Introducing race and gender into economics

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Contents

List of figures vii
List of tables viii
List of contributors x
Preface xii

Part I Integrating race and gender: a framework

1 Reconstructing Economics 190 R&G: Introductory Economics course from a race and gender perspective 3
Robin L. Bartlett

Part II Integrating race and gender topics into introductory microeconomics

2 Protective labor legislation and women’s employment 31
Pamela J. Nickless and James D. Whitney

3 Market segmentation: the role of race in housing markets 42
Rosemary T. Cunningham

4 Gender and race and the decision to go to college 52
Louise Laurence and Robert L. Moore

5 The labor supply decision—differences between genders and races 67
Margaret Lewis and Janice Peterson

6 The economics of affirmative action 89
Robert L. Moore and James D. Whitney

7 Risk analysis: do current methods account for diversity? 98
Kathy Parkison
16 Some thoughts on teaching predominantly affective-oriented groups

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This chapter evolves in the following way. First, there is a brief presentation of the traits that characterize the term “predominantly affective-oriented groups.” Second, there ensue some suggestions, when teaching such groups, about adjustments in some of the introductory course content. Third, and finally, a very brief section will be offered on some pedagogical styles that may facilitate the educational interaction between professors and affective-oriented groups. Since space constraints will not permit a thorough and rigorous development of these ideas, an apology is offered. Hopefully, the thoughts set forth below will excite you to ruminate about your own experiences, to critique your categories of analyses and to apply any results in your own way.

PREDOMINANTLY AFFECTIVE-ORIENTED GROUPS

The non-exhaustive set of traits discussed below does not imply that only these traits characterize people in affective-oriented groups; rather, it implies that this set of traits is dominant, relative to their embodiment of alternative sets, i.e. their dominant profile or their first-order preference. No attempt can be undertaken here to evaluate the degree of pervasiveness of these set of traits, i.e. their variation in differing situations or among differing classes. Several traits which may assist in understanding an affective framework are: (a) language, (b) values concerning nature, human relations and time, and (c) knowledge production.

Language

In an affective-oriented view of the world, there is no gap or separation among people, nature and the supernatural. One is simply an extension of the other. Their unity creates a conception of wholeness. There is no separation of the self; rather the self must feel, must experience, must internalize, must personalize the phenomenal world. There is no distance, no discontinuity, no gap, no empty perceptual space between the self and the phenomenal world. The self is one with it. One affective group reflects
this personification of the inanimate in their use of language: “That record is saying something,” “That sound is bad,” “The eagles fly on Friday,” or “You put the hurt on me.” (In effect, the phenomenal world becomes personalized, a “person,” a “thou.”) This usage involves words whose meanings are embedded in a specific phenomenal context. Words are concrete, with much use of visual and tactile symbols, for example, money eagles, bread, bundle, a little bit of dust (primarily welfare payments). Meaning depends upon the unique context of the event, its time and place, the characteristics of the interacting communicants’ age, sex, authority, social relationships to each other—and other non-verbal clues such as inflection, body movements, etc. When spoken, the language is characterized by fluency, by the use of strong and colorful expressions which are intended to communicate and to evoke emotion, and by a wide range of vocal intonation and inflection. All this is consistent with the orientation of non-separation of self from the phenomenal world. Accordingly, the use of non-affective English becomes very difficult for affective-oriented groups because it obscures, by either the speaker or the writer, non-verbal clues in its expression of meaning.

Values

Nature

Arising from an affective view of themselves and the phenomenal world as mutually interdependent, they experience themselves in harmony with nature. Their aim is to maintain balance or harmony among the various aspects of the universe. Disequilibrium may result in troubles such as human illness, drought, or social disruption. Illness, for example, may take the form of the “miseries” where no empirical measures of sickness (temperature, congestion, etc.) are present, yet they are physically incapacitated as if they had the flu. They personalize nature and work with its elements; magic, voodoo, herbs, mysticism are the use of forces in nature to restore a more harmonious relationship between man and the universe. Technology also has this characteristic of working with nature. According to my grandfather, Trinidadians undertook voyages spanning many hundreds of miles of open ocean with techniques that did not include even a compass, chronometer, sextant, or star tables. Instead of technology which masters nature, they relied on the direction of the wind and waves, the sound of the waves hitting the hull, the feel of the boat traveling through water, and, on a clear night, the rising and setting of the stars. Reports exist of similar phenomena for Truske sailors.

Human relations

Affective-oriented groups view the individual’s position in social space this way—“I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.” Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual becomes conscious only in terms of other people of his/her own being, duties, privileges, and responsibilities towards himself/herself and others. Thus, the individual suffers and rejoices not alone but with kinsmen, relatives, and neighbors, i.e. the corporate group. During the 1970s, the Trinidadian government paid all its employees a bonus of a half-year’s salary. Rather than save and invest this windfall gain, virtually all Trinidadians ceased working and had a two-week fete. Similar communal rejoicing occurs when an affective person hits the numbers. Alternatively, in a housing complex in Watts, California, set up along the lines of a ajuma village, people who had moved away returned in order to regain their individual identity created or produced by that community. Critical functions such as leadership, child care and discretionary use of funds were widely and periodically shared by all members of the group. These functions were not formally defined and attached to statuses. Furthermore, in a communal orientation, an individual cannot refuse to act in any critical capacity when called upon to do so. For example, affective-oriented persons unquestioningly going against their own personal welfare for other group members. Even though the former know that the latter are wrong. They will consign loans for friends, while aware that their friends will default and that their own finances will suffer. An orientation towards interpersonal relationships has predominance over a purely personal one.

Effectively, value is embodied in the affiliated relationship among individuals. Sensitivities become predominantly affiliation-oriented and affective persons, with this view, attain their highest self-value through the maximization of interpersonal harmony and satisfaction of their group. This affiliative orientation has relevance in the problem of adoption and pregnant, unmarried, affective mothers. Children obtain the benefits of the strengths inherent in an extended family rather than “get ahead” through adoption by a nuclear family. Old people are considered part of extended families; they have affiliation roles in the household as models for children and as purveyors of oral history and culture, rather than being sent to nursing homes or old people’s towns. In this context, children become a form of saving and investment for old age. Finally, this maximization of interpersonal affiliation means in economics that the marginal conditions (based on assumptions of independent utility and production functions) for optimal resource allocation no longer hold.

Time

For predominantly affective groups, time has to be experienced in order to make sense or become real. The future constitutes part of time, only as part of the rhythm of natural events, such as sunrise, sunsets, etc. The drive for future-oriented investment becomes substantially less important. The
Affect does interact with evidence, evidence in the form of Symbolic Imagery.

For example, consider the way in which Trinidadian and Hawaiian sailors came to know the proper ocean course to travel between islands without the use of mechanical aids. Although aware of their destinations, they could not plot beforehand or a priori their courses on a chart. The courses could only be formulated ad hoc, i.e., as they usually sailed towards their destinations. Their Affects had to experience and integrate with the combinations of motion, sounds, wave patterns, wind directions and force all unknown until actually encountered. These latter factors were symbolic images necessary for cognition. In effect, the input (these images and the feeling self) and its synthesis were a continuous process involving multiple simultaneous operations to produce output (the knowledge of the actual course). It is undeniable that this process of navigating between islands reflects a high order of intellectual functioning.

Since symbolic images convey multiple meanings, are there discernible principles or generalizations by which these many meanings are weighted and combined in order to obtain the meaning that is reality, for example, the proper course? Verbal, discernible principles or generalizations exist. One form of these generalizations is the proverbs of affective groups. Proverbs represent the collective experience of the community as a whole. They arise from the analyses of various generations of peoples, each generation testing the veracity of its proverbs and, if valid, passing them on to the succeeding generations. Areaw and Dundes (1964: no. 6) point out that:

The impersonal power of proverbs is perhaps most apparent in the well-known African judicial processes in which the participants argue with proverbs intended to serve as past precedents for action. In European courtrooms of course, lawyers cite previous cases to support the validity of their arguments. In African legal ritual, an advocate of a cause uses proverbs for the same purpose. Here, clearly it is not enough to know the proverbs; it is also necessary to be expert in applying them to new situations. The case usually will be won, not by the man who knows the most proverbs, but by the man who knows best how to apply the proverbs he knows to the problem at hand.

As a consequence, it is not surprising that proverbs provide principles of analysis for major events. Consider the analysis of the boycott of the 1979 Olympics. Congolese Jean-Claude Ganga, general secretary of the Supreme Council for Sports in Africa and a director of that boycott, offered the following analysis on how it could have been averted by certain actions of New Zealand:

Just deploiting apartheid isn’t enough. When the crocodile is hitting you, it’s crying at the same time. You need acts and action, not only declarations.

In this context, Malcolm X used a principle or proverb to analyze the particular details of the assassination of President Kennedy—"a case of chickens coming home to roost." He was harshly condemned by the press. In effect, Malcolm had used a proverb as a criterion for synthesizing the input of his Affect and the Symbolic imagery of government actions. The US government could not hatch assassination plots of foreign leaders (Castro, for example) without giving birth to similar plots of its own leaders. Alternatively, others stated: what goes around, comes around. In sum, Affect-Symbolic Imagery Cognition means this: "I feel phenomena; therefore I think; I know."

INTRODUCTORY ECONOMIC CONTENT

The purpose of this section is to offer some suggestions for recasting the usual introductory economic content to introduce the traits of predominantly affective-oriented groups. More specifically, we will focus on (a) economic goals, (b) human activity, and (c) hypothesis testing.

Economic goals

Consider a definition of economics in which rational action implies seeking to minimize the effect of the use of available means or outlays, i.e. a logic of rational choice which aims at the maximization of preferences—utility for the household and profits for the business firm. On the basis of the assumptions of absolute consumer sovereignty, independent utility and production functions, static time, a uniform motivation for all economic action of the maximization of private gain (expressed in monetary terms), and on the basis of other simplifying assumptions summarized in the notion of perfect competition, economists can state the optimum use of scarce resources in very simple terms: an equilibrium between demand and supply within a pattern of relative prices which corresponds to marginal costs and marginal utilities, and a remuneration of the factors of production which corresponds to their marginal productivities.

As a consequence, the institutional conditions of the optimal allocation of resources are those of the free play of the classical market mechanisms, in both national and international economics. For the latter, the principle of comparative advantage provides the foundation for the international division of labor and trade. Additionally, the "economic laws" of this static analysis (the law of diminishing returns, etc.) are stated unequivocally and are considered to be universally valid, i.e. independent of specific social, historical, and cultural contexts. The definition or assumption of economic rationality means the conquering of spontaneous, erratic, transitory impulses and temptations in the use of scarce resources, or else the lack of impulse control must, in a contradictory fashion, be systematic.

The rigorous application of the rules of economic calculation to the comparability of diverse ends and means requires their expression in a numeraire such as money. Thus, the maximization of preferences, utility, and profits involves the acquisition of money and ultimately goods and services (Objects). In this context, there follow naturally such notions as "consumerism"—the unrestricted pursuit of utility or pleasure through the acquisition and use of an ever-increasing volume and variety of goods and services; and "growth-fetishism"—the attachment of exaggerated importance to growth indices as decisive criteria of the efficiency of an economic system or policies that exclude non-economic factors such as the quality of life, etc. Increasing technological innovations in the form of mastery-over-nature, then, become important as a way of reducing any bending constraints of scarce means in order to increase output.

For an affective-oriented group that unites the emotive self and the phenomenal world, a single aspect of behavior can be understood only in its context of interconnection and interaction with other aspects. The optimum use of scarce means or the principle of economic rationality, therefore, has meaning only in relation with other phenomena to which the feeling self relates. That is to say, the repairing of sinks by affective-oriented plumbers (production of useful goods and services) has meaning only in relation to their production of utility for themselves and their customers, through their mutual engagement in the enjoyment of a "rap" and "taste." Alternatively, a chief in Africa had been entrusted with a friend's sheep which died. He gave his friend a sheep in compensation, then another, finally a third, and for good measure 100 francs as well. Only then could his friend forget the sorrow of having lost his sheep. In this interactive process, each element impinges upon others and is, in turn, acted upon by them. Optimization or the search for principles that fulfill the principle of economic rationality is relative to its phenomenal context and is sociohistorically conditioned. With this affective orientation of universal oneness, we may, for example, still speak heuristically of economics, sociology, history, etc., but these categories merge into one discipline. As a consequence, the content of assumptions and models includes factors which traditional economics considers given from other disciplines and/or subjective.

Human relations

The assumption of consumer sovereignty places the individual in the center of social space in economics in the form of the assumption of independent utility functions, i.e. one argument is not simultaneously in two or more utility functions, as an individual pursues his/her self-interest. Such preference functions effectively rule out any interpersonal comparisons of utility, given the present immeasurability of cardinal utility. Welfare economics erected an entire prescriptive system on the assumption of the existence of such functions, subject to maximization. Accordingly, the Pareto
formulation of optimality means that social welfare is increased only if the satisfaction of an individual can be increased without decreasing another person's satisfaction in his/her own estimation. More sophisticatedly, social welfare increases where the gainers can compensate the losers and the former still be better off. In any event, the definition of what increases social welfare depends on what increases individual welfare. Theoretically there is no recognition of the common welfare as such. In an orientation of individualism there is no conception of the group as a whole, except as a summation of individuals. In addition, this welfare formulation assumes the structure of income distribution, is given from outside. Thus, the redistribution of income or the enjoyment of individuals through systematically sharing their goods with others is not considered in that view of economic welfare. Some recent theoretical work on income redistribution also indicates similar individualistic orientations, treating income redistribution as one good in the utility function of an individual or using interdependent utilities, but requiring that transfers be Pareto optimal. Finally, the concept of externality together with the compensation principle also implicitly reflects, for analogous reasons, the orientation of individualism.

The affective orientation means the assumption of the maximization of affiliative or interpersonal and group preferences. According to affective orientation, they pursue both self-interest and non-self-interest, i.e. their own welfare, the welfare of others, and the welfare of the group. In turn, these latter two welfare are at the same time their own welfare. In economic parlance, individual utility is also collective utility and conversely. Consider, for example, the problem of the allocation of a given sum (means) to one of two firms to erect housing in an Afro-American community (end). One is a low-cost firm located outside the community, which can supply 23,000 housing units; the other is a high-cost company located within the community which can supply 19,000 units. Traditionally oriented economics would theoretically dictate allocation to the firm which optimizes the use of scarce resources based on the principle of comparative advantage. Thus, the external firm, supplying the maximum real product, receives the contract, unless the community firm can advance successfully an infant industry argument.

A more sophisticated theoretical formulation for allocating funds to the community firm could be a variant of Johnson's (1992) theory of protectionism. First, the assumption is made that there exists a collective preference for the development of housing production in the community which yields a flow of satisfaction independent of the utility derived directly from the consumption of housing. This assumption of a "preference for industrial housing development" as a collective consumption leads to a maximization of real income consisting of the individual utilities from the consumption of housing and the collective utility from the joint consumption by community members from having their own housing firm. In this context, the real product, forgone 4,000 housing units, becomes a cost of the development of the community's housing firm that may be offset by the utility of joint consumption. The allocation to the community firm that formerly may have been a suboptimal use of resources may now become optimal.

These analyses, however, are not consistent with an affective orientation. The first analysis does not consider collective utility, while the second separates individual and collective utilities. The utility derived from the consumption of the 19,000 units produced by the community firm is also the collective utility of the community. In this view, the forgone 4,000 units are neither costs nor losses of any type of utility. Similar paradoxical identity of seemingly contradictory utilities occurs in affective behavior set forth earlier. Consider the previously cited situation of an affective individual cosigning a note for a friend whom he/she knows will default. The former has, at the same time, positive utility from helping his/her friend and negative utility from the effects of his/her defaulting. Alternatively, consider an affective individual who shares his/her income with members of his/her extended family. The marginal conditions for optimal resource allocation no longer hold. For example, the affective individual's wages, the social marginal cost, do not adequately reflect his/her private marginal cost, since part of his/her earnings is analogous to rent paid to non-productive factors, i.e. members of his/her extended family. Similarly, price, the social marginal utility of the goods purchased by the individual, no longer indicates his/her own private marginal utility, since the latter includes the private marginal utilities of a number of other consumers. In sum, affective-oriented evaluations allow for the simultaneity of individual and collective utility as well as positive and negative ones.

The marginal productivity theory which measures accomplishment in a form external to the individual has limited validity for understanding affective behavior. More relevant is the degree of the union between one's individual utility and that of others and the group. For example, my research on manpower training programs in the Bedford-Stuyvesant area revealed a successful completion rate (job placements) of 21 percent of the enrollees over a seventeen-month period (Dixon 1973: 13-28). Many of the dropouts had finished the program, but did not obtain employment. They simply refused to go for a job interview without the accompaniment of each other. In part, this reflected their need to express intertwined utilities.

Hypothesis testing

The mode that characterizes the method of verification in economics is the use of quantifiable measures as a basis for knowing economic behavior. For example, ends and means expressed in money terms become fully comparable and allow for the strict application of the rules of economic calculation to determine net advantages or disadvantages. This empirical orientation
Additional considerations

toward measurement appears in the remarkable expansion of quantitative methods of economic analysis. Some have evolved into several new disciplines such as econometrics, programming theory, operations research, etc. Theoretical hypotheses are formulated in such a manner that they can be tested by statistical methods. There are very few aspects of economic behavior in which some attempt is not made to approach the phenomena quantitatively.

Specifically, econometric methods are widely used in impartial analysis to statistically verify the interdependence of two or more variables. These variables usually result from the narrow formulation of working hypotheses, whose validity the econometric testing serves to confirm or reject. In this way, concrete, quantitative regularities in economic behavior become knowable. These hypotheses or models are stated in terms of cause (independent variables) and effect (dependent variables). This construct establishes an exclusive relationship between two events or two sets of events. In effect, the separation of these variables from the rest of the phenomenal world through the use of ceteris paribus attributes to them more power and significance for explaining reality than they really possess. If all events are part of a total, continuous interacting network of reality, then the ceteris paribus approach becomes an interruption in this unity. In turn, the introduction of differential, difference and probability calculus, game theory, decision theory, etc., reinforce the notion of precision in economics even though the difficulties of measuring (utility, wealth, etc.) and of aggregating economic magnitudes are still present. Effectively, then, economists have a predisposition towards measurement and precision, whether in the form of mathematics, statistics, money prices, shadow prices, or quantitative probabilities, etc.

The affective-oriented method of verification of models and hypotheses follows naturally from the affective nature of knowledge production. This mode of verification involves the synthesis of the feeling self with evidence in the form of words, gestures, things, forces, numbers, etc. Researchers are participant observers, involved observers. They are part of what is being observed through their affective selves. They become part of the lives of the people, while at the same time seeking to understand the forces which mold them and to which they respond. This permits researchers to unite their affects with symbolic imageries of the evidence obtained.

While one form of useful evidence may be quantitative measures, they do not, in and of themselves, become the criteria for verification. It is the structural design of the numbers, the context and way in which they are spoken or written that reflects the symbolic image of their mathematical properties. My African friends, for example, speak of "reading" a number, not of counting a number. Their mathematical processes are expressed in image symbols rather than abstract symbols. As yet, no method, to my knowledge, has been developed to express the meaning of these image symbols in standard English form.

Unlike squares, triangles, etc., affective-oriented measures appear as forces or rhythmic circles arrived at through situational experiencing. Thus, affective researchers must circularize cause-and-effect models, statistics, and current econometric techniques, connecting their symbolic imagery with their affects. An analogous process occurs for non-affective-oriented researchers. They sometimes make numerical adjustments, for example, in the results of their econometric forecasting models in order to bring the predicted numerical results into closer harmony with the forecaster's perception of economic reality. This ability to make such refinements is hopefully developed by the process of osmosis during graduate training and nurtured subsequently by specialized immersion in the discipline. Kuhn (1970) makes a similar observation in speaking about experience presented during education and professional initiation. He claims that "we have too long ignored the manner in which the knowledge of nature can be tacitly embodied in whole experiences without intervening abstraction of criteria or generalizations". One aspect of this tacit knowledge I term "economic sense." Its use, however, is generally referred to as the practice of the "art" of economic research.

In contrast, affective researchers embody and nurture this ability and it is an integral, systematic part of verification in the use of any data, quantitative or not. As indicated previously, there is control or discipline over the possible distortion by the research in his analysis. It is the collective experience or judgment of the affective community as a whole in the form of proverbs, folk wisdom, etc. This proverbial repertoire, therefore, provides the principles and generalizations that ensure the correspondence of the analysis with the area of affective reality.

For example, consider "The price of your hat ain't the measure of your brain." This is the principle that external symbols, per se, are not reliable indicators of individual abilities. In economic parlance, the renunciation of a factor, in and of itself, does not measure its marginal product. Alternatively, consider the role of proverbs as a decision rule for researchers in whether to recommend the allocation of housing funds to the community or external firm. One principle which embodies this Afro-American characteristic of affirmation by negation (something "bad" is good) is the following: "If you're White, you're right; if you're Black, step back." Stated differently, any proposal originated by the Afro-American community as a community which improves their own welfare in their own estimation will have a very high probability of not being funded for successful implementation. Therefore, the proposal is verifiably good for increasing black collective welfare and should be recommended.

Non-affective-oriented researchers, on the other hand, would prefer to generate some quantitative proxy of collective black utility. For example, if during riots only externally owned businesses were looted and burned, then the monetary value of these businesses might be one proxy measure of the value of the collective community preference for acquiring their own
productive facilities. This value may offset the loss in housing units that results from the lower output of the community firm. In contrast to the need for some quantifiable measure, affective researchers as participant observers in the community know through Affect–Symbolic Imagery the value that the community gains through producing their own housing. In similar fashion, they know the value of the non-market, reciprocal repair work, construction, etc. done in the community that never appears in the gross national product, since it cannot be verified by conventional measures of quantification.

PEDAGOGICAL STYLES

There are at least two suggestions that flow from the foregoing. First, affective groups respond more readily to a teaching style that is termed "call and response." This refers to an arrangement where the professor is simultaneously a teacher of the class and a student in the class. It is a pedagogical technique consistent with the affective orientation of affiliative relations or inter- and intra-personal utilities. During this teacher-as-teacher presentation of the material, whether in the interrogatory or declarative voice (the call), students are free to speak to what you say and/or to what other students are saying (the response). These latter responses inform and educate the teacher-as-student. This of course is the teaching arrangement that characterizes, for example, many African-American church meetings or Native-American powwows or Hawaiian gatherings.

The second pedagogical style involves becoming, as much as feasible, a member of the affective group whom you are teaching through "in-dwelling" their set of affective-oriented traits. One may undertake this rather difficult task in the Jungian sense of "I am and I am not and that which I am not is also part of me." Such undertaking should facilitate the teacher seeing better the inherent power of the current economic paradigms as well as their significant limitations. In turn, these limitations should provide knowledge of the nature of the difficult avenue that affective-oriented groups of students must travel if they wish to arrive at a common destination of gaining a powerful category of analyses together with a way of critiquing this category.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has set forth some ideas about teaching affective-oriented groups that devolve from a consideration of their language, their values, and their knowledge production. Limited validity but never absolute validity may be defended for these affective traits. Consider, for example, the actual case of a group of affective-oriented African Americans who decided to put on a community festival in Los Angeles one year. They planned together, they worked together. Since they had little money, each member of the community donated their respective skills and/or materials for various tasks. Some tasks demanded more time and effort than others. The festival was a resounding success. Next year, the local government provided funds to put on the festival. Unfortunately, community members began to set a money value on their formerly donated services. Competition based on self-interest emerged among members of the community. Each sought to maximize his/her own acquisition of money. People demanded justification for why some members were receiving more money than they. The festival had become an object divorced from themselves. Acquisition of numerical dollars determined their self-worth rather than the growth in the harmony of interpersonal and collective relationships. Affect and symbolic imagery had disappeared. The festival became a resounding failure and has not been held since, to my knowledge. Analysis of this behavior is susceptible to affective-oriented techniques. Such behavior, however, points to the area in which research is critically needed, namely, the specification of the dynamic process which characterizes the economic movement from affective behavior. In terms of the community festival, what is the nature of the mechanism that switched them away from affective-oriented behavior? Such research is vital to the maintenance and growth of affective-oriented, collective welfare.

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