

Contemporary feminist political economy (PE) and feminism as a sphere of analysis emerged through the women's movement in the 1970s. Feminist political economy PE is concerned with bringing women's economic role and contributions to the fore. This was necessary as the two dominant theories—neoclassical economics and Marxian political economy PE—were seen as unable to provide a framework to consider how gender relates to the economy (Tong, 2009, 116). This short paper will outline why neoclassical economics continues to be incompatible with feminist political economy PE analyses. However, it will be argued that feminist political economy PE is not incompatible with Marxian political economy PE.

The unit of analysis and core organizational concept for neoclassical economics is the utility-maximizing, rational individual. The economy is seen as being steered by the aggregate impact-effect of individuals acting in their own material interest through the market (Marshall, 2003, 121). This entry point is fundamentally at odds with the feminist approach to women as an economic and social group, and its concern with women's collective economic contributions. Neoclassical economics cannot account for large-scale patterns of gendered exploitation in the workforce. This is because it regards labour as a "factor of production," and, through applying marginal analysis to show that each factor is "rewarded" with returns corresponding to their productivity (Stilwell, 2012, 195), there is no room for an enquiry into women's lower wages, or why women's "returns" are lower than those of men for the same jobs as men. Moreover, a great deal of women's labour takes place occurs in the household. This work is seen as "outside" of the market and thus outside the realm of analysis for neoclassical economics (Nelson, 1996, 141).

**Commented [CE1]:** As requested, I have edited your article according to Chicago style guidelines, which recommend double spaced left-aligned, indented paragraphs (see *The Chicago Manual of Style*, chap. 2).

Also as requested, I have converted the article from British/Australian English to American English for submission to your chosen journal.

**Commented [CE2]:** Please note the use of em rules in Chicago style.

**Commented [CE3]:** I have corrected all your in-text citations according to Chicago Author-Date referencing guidelines.

**Commented [CE4]:** Please add this source to your reference list.

**Formatted:** Font: (Default) Times New Roman, 12 pt

Neoclassical economics argues that the economic behavior of individuals is determined by the desires and wants of humans beings (Resnick and Wolff, 1987, 240). It must hence conclude that women's "nonmarket" work is a product of choice. Therefore, neoclassical economics is steeped in biological essentialism—for instance, the idea that women are inherently caring and suited to domesticity, and while men are naturally competitive and thus better suited to "real" market engagement. It is this very ideology that feminism seeks to challenge, emphasizing the social construction of gender. Methodologically, the deductive, positivist approach of neoclassical economics cannot be reconciled with feminism's normative, value-laden agenda.

Marx himself did not specifically analyze women's oppression. However, his work provides powerful tools for revealing the structures underpinning the oppression of women (Gimenez and Vogel, 2005, 6). Locating these structures, Engels ([1888]; 1977) developed a comprehensive analysis of the significance of the family unit to the capitalist economy. An integral contribution to Marxian political economy (PE), this approach confirms that it is also possible to analyze the way that manner in which the relations of production construct and differentiate society's members based on gender. Marxist feminists have drawn upon this work and continue to make significant contributions to this approach in our contemporary context (see Gimenez, 2005 and Vogel, 1995).

There are two interrelated, core "grounding points" that can be identified, which that provide a structural framework for feminist PE analyses. Firstly, Marx and Engels recognized

that the root of women's oppression was in the family unit—an essential economic unit of class society (Engels [1888]; 1977). Arising alongside the development of a society divided into classes, the family privatizes the costs of reproducing the workforce and protects the privately-owned wealth of the capitalist class. Secondly, the gendered division of labour that stems from women's relationship (or lack thereof) to the means of production defines their primary responsibilities as within the family. ~~This means that, relegating their women's~~ role as waged workers ~~is to~~ secondary position. Women have thus historically formed the majority of the working class and a “super-exploitable” layer due to, ~~and through~~ their struggle for financial independence. They are, as Marx ([1844] 1959) described, a “reserve army of labour” for the capitalists. The Marxian analysis of the family allows for an understanding of the gendered constitution of class. It means that an independent analysis of women's public and private labour is possible; ~~whilst drawing upon, and basing this analysis based on within,~~ class relations.

**Commented [CE5]:** Please check whether this should be 'labor'. Spelling in direct quotations should always match the original source.

**Commented [CE6]:** Please check the year I have added for this direct quotation (based on your reference list) and add the page number.

**Commented [CE7]:** Please check that this was what you meant to say.

In relating to Marxian PE's analysis of class and class struggle, there is a widely-held misconception that feminism is incompatible with Marx's “two class binary” (Stilwell; 2012: 362). However, the emphasis Marxian PE places upon the proletariat and bourgeoisie relation is due to its objective aim of producing a general theory that captures the totality of social and productive relations, of which class is the primary organizational concept. Marx ([1844] 1959) of course recognized the complexities of intersecting oppressions in creating material divisions within the working class (Marx [1844], 1959: -). Denying the gendered constitution of class means that relations that produce patriarchy are partitioned from those that transform people and things into commodities under capitalism – ~~there are thus~~ two distinct systems of oppression are thus proposed. Beloso (2012: 53) argues that if a wedge is driven between patriarchy and

**Formatted:** Font: (Default) Times New Roman, 12 pt

capitalism, then class is no longer an epistemological relation, but a static identity. ~~Rather than seeing class~~ must be seen as a dynamic process as rather than a rigid, ahistorical binary, ~~it must be seen as a dynamic process~~. Therefore, political movements and theoretical analyses, ~~which that~~ seek to organize against those existing material divisions are paramount to an analysis of class struggle.

In summary, this discussion shows that feminist PE is not only compatible with Marxian PE, but it can also play a significant role in contextualizing Marx's analyses of class and class struggle. It can ensure that Marxism is a living and breathing theory that relates to current economic, political, and social conditions. Conversely, feminist PE analyses are incompatible with neoclassical economics.

**Formatted:** Chicago Body, Left, Line spacing: single

**Commented [CE8]:** Please check that this was what you meant to say.

**Formatted:** Font: (Default) Times New Roman, 12 pt

|  
|  
|

2



5

**Formatted:** Font: (Default) Times New Roman, 12 pt

|

## Bibliography

**Commented [CE9]:** Please note that the Chicago Author-Date system of referencing usually requires a reference list not a bibliography. This means that the heading here should be 'References', not 'Bibliography', and the list should only include works that you have cited throughout your paper. I have commented on the works that were not cited in your paper, so that you can delete them if necessary.

Beloso, Meredith. (2012.) *“Sex, Work, and the Feminist Erasure of Class.”* *Signs*, vol. 38, no. (1); pp. 47–70.

**Commented [CE10]:** Please note that Chicago style has no specific guidelines for the presentation of reference lists and bibliographies in student papers, but hanging indents are recommended (see *The Chicago Manual of Style*, s. 2.22).

Engels, Frederick. ((1888)); 1977.) *“The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.”* In *Marx, Karl and Engels, Frederick, Selected Works: Volume Three, by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 204–334.* Moscow; Progress Publishers; pp. 204–334.

Gimenez, Martha E. (2005.) *“Capitalism and the Oppression of Women: Marx Revisited.”* *Science and Society*, vol. 69 (no. 1); pp. 11–33.

Gimenez, Martha, and Vogel, Lise Vogel. (2005.) *“Marxist-Feminist Thought Today: Introduction.”* *Science and Society*, vol. 69 (no. 1); pp. 5–10.

Holstrom, Nancy. (2003.) *“The Socialist Feminist Project.”* *Monthly Review*, vol. 54, no. (10; pp.); 38–48.

**Commented [CE11]:** This entry does not have a corresponding citation in the body of your paper. You have titled this list 'Bibliography', which suggests that it is acceptable for you to include sources that you consulted even if you did not cite them. However, please check and delete if necessary.

Marx, Karl. ((1844)); 1959.) *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844.* Moscow; Progress Publishers.

**Formatted:** Font: (Default) Times New Roman, 12 pt

Matthaei, Julie. (1996.) "Why Feminist, Marxist, and Anti-Racist Economists Should Be Feminist-Marxist-Anti-Racist Economists." *Journal of Feminist Economics*, vol. 2, no. (1), pp. 22-42.

**Commented [CE12]:** Please note that I checked this punctuation online:  
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/738552684>

**Commented [CE13]:** Please check this entry as well, as it does not have a corresponding citation in the body of your paper.

~~Marx, Karl. (1844, 1959) *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Moscow, Progress Publishers~~

Nelson, Julie. (1995.) "Feminism and Economics." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol. 9, (no. 2), pp. 131-148.

Resnick, Stephen A., and Wolff, Richard D. Wolff. (1987.) *Economics: Marxian versus Classical*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Stilwell, Frank. (2012.) *Political Economy: The Contest of Economic Ideas*. (3rd ed). South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Tong, R. (2009.) *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Vogel, Lise. (1995.) *Woman Questions: Essays for a Materialist Feminism*. London: Pluto Press.

**Formatted:** Font: (Default) Times New Roman, 12 pt

Contemporary feminist political economy(PE) and feminism as a sphere of analysis emerged through the women’s movement in the 1970s. Feminist PE is concerned with bringing women’s economic role and contributions to the fore. This was necessary as the two dominant theories—neoclassical economics and Marxian PE—were seen as unable to provide a framework to consider how gender relates to the economy (Tong 2009, 116). This paper will outline why neoclassical economics continues to be incompatible with feminist PE analyses. However, it will be argued that feminist PE is not incompatible with Marxian PE.

The unit of analysis and core organizational concept for neoclassical economics is the utility-maximizing, rational individual. The economy is seen as being steered by the aggregate effect of individuals acting in their own material interest through the market (Marshall 2003, 121). This entry point is fundamentally at odds with the feminist approach to women as an economic and social group and its concern with women’s collective economic contributions. Neoclassical economics cannot account for large-scale patterns of gendered exploitation in the workforce. This is because it regards labor as a “factor of production” and, through applying marginal analysis to show that each factor is “rewarded” with returns corresponding to their productivity (Stilwell 2012, 195), there is no room for an enquiry into women’s lower wages or why women’s “returns” are lower than those of men for the same jobs. Moreover, a great deal of women’s labor occurs in the household. This work is seen as “outside” the market and thus outside the realm of analysis for neoclassical economics (Nelson 1996, 141).

Neoclassical economics argues that the economic behavior of individuals is determined by the desires and wants of humans (Resnick and Wolff 1987, 240). It must hence conclude that women’s “nonmarket” work is a product of choice. Therefore, neoclassical economics is steeped in biological essentialism—for instance, the idea that women are inherently caring and suited to



domesticity, while men are naturally competitive and thus better suited to “real” market engagement. It is this ideology that feminism seeks to challenge, emphasizing the social construction of gender. Methodologically, the deductive, positivist approach of neoclassical economics cannot be reconciled with feminism’s normative, value-laden agenda.

Marx himself did not specifically analyze women’s oppression. However, his work provides powerful tools for revealing the structures underpinning the oppression of women (Gimenez and Vogel 2005, 6). Locating these structures, Engels ([1888] 1977) developed a comprehensive analysis of the significance of the family unit to the capitalist economy. An integral contribution to Marxian PE, this approach confirms that it is possible to analyze the manner in which the relations of production construct and differentiate society’s members based on gender. Marxist feminists have drawn on this work and continue to make significant contributions to this approach in our contemporary context (see Gimenez 2005; Vogel 1995).

Two interrelated, core “grounding points” can be identified that provide a structural framework for feminist PE analyses. First, Marx and Engels recognized that the root of women’s oppression was in the family unit—an essential economic unit of class society (Engels [1888] 1977). Arising alongside the development of a society divided into classes, the family privatizes the costs of reproducing the workforce and protects the privately owned wealth of the capitalist class. Second, the gendered division of labor that stems from women’s relationship (or lack thereof) to the means of production defines their primary responsibilities as within the family, relegating their role as waged workers to secondary position. Women have thus historically formed the majority of the working class and a “super-exploitable” layer due to their struggle for financial independence. They are, as Marx ([1844] 1959) described, a “reserve army of labour” for the capitalists. The Marxian analysis of the family allows for an understanding of the

gendered constitution of class. It means that an independent analysis of women's public and private labor is possible based on class relations.

In relating to Marxian PE's analysis of class and class struggle, there is a widely held misconception that feminism is incompatible with Marx's "two class binary" (Stilwell 2012, 362). However, the emphasis Marxian PE places upon the proletariat and bourgeoisie relation is due to its objective aim of producing a general theory that captures the totality of social and productive relations, of which class is the primary organizational concept. Marx ([1844] 1959) of course recognized the complexities of intersecting oppressions in creating material divisions within the working class. Denying the gendered constitution of class means that relations that produce patriarchy are partitioned from those that transform people and things into commodities under capitalism – two distinct systems of oppression are thus proposed. Beloso (2012, 53) argues that if a wedge is driven between patriarchy and capitalism, then class is no longer an epistemological relation, but a static identity. Class must be seen as a dynamic *process* rather than a rigid, ahistorical binary. Therefore, political movements and theoretical analyses that seek to organize against those existing material divisions are paramount to an analysis of class struggle.

In summary, this discussion shows that feminist PE is not only compatible with Marxian PE, but it can also play a significant role in contextualizing Marx's analyses of class and class struggle. It can ensure that Marxism is a living and breathing theory that relates to current economic, political, and social conditions. Conversely, feminist PE analyses are incompatible with neoclassical economics.

## Bibliography

- Beloso, Meredith. 2012. "Sex, Work, and the Feminist Erasure of Class." *Signs* 38 (1): 47–70.
- Engels, Frederick. (1888) 1977. "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State." In *Selected Works: Volume Three*, by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 204–334. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Gimenez, Martha E. 2005. "Capitalism and the Oppression of Women: Marx Revisited." *Science and Society* 69 (1): 11–33.
- Gimenez, Martha, and Lise Vogel. 2005. "Marxist-Feminist Thought Today: Introduction." *Science and Society* 69 (1): 5–10.
- Holstrom, Nancy. 2003. "The Socialist Feminist Project." *Monthly Review* 54 (10): 38–48.
- Marx, Karl. (1844) 1959. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Matthaei, Julie. 1996. "Why Feminist, Marxist, and Anti-Racist Economists Should Be Feminist-Marxist-Anti-Racist Economists." *Journal of Feminist Economics* 2 (1): 22–42.
- Nelson, Julie. 1995. "Feminism and Economics." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 9 (2): 131–148.
- Resnick, Stephen A., and Richard D. Wolff. 1987. *Economics: Marxian versus Classical*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Stilwell, Frank. 2012. *Political Economy: The Contest of Economic Ideas*. 3rd ed. South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Tong, R. 2009. *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Vogel, Lise. 1995. *Woman Questions: Essays for a Materialist Feminism*. London: Pluto Press.