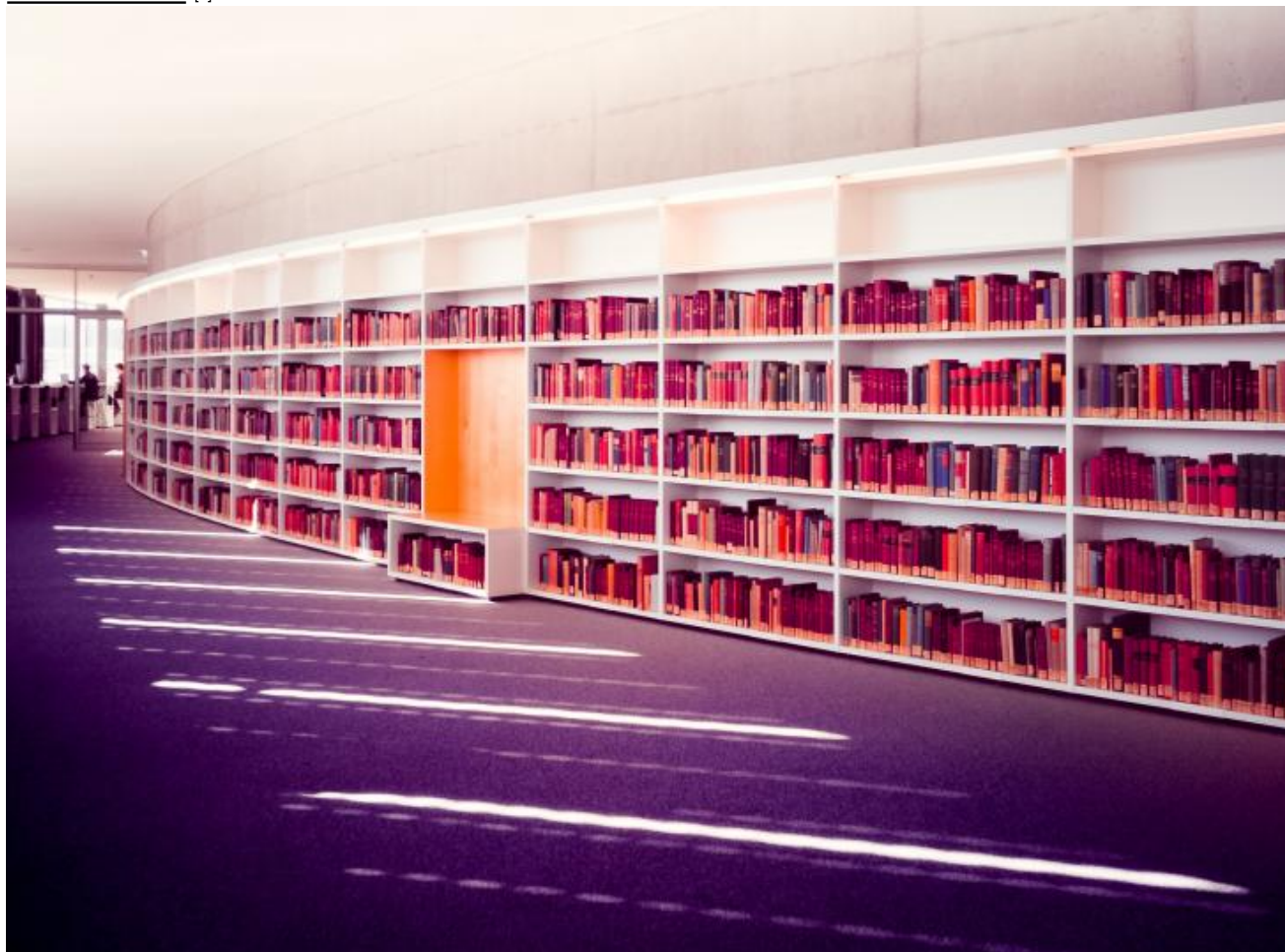


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## How to reduce the androcentric bias in economics

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Teaching heterodox economics in a feminist perspective requires to reduce the androcentric bias in economic ideas and also rethinking the pedagogical methods

I have read with much interest the articles published in the series *Diversity and Pluralism in Economics* on the INET website. I agree with [Costantini and Zacchia](#) <sup>[5]</sup> in saying that the “self-determination of women and minorities in academia and other research-based institutions cannot happen without a change in the whole system in which research and knowledge are conceived and passed on”. I also believe, as stated by [Besiana et al.](#) <sup>[6]</sup>, that “economics is only able to answer to real-world issues if it is creative, innovative, and in touch with societal issues, which diversity of perspective can help generate”.

In this line of thought, I think it is crucial to address the issue of teaching heterodox economics in a feminist perspective.

When we talk about teaching [heterodox economics](#) <sup>[7]</sup> we mean first of all presenting the plurality of methods that make our discipline. It requires the consideration that

economics needs rigor but also realism: economic theory must be internally consistent, and it must also capture the essential characteristics of that part of reality that is being studied. Hence, the didactic of heterodox economics implies helping students understand the implications of theoretical hypotheses when applied to society. In absence of that critical reality check, they may infer that the orderly world posited by models is the real world. Or, worse, the only possible world.

Consistently with that effort, when we teach heterodox economics under a feminist perspective, we seek to reduce the androcentric bias in economic ideas. In practice, we show students different ways of analysing economic and social inequalities (which include income inequality, gender pay gap, discrimination in the labour market, etc.) and to access several aspects of human behaviour (such as consumption and saving behaviour).

### Pedagogical issues

Teaching heterodox economics in a feminist perspective requires also rethinking the pedagogical methods.

Mainstream economics focuses on a narrow range of topics, methods, and epistemological frameworks that have excluded and marginalized the experiences of many women. Similarly, there is a very limited range of pedagogical techniques used in teaching economics courses. Becker and Watts (2001) find that economics instructors continue to use the "chalk and talk" method of teaching 83% of the time, while other disciplines have become more diverse and inclusive in their use of different pedagogies. That is, most economics teachers in college courses lecture as the "sage on the stage", writing notes and drawing graphs on the chalkboard (or whiteboard) while students take notes. Becker and Watts's findings suggest the need for expanding pedagogies to be more inclusive within the field of economics. Furthermore, Aerni et al. (1999) call for a combined increase in inclusiveness in economics in terms of both pedagogy and subject matter, arguing that "(...) feminist teaching methods might serve economists well in transforming the economics classroom to one that is more hospitable to wider audiences." In this way, diary-writing may be a useful pedagogy to use in conjunction with traditional lecture-based teaching.

### Using student-written dairies

Despite the calls for more inclusive teaching styles to be used in the field of economics, little attention has been paid to the use of student-written dairies. On the contrary, they are especially appropriate for teaching feminist economics courses, in complement with traditional lecture-based teaching. In fact, the diary assignment allows students to more fully connect with the two main goals of feminist economics. That is, students may engage with actions that are commensurate with elevating women's economic status and with critiquing the androcentric biases in mainstream economics.

Brewer and Jozefowicz (2006) recommends the use of student-written journals and reflection papers to try to make economics more relevant to students' lives. Here, students write what is personally meaningful to them, rather than just a summary of a chapter or other, less personal aspects. In students writing about what is specifically meaningful to them, Brewer and Jozefowicz note that this allows for gender differences in experiences and in what women and men may find meaningful to write about. However, the authors do not fully explore the feminist or gender-related implications of the student-written journal.

In my view, diary writing, in tandem with lectures, may help to bring about a reduction in the androcentric bias in economics in terms of the notions of epistemology and objectivity used in mainstream economics, as well as the assumptions of human behaviour that neoclassical economics is premised upon.

Mainstream economics emphasizes knowledge gained through formal, mathematical modelling and quantitative reasoning, where these traits have traditionally been associated more with masculinity. At the same time, this marginalizes knowledge gained through intuition, emotion, and experiential aspects, where these traits have traditionally been associated with femininity. Diary writing, with its more personal, emotional, and experiential emphasis is one way of valuing and validating knowledge that is gained in this way (Barnhardt and O'Quinn 2003).

In addition to the emotional connections generated through diary writing, the diary approach also allows students to notice and reflect on the social contexts in which they live and interact. For example, if students notice the ways in which an individual's social context often impacts an individual's status with respect to economic inequalities, they may be less likely to consider only the ways that an individual's choices impact their status as in the rational choice model, and may, instead, become more aware of how social structures of patriarchy and within-sex altruism may serve to disadvantage women and other marginalized groups (England 1993). In this way, students may be more likely to challenge the legitimacy of relying only on the rational choice model, and this may lead students to look at models of human behaviour that also recognize the social contexts and social connections within which humans interact.

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