuerle, 77–92. Berlin: Springer.
Seguino, S. 2020. 'Engendering Macroeconomic Theory and Policy.' *Feminist Economics* 26 (2): 27–61. doi:10.1080/13545701.2019.1609691
Sen, A. 1992. Objectivity and Position. *The Lindley Lecture - The University of Kansas*. https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/bitstream/handle/1808/12406/Objectivity%20and%20Position-1992.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.
Shackelford, J. 1992. 'Feminist Pedagogy: A Means for Bringing Critical Thinking and Creativity to the Economics Classroom.' *American Economic Review* 82 (2): 570–576.

Shackelford, J. 1999. 'The International Association for Feminist Economics.' In *In The Elgar Companion to Feminist Economics*, edited by J. Peterson, and M. Lewis, 486–489. London: Edward Elgar.

Sternio, J. forthcoming. 'Diversifying the 'Great Economists': An Assignment to Promote Inclusivity and Belongingness in Introductory Economics Courses.' *forthcoming at Review of Political Economy*.

Sylos Labini, P. 2002. *Il Mestiere Dell'economista tra Analisi Teorica e Impegno Sociale*, Quaderno del Dipartimento di Economia Politica, n. 52, Milan: Università degli Studi di Milano Bicocca.

Trezzini, A. 2014. 'Early Contributions to the Economics of Consumption as a Social Phenomenon.' *The European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 23 (2): 272–296. doi:10.1080/09672567.2014.881899

Wootton, B. 1938. *Lament for Economics*. London: George Allen and Unwin.

Zacchia, G. 2021. 'What Does It Take to Be Top Women Economists? An Analysis Using Rankings in RePEc.' *Review of Political Economy* 33 (2): 170–193. doi:10.1080/09538259.2020.1848624