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Article · November 2004

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SOCIAL PROVISIONING AS A STARTING POINT FOR FEMINIST ECONOMICS

Marilyn Power

ABSTRACT

The past decade has seen a proliferation of writing by feminist economists. Feminist economists are not identified with one particular economic paradigm, yet some common methodological points seem to be emerging. I propose making these starting points more explicit so that they can be examined, critiqued, and built upon. I use the term ''social provisioning'' to describe this emerging methodology. Its five main components are: incorporation of caring and unpaid labor as fundamental economic activities; use of well-being as a measure of economic success; analysis of economic, political, and social processes and power relations; inclusion of ethical goals and values as an intrinsic part of the analysis; and interrogation of differences by class, race-ethnicity, and other factors. The paper then provides brief illustrations of the use of this methodology in analyses of US welfare reform, gender and development, and feminist ecological economics.

KEYWORDS

Social provisioning, feminist political economics, feminist methodology, welfare reform, gender and development, feminist ecological economics

JEL Codes: B4, B5, J16

''The annual labour of every nation is the fund which originally supplies it with all the necessaries and conveniences of life which it annually consumes. . . .''

> *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations,* opening lines
>
> (Adam Smith 1937)

''The Congress makes the following findings:

> (1) Marriage is the foundation of a successful society.''
>
> *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996*, opening line (US Government 1996)

Feminist Economics ISSN 1354-5701 print/ISSN 1466-4372 online
http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals
DOI: 10.1080/1354570042000267608

INTRODUCTION

Starting places matter. In teaching, the concepts and arguments introduced at the beginning of the course become repeating themes that inform the material for the entire semester. In economic analysis, where the analysis begins limits what will be examined and what will be ignored. Feminists have done considerable work in understanding the role that gender has played in affecting outcomes in concrete, specific historical instances. In the process, feminist research has illuminated the greater complexity of human social, economic, and political organization, combining a search for universal themes with attention to the diversity and historical specificity of human outcomes. At its best, this attention to detail and willingness to avoid neat outcomes has resulted in a richer and deeper understanding of social organization and the roles that gender relations (in conjunction with other relations such as class and race-ethnicity) play.

A great deal of exciting and innovative work is emerging from an increasingly international group of feminist economists, facilitated since the early 1990s by the establishment of the International Association for Feminist Economics. In this wonderfully fruitful period, feminists have been able to persist in their tradition of collaboration across paradigms, embracing a wide range of methodologies, listening with respect to each other's arguments, and offering constructive criticisms. To Diana Strassmann's important question of who gets to speak and who has to listen (1993), feminist economists so far have been able to answer with striking openness. I would not want in any way to be understood as advocating that we coalesce around one uniform methodology. However, a study of the growing body of feminist economic literature suggests a coalescence around certain basic principles as points of analytic departure. By identifying these starting points, I hope to both further the analytic discussion of feminist economists and provide a useful jumping-off point for feminist economic research.

METHODOLOGICAL STARTING POINTS

An implicit consensus is emerging among many feminist economists around five core methodological starting points.[1] (In the list below, each point is followed by a reference to some representative recent expressions of these methods – these references are illustrative and by no means exhaustive.[2])

First, caring labor and domestic labor are vital parts of any economic system and should be incorporated into the analysis from the beginning, not shoehorned in as an afterthought. One implication of this view is that interdependent and interconnected human actors are at the center of the analysis, rather than the isolated individual (Marianne Ferber and Julie

Nelson 1993; Nancy Folbre 1994; Susan Himmelweit 1995; A. Haroon Akram-Lodhi 1996; Jasmine Gideon 1999).

Second, human well-being should be a central measure of economic success. Properly evaluating economic well-being requires attention not only to aggregate or average distributions of income and wealth, but also to individual entitlements and what Amartya Sen has identified as the heterogeneity of human needs (Maria Floro 1995; Iulie Aslaksen, Ane Flaatten, and Charlotte Koren 1999; Sen 1999).

Third, human agency is important. Processes as well as outcomes should be examined in evaluating an economic event. This emphasis on agency means that questions of power, and unequal access to power, are part of the analysis from the beginning (Randy Albelda 2002; Marianne Hill 2003; Fabienne Peter 2003).[3]

Fourth, ethical judgments are a valid, inescapable, and in fact desirable part of an economic analysis (Lourdes Beneria 2003; Martha Nussbaum 2003; Ingrid Robeyns 2003).[4]

Fifth, many researchers identifying themselves as feminist economists incorporate considerations of class, race-ethnicity, and other factors into their research, recognizing the limits of theorizing ''women'' as a homogeneous category. For example, the July 2002 issue of *Feminist Economics*, dedicated to issues of ''gender, color, caste, and class,'' represents, in the words of the volume's editors, ''steps toward an intersectional analysis'' (Rose Brewer, Cecilia Conrad, and Mary C. King 2002) in which the interactions of race, gender, and other historically specific social categories can be better understood. Also important has been the recognition of differing ''standpoints''[5] in illuminating women's varying experiences across cultures; the growing literature by feminists from countries of the South has been crucial to this process.

An explicit recognition of these points of methodological convergence may be useful in providing direction for further feminist economic explorations, not as a rigid template or delineation of boundaries, but as a set of guideposts in a rapidly developing field of knowledge. I use the term ''social provisioning'' to refer to these methodological starting points and the broader worldview I believe they represent.

Economic theory provides a range of examples of alternative approaches that may be of value to feminist economists. These include the labor theory of value; Thorstein Veblen's invidious distinctions (1967); Sen's capabilities approach; the growing body of work on caring labor by Nancy Folbre, Susan Himmelweit, and numerous other writers; and the suggestion by Julie Nelson (1993, 2000), Ann Jennings (1993), and other writers that provisioning be used as a starting point. All of these approaches can make fruitful contributions. The labor theory of value, most thoroughly developed in Karl Marx's *Capital* (1967), is typically employed at a high level of aggregation in analyses focused solely on commodity production.

But when not overly abstracted, the labor theory of value draws attention to production (paid and unpaid) as a human project that is socially determined. It illuminates the ways people provide for (as well as exploit and oppress) each other – and it leads to an emphasis on wages as a *living*. Veblen's institutionalism emphasizes the complexity of human motives and the importance of culture and relations of power. Sen's capabilities approach focuses on well-being and human interdependence, and raises issues of gender and inequality. It places emphasis on processes as well as outcomes, drawing attention to cultural and social, as well as material, dynamics.

SOCIAL PROVISIONING AS A STARTING POINT

Caring and provisioning as starting points clearly succeed in furthering the feminist project.[6] But without further elaboration, provisioning can become a study solely of individual acts and choices; it does not automatically highlight the interdependence or social embeddedness of economic processes. This is why I suggest ''social provisioning'' as a term that emphasizes the analysis of economic activities as interdependent social processes. To define economics as the study of social provisioning is to emphasize that at its root, economic activity involves the ways people organize themselves collectively to get a living.

I certainly don't want to be seen as attempting to impose a new orthodoxy. Rather I want to illustrate the fruitfulness of starting the analysis in a more appropriate place instead of attempting to modify and reform a structure that doesn't illuminate issues of gender, race, and social justice. In addition, it may be useful to put a name to a method (the five methodological starting points described above) that many feminist economists have increasingly been using. Language is not neutral but is itself culturally powerful, affecting not only the understanding of society, but also its social practices. Linda Gordon and Nancy Fraser, for example, in tracing the varying historical meanings of the term ''dependency,'' argue that ''the terms used to describe social life are also active forces shaping it'' (1994: 310).

''Social provisioning'' is a phrase that draws attention away from images of pecuniary pursuits and individual competition, and toward notions of sustenance, cooperation, and support. Rather than be naturalized or taken as given, capitalist institutions and dynamics become subjects to be examined and critiqued. Social provisioning need not be done through the market; it need not be done for selfish or self-interested reasons, although neither of these is inconsistent with social provisioning, either. Thus, the concept allows for a broader understanding of economic activity that includes women's unpaid and nonmarket activities and for understandings of motivation that don't fall under narrow or tautological notions

of self-interest. The term also emphasizes *process* as well as outcomes. The manners in which we provide for ourselves, both paid and unpaid, are included in the analysis. And *social* provisioning emphasizes the importance of social norms (Susan Himmelweit 2002) in affecting both the process and the outcome of economic processes.

Starting economic analysis from this standpoint illuminates the ways a society organizes itself to produce and reproduce material life. This organization is a set of social activities, rather than individual choices, and its outcome is social production and reproduction, rather than individual happiness (although, of course, individual choices do occur and individual happiness is directly relevant – the point is that this is not utility maximization). Social provisioning is a classical, not a neoclassical, concept, a descriptive category rather than a motivation. At any historical moment within a given economic system, a specific aspect of provisioning can be carried out in myriad ways. The dynamics of economic relations (themselves embedded within power relations) interact with societal institutions and social divisions (by, for example, class, race, and gender) to construct specific outcomes. In this sense, social provisioning is closely related to feminist historians' notion of social reproduction (Evelyn Nakano Glenn 1992), because culture, ideology, and social institutions help determine the specific organization of provisioning at a given moment.[7] In turn, the organization of social provisioning interacts with and changes the social environment – for example, by rendering some groups poor or economically dependent.

This definition points to several important characteristics of social provisioning. First, because it is a *process*, it is in a state of continuous change. Second, it is situated in a social, cultural, and political context, and as such, it is complex, messy, and nondeterministic. Third, and related to the preceding two characteristics, it will be affected by the class, racial-ethnic, and gender dynamics of the society, and will affect these dynamics in turn. Finally, the organization of social provisioning is not the ''natural'' outcome of market and emotional forces. Rather its organization reflects relations of power and can become an object of sharp political struggle.

Feminist economic writing in many areas has illustrated some or all of the five components of what I am calling a social provisioning approach: inclusion of unpaid and caring labor; emphasis on well-being; analysis of economic, social, and political processes and power relations; articulation of feminist ethical values; and inclusion of class, race-ethnicity and other factors of difference. Examples cover the scope of economic analytic concerns, including work on social welfare policies and the plight of poor lone mothers and their children; the effects of structural adjustment policies on women; gender-impact analyses of macroeconomic policies; and the gendered and racialized process of wage setting. I will offer an

illustrative example of the use of social provisioning as a feminist political economic methodology in analyses of welfare reform in the United States, followed by briefer descriptions of its use by feminist economists analyzing economic development in countries of the South and within feminist ecological economics.

WELFARE REFORM IN THE UNITED STATES

Support for poor solo mothers and their children in the United States was never generous or easily obtained, but it has been cut back continuously since the 1980s. Most recently, the *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996*, commonly referred to as the Welfare Reform Act, codified a rigid work requirement for women on welfare without providing adequate provision for childcare, education, or job training. The analysis of women's poverty that underlies this policy is the notion of ''dependency'': poor solo mothers are said to lack the values and determination to apply themselves in the labor force. While the rhetoric of the Welfare Act particularly critiqued solo mothers for failing to marry or remain married – the act, in fact, begins with the statement, ''Marriage is the foundation of a successful society'' (US Government 1996) – most of the policy provisions enforce paid work, or unpaid work in exchange for a welfare check for those unable to find a private sector job, and a five-year lifetime limit on the receipt of welfare. Current revisions to the welfare bill would make the work requirement more stringent, limit even further the ability of women on welfare to seek education, and allocate welfare funds to a public relations campaign to promote marriage (National Organization of Women 2002).

Numerous feminist scholars and social welfare activists have interrogated and critiqued the reasoning behind the passage of the welfare reform law (see, for example, Gordon and Fraser 1994; Diana Pearce 2000; Nancy Rose 2000). In fact, it is likely that the bill's authors and the Congress that passed it had a range of different motivations. A great deal of research, both before and since the bill's passage, has documented that many women on welfare had experience with wage labor, either prior to going on welfare or while receiving welfare (David Ellwood and Mary Jo Bane 1994; Roberta Spalter-Roth, Beverly Burr, and Heidi Hartmann 1995; Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein 1997). Research further makes it clear that work at low wage jobs *increases* hardship for solo mothers and their children when compared to welfare (David Ellwood 1988; Edin and Lein 1997). Nevertheless, some legislators may have believed (despite expert testimony to the contrary) that wage work was the appropriate anti-poverty strategy for solo mothers because they expected either that the skills learned in an initial low wage job would lead to higher pay or that such work would lead to generational progress through the modeling of a work-based culture for children (for an

articulation of this generational view, see Michael Novak 1987). For other legislators, the emphasis on marriage and lower rates of unmarried births was the likely motivation. For this group, work requirements serve the essentially punitive purpose of making welfare comparatively less attractive than marriage or sexual abstinence.

The outcome of these welfare policies has been a sharp drop in the number of women and children in the United States who receive welfare. Since decreasing welfare use was the policy goal, the welfare reform has been declared a success, despite alarming evidence that many of the ''leavers'' face considerable economic hardship in an unstable, low wage job market that does not offer adequate support for them and their children. In addition, those families left on welfare, many of whom are facing their five-year lifetime limit, tend to have family heads with low education levels and/or dependents or caregivers with a physical disability, making paid work problematic. Reflecting the general racial inequality within the country, the population left on the welfare rolls is becoming increasingly one of women and children of color (for a summary of these findings, see Janice Peterson, Xue Song, and Avis Jones-DeWeever 2002; Alan Weil 2002).

What, then, would be the basic components of a feminist political economic analysis of policies enacted to address the poverty of solo mothers? Beginning with the concept of social provisioning would draw our attention away from the individual to the web of interdependent economic and social dynamics that surround and involve her. In this context, the diagnosis of ''dependency'' as the cause of her poverty is meaningless, both because all of the members of the society (and beyond) are interdependent upon each other and because the expansion of the definition of productive activity beyond wage work includes parenting as a social and economic contribution. Building on a foundation of social provisioning and the four points of general agreement among feminist economists, we could argue the following:

1 Caring labor should be valued. As many critics of welfare reform have pointed out (for example, Albelda 2002), parenting is socially productive work. Poor solo mothers are in fact working, even if they don't earn wages. They carry out their parenting work, moreover, in the most difficult of circumstances, with inadequate resources, and in the context of a society that is at best unsympathetic to them and their struggles. This is not to argue that paid work is undesirable for women on welfare, but to argue that it is unrealistic and not in society's interest to require full-time work from people who already bear sole responsibility for parenting. Nor is it realistic to expect poor solo mothers to be able to raise their families out of poverty by paid work alone.

2 Well-being is the measure of economic activity. The goal of welfare reform should be to raise the level of well-being of solo mothers and their children. At minimum, this means the policy should aim at ending poverty, rather than ending welfare. Respect for the heterogeneity of human needs contradicts the strategy of a ''one size fits all'' set of welfare regulations.

3 Human agency matters. Poor solo mothers need substantial services, from education and healthcare to housing assistance and sometimes domestic violence counseling, to help them escape from poverty. But they also need to have a voice in deciding when it is appropriate for them to go to work or to school and when they need to concentrate on parenting. In other words, the *process* as well as the end result is important – well-being requires empowerment and choice as well as food and shelter. An emphasis on process requires a more complex view of human nature that recognizes that human motives involve both self-interest and altruism. An emphasis on process also reminds us that people need information, and the ability to understand it, in order to make choices for themselves. Education and the time to reflect on and discuss options are important, as are opportunities to participate in policy-making.

4 Ethical judgments are important. The US Welfare Reform Act and its proposed replacements have not shied away from ethical and value judgments. Marriage and wage work constitute success; parenting (if by poor solo mothers) is devalued; and ''illegitimacy'' is to be curtailed, with sexual abstinence as the preferred contraceptive strategy for unmarried women. While feminists and social activists have countered with empirical challenges to the assumptions underlying these positions, it is appropriate and important to make ethical and value statements in response: a situation in which marriage is the only resort for a woman to raise children and escape poverty is an unacceptable infringement on women's rights to autonomy and self-expression.[9]

5 Finally, it is important to look at how welfare reform impacts women differently by race, ethnicity, and other social factors. Crucially, our attention must be drawn to the question of why solo mothers, particularly solo mothers of color, have been disproportionately impoverished.

Perhaps feminist political economists, by employing a social provisioning approach, can contribute to rehabilitating parenting as socially valid work and emphasizing the necessity of a living wage. Reformers can challenge

the ''dependency'' label given to poor solo mothers by pointing out that the employers who pay less than a living wage are the ones, in fact, being subsidized – they are ''dependent'' doubly, both on the women's labor and on the social welfare system that subsidizes the wage (Marilyn Power 1999). By using an approach that includes both paid and unpaid labor, reformers can illuminate the social value of the work performed by poor solo mothers, construct more realistic and viable opportunities for them to combine work and parenting, and challenge the divisive distinction between the worthy ''working'' poor and the ''dependent'' nonworking poor. As this discussion of the US welfare reform struggles indicates, a social provisioning approach can illuminate the economic experience of women in all its facets, and place well-being, empowerment, and equity at the center of the analysis.[10]

GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT

Feminist economists have been at the forefront of challenges to the predominant market-based development policies that are encouraged, and often enforced, by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Feminist efforts in the field of gender and development have resulted in a growing body of work, both theoretical and empirical, and using qualitative as well as quantitative methodologies. This discussion will touch on only a few examples from this literature, to show how it has been informed by the methodologies of social provisioning.[11]

1 Women's unpaid and caring labor is incorporated into the analysis from the beginning. Feminist analyses have challenged the measurement of economic activity, noting that women's subsistence activities constitute a substantial, but often uncounted, contribution to family survival in poor countries (Beneria 2003: 131–40). And feminist critiques of structural adjustment policy have pointed out that the cutbacks in government social programs and supports have increased the pressure on women to make up the difference through their own unpaid work (Beneria 2003: 50; Diane Elson 1999: 102).

2 Analyses of gender and development generally assert the importance of human well-being, rather than aggregate macroeconomic data, as measures of economic success. Sen's capabilities approach, defining well-being as the freedom and ability of people ''to lead the kind of lives they value'' (1999: 18), has been very influential (Elson 1999: 104). Using well-being as a criterion for development requires close attention to the lived experience of poor women. For example, Lourdes Beneria and Maria Floro (forthcoming), who analyzed interview data from home-based women workers in Bolivia, Ecuador, Thailand, and the Philippines, find that a household's ability to access

resources to smooth consumption in times of economic distress greatly affects the woman's willingness to take risks that can improve her family's well-being. They note,

> The mere existence of employment does not define the economic status and ability of the worker to function in the capability space. It needs to be seen as acting together with … mutual support networks, credit, other assets – in the face of income shortfalls and consumption expenditure shocks.

3 Processes of development, and relations of power within those processes, are central to the gender and development literature. Sen has emphasized that women's *agency*, their ability to be ''active agents of change'' (1999: 189), is crucial to ensuring their well-being and that of children as well. Women's agency is furthered, according to Sen, by women's employment outside the home, literacy, ownership rights, and active rights of citizenship (191). Bina Agarwal (1994a) investigates this relationship in detail and argues that entitlement to property is crucial to the empowerment of women in South Asia. Naila Kabeer (2004) finds that Bangladeshi women garment workers value the independence, wider social networks, and greater voice within the household which came from regular, if low wage, employment (2004: 18–19). Beneria notes that paid employment has had contradictory effects for women in poor countries, creating the possibility of greater autonomy and voice at the same time that it frequently leaves them at the bottom of the wage ladder and increases their work burden (Beneria 2003: 164; see also Christine Koggel 2003). For Beneria, women's greater visibility in public life, as symbolized by the United Nations conferences on women, has had a significant effect on ''their ability to engage in active agency at all levels of social and political life'' (2003: 164–5).

4 Feminist economists in the field of gender and development do not hesitate to assert the importance of ethical judgments. From Sen's definition of ''development as freedom'' (1999) to Beneria's call for ''economics as if all people mattered'' (2003), the priorities are clear. In Beneria's words, ''Development is much more than increases in GDP and the growth of markets; it's about the fulfillment of human potential in all its dimensions – for each and everyone. It's about economic as well as political democracy'' (2003: 167–8).

5 Finally, most studies of gender and development emphasize differences by class, caste, and ethnicity as well as gender. There is widespread recognition that the processes of marketization and globalization have advantaged some groups while depriving and

impoverishing others (see, for example, Barbara Thomas-Slayter 2003).

FEMINIST ECOLOGICAL ECONOMICS

Despite a long tradition of feminist writing on environmental issues, there is not an extensive body of work by feminist economists in this area. Still, some influential examples exist. Marilyn Waring (1999) began an important and ongoing dialogue in 1988 by pointing out that neither women's unpaid labor nor the services provided by the natural environment were counted in the measurement of GNP and in the UN System of National Accounts. Agarwal has written numerous articles over more than two decades documenting women's particular relationships to natural resources in India and the necessity of their active participation in the construction of policy to conserve these resources (see, for example, Bina Agarwal 1994b, 2000, 2001). Dianne Rocheleau, Barbara Thomas-Slayter, and Esther Wangari have edited a volume of eleven case studies of women's environmental activism in countries of both the North and the South. They identify their analytic framework as ''feminist political ecology,'' by which they mean the study of ''the ways that social, political, cultural, and ecological factors interact with gender and how these are expressed in gendered relations of production and strategies for survival'' (Wangari, Thomas-Slayter, and Rocheleau 1996: 127). The literature in this field is expanding, growing out of responses to ecofeminist writings and the writings of ecological and mainstream environmental economists, and out of empirical work in the fields of gender and development, and social justice.[12]

The methodology of social provisioning is well-suited to the development of a feminist ecological economics since social provisioning can be seen as a fundamentally ecological concept. An ecosystem is studied as an interdependent and interconnected web of both living and physical components (Robert Leo Smith and Thomas M. Smith 2000: 3).[13] An ecosystem is by definition dynamic, possessed of a history and a variety of possible future paths that are affected by present events. Similarly, social provisioning emphasizes interconnectedness and is a dynamic, historical process. The emerging literature on feminist ecological economics can be seen as employing the five components of social provisioning methodology:

1 Women's unpaid and caring labor is central to the analysis. Because of the gendered division of labor and unequal property rights by gender, women often experience a different relationship to their environment than men (Agarwal 1994a, 2000, 2001; Waring 1999; Susan Hawthorne 2002). Recent studies in countries of the South

have shown that growing marketization of natural resources has often benefited men while depriving women of common pool resources – firewood, fresh water, wild foods – upon which they rely to provide for their families (Thomas-Slayter 2003: 261–2).

2 Human and environmental well-being is a central concern (Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Wangari 1996; Waring 1999). Emphasis on well-being lends itself to a concern with future generations and with sustainable practices, implying the necessity for reliance on and interdependence with nature, rather than exploitation of nature.

3 Concerns with social justice mean that both the outcome of an environment-affecting event and the *process* by which that outcome was determined must be examined. As mentioned above, Agarwal has repeatedly documented the importance of including women's voices in environmental decision-making (1994b, 2000, 2001), a point emphasized in the eleven case studies in the volume by Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Wangari (1996) as well. Eiman Zein-Elabdin (1996) argues that women's relation to their environment is itself a culturally and historically specific process, which can only be understood through ''identifying and understanding the actual institutions and economic processes that lead to gender-specific attitudes and actions toward the environment and natural resources within different historical and cultural confines'' (1996: 941).

4 Valuing nature in itself, and valuing future generations as well as the present one, means valuing what cannot be commodified or quantified (Waring 1999; Hawthorne 2002). This is not to say that quantitative analysis has no place in feminist ecological economics, but that it combines with qualitative analysis and ethical judgments.

5 Finally, feminist ecological economists strive to avoid overly generalized assertions about women's relation to nature. Agarwal notes that ''women's and men's relationship with nature needs to be understood as rooted in their material reality, in their specific forms of interaction with the environment,'' and that ''insofar as there is a gender and class (/caste/race)-based division of labor and distribution of property and power, gender and class (/caste/race) structure people's interactions with nature and so structure the effects of environmental change on people and their responses to it'' (1994b: 93).[14]

In short, a social provisioning approach can incorporate the concerns of feminist ecological economics effectively. It draws attention to the different

ways of getting a living (both paid and unpaid) by gender and hence to differing relationships to natural resources and the environment. The emphasis on well-being implies entitlement to a healthy environment, including clean air and safe water. Because provisioning is a process that takes place across generations, the future effects of current environmental degradation are inherent in the analysis. And the emphasis on women's empowerment draws attention to women's own collective actions to affect their environment.

CONCLUSION

A review of the growing body of scholarship in feminist economics reveals an implicit coalescence around five key methodological points. I have termed this approach to economic analysis ''social provisioning'' and have attempted to illustrate its usage in discussions of welfare reform in the United States and in the literature on gender and development and on feminist ecological economics. My intention is to both foster a discussion of these methodological starting points and, by synthesizing the feminist literature that employs them, facilitate further research by feminist economists. But it would be disingenuous for me to claim that I have no deeper interest than this. I also hope to encourage explorations in this alternative methodology because I believe that social provisioning is a fruitful beginning for an economic analysis that has at its core a concern with human well-being, with the empowerment of subordinated groups, and to return to Beneria's words, with ''the fulfillment of human potential in all its dimensions – for each and everyone'' (2003: 167–8). Starting points matter because of where they take you and, as such, must be chosen with great care.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful for the encouragement and suggestions on this work from numerous sources including Deb Figart, Ellen Mutari, Myra Strober, Randy Albelda, Prue Hyman, and Mary King. I particularly want to thank the anonymous reviewers at *Feminist Economics*, whose constructive comments encouraged me to widen the scope of the work.

NOTES

[1] As Ulla Grapard (1999) has noted, economists use the term ''methodology'' in more than one way. It may refer to the tools and techniques of analysis used by economists, but it may also delineate the boundaries of economic knowledge. In Grapard's words, methodology in this sense ''addresses questions about who gets to define the domain of economic inquiry, how it is decided which activities will be the subject of economic inquiry, which variables will be considered important economic variables, and which assumptions about the world and the nature of scientific analysis economists will adhere to'' (p. 545). It is this understanding of methodology that I am using in this paper.

[2] In her very useful recent article in *Challenge* (2002), Ann Mari May implicitly or explicitly employs all of these methodological starting points.

[3] I am indebted to Prue Hyman for noting that this emphasis on power should be made explicit in the methodological starting points. Prue argued for the importance of paying ''attention to power and discrimination in economic theory and systems and hence … to the links between feminist analyses and analyses of class/race/sexual orientation/colonialism (etc.)'' (Hyman 2002).

[4] The statement of purpose at the beginning of each *Feminist Economics* issue makes this principle explicit: ''The goal of *Feminist Economics* is not just to develop more illuminating theories, but to improve the conditions of living for all children, women, and men.''

[5] This use of the term ''standpoint'' comes from feminist standpoint epistemology, which argues that knowledge is ''socially situated'' in the material conditions of life. Life experiences stemming from such factors as the gender division of labor, colonialism, and racial discrimination affect different groups' understandings of (and perhaps priorities about) the world. For a summation of the literature on standpoint epistemology, see Drucilla Barker (1999).

[6] See, for example, work on the gender analysis of national budgets (Susan Himmelweit 2002).

[7] Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1992) examines the historic dynamics that led to the construction of paid domestic labor as the occupation of specific groups of women (and sometimes men) of color in different parts of the United States.

[8] While this work requirement is often justified by pointing to the growing presence of mothers of young children in the workforce, in fact, as Philip N. Cohen and Suzanne M. Bianchi (1999) have documented, most married women with preschool children work for pay considerably less than full time. They comment, ''Rather than being in step with levels of employment of married mothers, current reforms require paid-work efforts on the part of single mothers that put them substantially ahead of the curve'' (1999: 30).

[9] Besides these crucial issues of ethics and empowerment, it is important to note, as Stephanie Coontz and Nancy Folbre (2002) point out, that we have little reason to suppose that promoting marriage is a plausible strategy to end the poverty of solo mothers and their children.

[10] For an example of a proposed welfare reform that would fit with these criteria, see the Women's Committee of 100's ''An Immodest Proposal: Rewarding Women's Work to End Poverty'' (2000).

[11] For an excellent brief summary of the development and arguments of the field of gender and development, see Diane Elson (1999).

[12] See Linda Lucas (1999) for a summary of this literature.

[13] In fact, the word ''ecology'' has the same Greek root as ''economics''; both are from the word *oikos*, meaning ''the family household'' (Smith and Smith 2000: 3). Ecology

as the ''study of the household'' of nature emphasizes the interdependence of the component parts in an overall system.

[14] In this quote, Agarwal is also emphasizing her view that women's understandings of their environments are outcomes of their specific material conditions. Thus she critiques ecofeminism for viewing ''women'' as a unified category across cultures and history, with a relationship to nature formed by ideology and/or biology (1994b: 90).

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