**Gender and inequality in the workplace: lessons from Institutional and Marxist-Feminist perspectives**

Imko Meyenburg and Sandra Selmanovic

**Abstract:** Gender discrimination and inequality in the workplace are pertinent issues in the contemporary labour markets across the developed and developing world. The aim of this chapter is to outline two frameworks, namely Williamson’s New Institutional Economics (NIE) framework and the Marxist-Feminist framework of social reproduction as well as their historical roots, which allow the conceptualisation of gender discrimination and inequality in the workplace from a structural perspective. The root causes of these forms of discrimination and inequality are allocated to the wider social context of either i) different formal and informal institutional settings in the case of the NIE framework or ii) the exploitation and alienation within the capitalist mode of production. The chapter outlines the relevant methodological principles inherent in these two frameworks to illustrate, with reference to relevant literature, how these can help the interested reader in guiding and conceptualising their research. Where relevant, the chapter supports the theoretical assertions with empirical research and practical examples of gender discrimination in the workplace, which helps us to formulate preliminary policy implications. The chapter closes with a summary of the distinct advantages of the two frameworks and, in the light of these different advantages, a call for methodological pluralism.

1. **Introduction**

While the empirical investigation into existing gender inequalities and discrimination in the workplace, and beyond, provides an important field of research, the theoretical conceptualisations about gender and the root causes of inequality itself play an equally important role for the researcher to inform and reflect on their ontological, epistemological and methodological presuppositions and principles. This chapter aims to help the interested researcher to reflect on those epistemic and methodological principles, and potentially guide them in their endeavours, by outlining two exemplary conceptualisations of gender inequality and discrimination in the workplace, and beyond, from the theoretical contributions of Old and New Institutional Economics and the intersection of Marxist-Feminist literature[[1]](#footnote-1). The focus here shall remain on epistemological and methodological principles, with the ontology of gender itself not being discussed in detail as it would go beyond the scope of this chapter. Furthermore, the historical literature presented here is mostly binary in its conceptualisation of gender, but the argument will be made that the reviewed principles are also applicable to non-binary gender conceptions.

In addition, the reason for presenting more than just one theoretical contribution to the topic lies in the authors’ support for pluralism, and consequent rejection of methodological monism. This support rests on the presupposition of “the absence of a single conclusive final methodology or epistemological principle” (Samuels, 1997b, p. 67), which has been discussed widely in the relevant literature on pluralism in economics (see, for instance, Caldwell, 1982, 1997; Dow, 1997, 2000, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2014; Garnett, 2006, 2011; Lee, 2011; Mäki, 1997; Negru and Bigo, 2008; Negru, 2009, 2010; Samuels, 1997a; b, 1998). Consequently, this implies not only the recognition, but active, normative promotion of pluralism in economics and in general (Meyenburg, 2018). Secondly, the two exemplary schools of thought chosen here in recognition that phenomena of gender inequality and discrimination in the workplace cannot be studied in the isolated setting of the workplace itself but must include the study of the wider social strata as well.

Furthermore, this chapter will apply definitions of gender discrimination and gender inequality following the taxonomy of the European Institute for Gender Equality (2020, a, b), where the former is defined as

[a]ny distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field

while the latter refers to the

[l]egal, social and cultural situation in which sex and/or gender determine different rights and dignity for women and men, which are reflected in their unequal access to or enjoyment of rights, as well as the assumption of stereotyped social and cultural roles.

Since the development of original working definitions is beyond the scope of this chapter, the definitions of the European Institute of Gender Equality (2020) are applied here, as they are well suited to our purposes. They clarify that gender inequalities are to be understood more holistically with their legal, social and cultural roots, whereas gender discrimination, specifically in the workplace, could be understood as a specific instantiation of such inequalities. It is argued that the two main differences clarified in these definitions align well with the essence of the two theoretical frameworks presented here, which aim to explain gender discrimination in the workplace as a specific manifestation of inequalities found in contemporary societies.

This chapter begins with a review of literature from Old and New Institutional Economics followed by Marxist-Feminist literature on the questions of the origins of gender inequality and discrimination, not only in the context of the work-place but also beyond, in order to provide the aforementioned epistemological and methodological guidance. This literature review followed an approach in which integrative, argumentative and systematic literature review methods are combined to approach the different types of literature (historical, contemporary, theoretical, and empirical) available for the two frameworks presented. At the end, conclusive comments are made on both the reviewed literature, the need for pluralism and potential future applications.

1. **Institutionalist perspectives on gender-related discrimination**

Institutions are social phenomena that affect all spheres of human life and they are, as shall be argued in the following, particularly relevant for understanding and studying gender-related inequality in the labour market and workplace. In the four sections that follow, first Williamson’s (2000) New Institutional Economics (NIE) framework is introduced, suggesting that it is suitable for studying issues of gender inequality in the labour market. Then an outline of the adopted definition of institutions is given together with a brief overview of the historical evolution of institutionalism as embedded in the institutional economics literature. An emphasis is placed on the writings of Thorstein Veblen, the father of (the original or old) institutionalism, his views on gender equality and their relevance to the NIE framework. Thereafter, we provide examples of contemporary studies on gender inequality in the labour market linking them to each level of the NIE framework. Finally, the focus moves on gender-related wage discrimination and the need for institutional change to address gender-related labour discrimination.

**2.1 The NIE Framework: relevance of formal and informal institutions**

In his article, “New Institutional Economics: Taking Stock, Looking Ahead”, Williamson (2000) writes: “I open my discussion of the new institutional economics with a confession, an assertion, and a recommendation. The confession is that we are still very ignorant about institutions. The assertion is that the past quarter century has witnessed enormous progress in the study of institutions. The recommendation is that, awaiting a unified theory, we should be accepting of pluralism” (Williamson, 2000, p.595). Almost two decades later, as will be discussed in the following, his statement could not be more relevant for the economic discipline in general and for labour economics in relation to gender discrimination in particular. The core of his article centres around a neat synthesis of institutional thought in economics, which are summarised in his NIE framework and can be expressed in four interdependent levels (Williamson, 2000, p.597):

* Level 1: “Embeddedness”: referring to “informal institutions, customs, traditions, norms, religion”. This is the fundamental level, which influences all others and changes to this level require hundreds or even thousands of years.
* Level 2: “Institutional environment: formal rules of the game-esp. property (polity, judiciary, bureaucracy)”. Change at this level can take decades or centuries.
* Level 3: “Governance: play of the game-esp. contract (aligning governance structures with transactions)”. Changes at this level take between one and ten year(s).
* Level 4: “Resource allocation and employment (prices and quantities; incentive alignment)”. Change happens constantly at this level.

According to Williamson (2000), Level 1 refers to informal institutions, which change very slowly, often over many generations. It comprises all sorts of informal rules and norms relating to behaviour and culture. These directly influence and are influenced by Level 2 institutions, which also change relatively slowly and consist of formal laws and regulations, with a particular focus on property rights. The purpose of Level 2 institutions is to establish the rules of the game prior to transactions. The intersection between Levels 1 and 2 bears high potential for conflict, if informal institutions are not compatible with the rules of the game. In order to provide for the enforcement of Level 2 institutions ex post, contracts are needed and the governance of contracts is the focus of Level 3 in Williamson’s NIE framework.

Level 3 is about creating the right governance structures, which entail contractual relationships that create order and minimize conflict. Changes at this level are quicker, between one and ten years, whilst changes on Level 4 are continuous. Level 4 is characterised by neoclassical economic analysis and focuses chiefly on outputs, prices and the firm. Finally, Williamson (2000) includes an additional level to his NIE framework, Level 0, which in turn is highly influenced by the first two levels (Hodgson, 2007): “an evolutionary level in which the mechanisms of the mind take shape” (Williamson, 2000, p.600). This basic and behavioural component of the NIE framework is gaining in importance in the economics discipline including studies on gender-related discrimination, as will be discussed further below.

Before addressing each of the levels of the NIE framework in relation to gender discrimination in the labour market, some definitional and historical aspects surrounding the concept of institutionalism need to be clarified. The contemporary meaning of the term “institution” can be traced back to the 18th century in English language, while its roots can be found even earlier in Latin and French writings (Hodgson, 2006). Different meanings have been assigned to the term by various authors and here two exemplary ones have been chosen to be presented. Hodgson (2006) provides a detailed discussion of the concept and the numerous uses and connotations provided in the literature. He proposes the following definition: “[…] systems of established and prevalent social rules that structure social interactions. Language, money, law, systems of weights and measures, table manners, and firms (and other organizations) are thus all institutions” (p.2). He further defines organisations as “special institutions”, since they involve rules, membership structures and hierarchies (Hodson, 2006).

North (1992) proposes a distinction between formal institutions and informal constraints in his definition of institutions: “Institutions are the rules of the game of a society or more formally are the humanly devised constraints that structure human interaction. They are composed of formal rules (statute law, common law, regulations), informal constraints (conventions, norms of behavior, and self-imposed codes of conduct), and the enforcement characteristics of both” (North, 1992, pp.5-6). Hodgson (2006) disagrees with such a distinction: “if all rules are formal, and institutions are essentially rules, then all institutions are formal” (p.11). This is problematic as certainly institutions can constrain behaviour without being formal, one example being, according to Hodgson, “gender in various countries” (p.12).

Hodgson (2006) suggests that informal institutions need to be clearly defined or explicitly named to avoid misleading uses, which are abundant in some of the institutionalist literature (Hodgson, 2006). For the purpose of this review of gender-related labour discrimination from the institutional perspective, sections 2.1 to 2.4 all directly relate informal institutions to Williamson’s (2000) NIE framework introduced above (Level 1) and thus define them as: nonlegal, nonexplicit, but established systems of social rules, which are manifested in, for example, culture, religion, tradition, customs, beliefs and habits of a society. Formal institutions are always dependent on informal ones (and vice versa) and the effectiveness of new formal institutions is largely determined by the corresponding informal institutions. Consequently, there is potentially significant conflict between formal and informal institutions. For example, formal rules may be put in place by the state to ensure equal participation in political or economic life by women (e.g. electoral quotas or gender quotas on company boards), but if the respective informal institutions do not support equal participation, formal rules may not be enforced and are hence of little use (Elson, 1999; Waylen, 2014).

**2.2 Historical evolution of institutionalism in economics and the relevance of Thorstein Veblen**

In modern economics, institutions gained prominence in the 20th century. Whilst Veblen, Mitchell and Commons are considered to be the founders of institutionalism, it was Prof. Walton Hamilton (1919) who coined the term institutional economics (Rutherford, 2001). Institutionalist economics, unlike neoclassical economics at the time, was very much empirically grounded and initially focused on employing natural scientific methods to study economic phenomena[[2]](#footnote-2). Institutional economists undertook statistical work and policy analysis for the government. In terms of labour markets, institutional economics focused on “wage determination”, “labor relations issues of collective bargaining and systems of conciliation and mediation” (Rutherford, 2001, p. 181).

Institutionalism was highly popular in economics in the United States (US) between the two World Wars, but lost in importance thereafter. According to Rutherford (2001, p.183): “[…] institutionalists failed to develop their theories of social norms, technological change, legislative and judicial decision-making, transactions, and forms of business enterprise (apart from issues of ownership and control) much beyond the stage reached by Veblen and Commons”. It did not clearly lay down how it related to contemporary psychology, one of its main claims initially. Contemporary psychology began to shift its focus from habits and instincts to behaviourism, which was difficult to align with economics. At the same time, there was a disciplinary split between politics, economics and sociology in higher education departments, whereby sociology departments, including their strong focus on institutions, were separated from economics in the US (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Rutherford, 2001).

Nevertheless, in Europe, the Austrian School of economic thought, amongst others, kept some institutionalist thought alive as reflected in the writings of Friedrich Hayek. Hayek embraced liberalism and consequently favoured a very limited involvement of government in the economic sphere, which, in his view, could only be effective if the associated “cultural rules” were compatible (Boykin, 2010, p.10). Keynesian economics gained more popularity from the 30s onwards and econometrics gained prominence amongst neoclassical economists, whilst they too started to focus on issues relating to institutionalism. Institutionalism then distanced itself from the positivistic paradigm it had advocated for heavily at the beginning (Rutherford, 2001). Institutional thinking re-emerged more recently in the form of New Institutional Economics (NIE), attempting to advocate for more embeddedness of evolutionary psychology and cognitive science into economic thinking (Coase, 1984), whilst also drawing attention to organisational and technological innovation (Williamson, 2000).

As mentioned above, it is Williamson’s NIE framework and its respective institutional levels that will be illustrated and suggested for application to the issues of labour related gender inequality in this chapter. Prior to this however, the work by Thorstein Veblen, the father of institutionalism, is summarised here for two reasons. Firstly, it substantially influenced Williamsons’ (2000) own framework and directly relates to the first two levels of the framework. Secondly, Veblen himself significantly contributed to the question of gender and equality and subsequently influenced generations of institutionalists as well as this chapter.

Veblen made substantial contributions to feminist thinking and gender (Veblen, 1899) and his work in the area has been analysed by various contributors (see, for example, Miller (1972), Ryan (1982), Greenwood (1984) or Gilman (1999)). Waddoups (1992) provides an overview of Veblen’s work on gender discrimination and emancipation in an attempt to interpret it and establish links to new institutional feminist thinking. Eradicating or minimising discrimination lies at the heart of institutional economics and Waddoups (1992) criticises neoclassical and Marxian theories for overly focussing on the economic sphere whilst viewing individuals who do not participate in the latter as of a lower category, largely excluding them from analysis. He claims that, by not focussing on institutions, in particular informal ones, these theories seem unable to analyse gender discrimination phenomena (Waddoups, 1992). However, as will be shown in the analysis of Marxist thought and gender-related labour discrimination in the second part of this chapter, the methodological tools to study gender discrimination phenomena had been well established in Marxist structuralist theory.

According to Gilman (1999), Veblen was a feminist. Whilst the term “feminism” was only coined in 1913 in the USA, its core characteristics were central to Veblen’s work, i.e. 1) strong commitment to gender equality; 2) any differences in “social status” between genders are “socially constructed”; 3) it is unethical to assign a superior social status to men (p.691). Two articles, published only months before Veblen’s seminal book, The Theory of the Leisure Class (1899), focus on gender, i.e. “The Beginnings of Ownership” and “The Barbarian Status of Women”, which according to Gilman (1999) should be considered as prologues to The Theory of the Leisure Class and the latter “[…] emerged directly out of a critique of women’s subjugation” (p. 694).

The first of the two essays mentioned above suggests that the earliest form of individual ownership manifested itself in the capture and exclusive ‘consumption’ of women as opposed to land seizures which represented communal ownership. The second essay explained the barbarian status of women for which marriage is a major reason. Barbarism is defined by Veblen as “[…] the transition from a peaceable to a predatory habit of life. Throughout barbarian culture, where this tenure of prowess prevails, the population falls into two economic classes: those engaged in industrial activities, and those engaged in such non-industrial pursuits as war, government, sports, and religious observances” (Veblen (1934, p.44) in Gilman (1999, pp.696-697)). These “barbaric” circumstances gave rise to gender-related labour discrimination and a much higher value was assigned to work predominantly performed by men, whilst tasks mainly performed by females started to be seen as inferior. Marriage is a key manifestation of barbarism according to Veblen since it stands for ownership of women by men. He writes that in marriage, “[…] it is the woman’s place to love, honor, and obey” ((Veblen (1934, p.58) in Gilman (1999, p.698)). Veblen vehemently opposed gender-related labour discrimination since it prevented labour from realising its full potential, increasing economic inefficiency.

Building on the above articles, in his “The Theory of The Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions”, Veblen establishes ownership as an important institution tracing its origins to the ownership of individuals, particularly women (Veblen, 1899). In Veblen’s view, women are constantly overpowered and dominated by the head of the household, the man, and their status varies with the level of economic development. For example, Veblen (1899) writes:

“The women being not their own masters, obvious expenditure and leisure on their part would redound to the credit of their master rather than to their own credit; and therefore the more expensive and the more obviously unproductive the women of the household are, the more creditable and more effective for the purpose of reputability of the household or its head will their life be. So much so that the women have been required not only to afford evidence of a life of leisure, but even to disable themselves for useful activity” (Veblen, 1899, pp.180-181).

Waddoups (1992) provides examples of this: the corset in England or feet binding of Chinese girls, which disables them from doing productive work. The fact that in many societies (still today) females (have to) accept practices of male dominance and oppression (e.g. genital mutilation) from an early age and often do not view them as such, perpetuates their unequal status in society.

Veblen (1899) postulated that the leisure class, i.e. the segment of society, which is not involved in any productive or industrial work, is assigned a higher status than are workers involved in useful industrial production. He writes: “[…] the upper classes are exempt from industrial employments, and this exemption is the economic expression of their superior rank” (Veblen, 1899, p.2). “Manual labour, industry, whatever has to do directly with the everyday work of getting a livelihood, is the exclusive occupation of the inferior class. This inferior class includes slaves and other dependents, and ordinarily also women” (Veblen, 1899, pp.2-3). Veblen also remarked that “The institution of a leisure class is the outgrowth of an early discrimination between employments, according to which some employments are worthy and others unworthy” (p.5). According to Veblen, unworthy employment is considered by the leisure class to comprise tasks traditionally assigned to women, such as material shaping. Women would not be considered worthy enough to perform men’s work, which would go as far as “[…] in many hunting tribes the man must not bring home the game which he has killed, but must send his woman to perform that baser office” (Veblen, 1899, p.8).

Veblen also commented on aesthetics whereby men define what is beautiful in females: “It is unfeminine in her to aspire to a self-directing, self-centred life; and our common sense tells us that her direct participation in the affairs of the community, civil or industrial, is a menace to that social order which expresses our habits of thought as they have been formed under the guidance of the tradition of the pecuniary culture” (Veblen, 1899, p.163). Hence informal institutions play an important role in Veblen’s analysis of gender discrimination and emancipation. With the rise of capitalism, the work traditionally performed by men received even more recognition, status and acknowledgement as opposed to the work in the household performed by females (Veblen, 1899; Waddoups, 1992; Gilman, 1999). Discriminatory practices in the workplace today can hence be traced back to, inter alia, the devaluation of female labour historically, mainly in the household, as well as their ownership by men.

**2.3 Empirical relevance of the NIE framework**

Waylen (2014) conceptually analyses the importance of informal institutions (Level 1 of Williamson’s NIE framework) for institutional change and gender equality. Her work is motivated by the fact that, despite major advances in women’s rights over the past five decades, unequal power relationships and gender discrimination still exist in many spheres of socio-economic and political life. Institutional change is mainly conditioned by informal institutions and she argues that informal institutions always need to be analysed alongside formal ones (see also Azari and Smith, 2012; Grzymala-Busse, 2010), whilst gender is an important aspect of institutions (Acker, 1992; Chappell and Waylen, 2013; Lovenduski, 2005). Nowadays there are many gender-neutral formal institutions, but informal ones are still prevalent, e.g. “[…] dress codes and the sexual division of labor” (Waylen, 2014, p.217).

A field experiment conducted by Drydakis et al. (2018) on labor outcomes in Great Britain shows that when CVs of females contain references to male personality traits (e.g. as reflected in their hobbies), they are more likely to get access to occupations than those displaying female personality traits. They are also more likely to secure better paid positions (Drydakis et al., 2018). The conflict that can arise between formal and informal institutions is clearly demonstrated here: despite the existence of formal institutions that are meant to ensure gender equality in terms of access to labour, informal institutions such as the perception of the value of labour seem to still play an important role, even in developed country contexts, such as Great Britain.

The situation is exacerbated in developing country contexts where Elson (1999) finds that females work considerably longer hours than men and their role as an economic agent as perceived by society is considerably influenced by religious practices. There are lower female labour participation rates (Jarvis and Vera-Toscano, 2004), which is a major reason for lower household incomes in these contexts (Ferrada and Zarzosa, 2010; Contreras and Gallegos, 2011). Female workers in developing countries often transfer their earnings from agricultural activities to men of the household (e.g. in India (Agarwal, 1986) or Pakistan (Hafeez, 1989)). Hence, females undertaking paid work are not necessarily being empowered, but it could be an even deeper form of discrimination and inequality (Elson, 1999). Once women earn an income, there is also a danger that other income sources (e.g. from male family members) will be reduced or cease to exist (Folbre, 1994). Discrimination in these contexts seems to be even more rooted in informal institutions, despite evidence showing that more focus on equality, democracy, inter-gender cooperation and inclusiveness when organising labour, increases productivity in the work place (see, for example, Hodgson (1984); Pagano (1991); Bowles and Gintis (1997)).

The components of Level 1 of the NIE framework, i.e. habits, norms, culture and religion, directly influence the institutional environment on Level 2. In the context of gender-related labour discrimination, property rights and political institutions are of particular importance. For example, Meinzen-Dick et al. (1997) show that women in many contexts have historically faced high barriers to owning property or controlling resources in general. This can be observed in the UK where, before the introduction of the Married Women’s Property Acts in the 1800s (and especially the Act of 1870), women were considered the sole property of their husband with rights substantially inferior to their male partners (Combs, 2006).

The stark differences across countries are demonstrated by Deere et al. (2013) who show female ownership of the joint wealth of married couples to be 44% in Ecuador, 19% in Ghana, and 9% in Karnataka (India) (Deere et al., 2013). Policies of large-scale privatisation of land in African countries have exacerbated gender-related inequalities in favour of men. In addition to prevailing informal institutions of male ownership, privatisation has led to most land being owned by male heads of households, whilst particularly poor rural women have been disadvantaged and left with even less access to land ownership than previously under indigenous customary systems of land tenure (Lastarria-Cornhiel, 1997).

The constrained access to property and resources is a major limiting factor for females’ participation in the workforce. Effective political institutions are needed to address the latter, mainly through hard (binding) and soft (voluntary) legislation on equal participation of females in the labour market (Casey, Skibnes and Pringle, 2011; Terjesen, Aguilera and Lorenz, 2015). This varies considerably across different national and cultural contexts, with Nordic countries having some of the most advanced/equal gender-related policies and Muslim countries having some of the most restricting. In an analysis of institutional factors that impact on gender quotas in management boards of firms, for example, Terjesen, Aguilera and Lorenz (2015) provide a detailed overview of gender equality policies in 25 countries and identify three factors that are particularly conducive to increasing gender equality. These include a left-leaning governing party or coalition, a high level of family-friendly national policies (e.g. generous maternity/paternity leave provisions), and path dependency in terms of a historical record of gender equality initiatives (Terjesen, Aguilera and Lorenz, 2015).

More female participation in politics could help address these factors and Chappell (2010) advocates for a research agenda that compares different settings in the area of gender in politics. She argues that a comparative approach across space and time will deepen the understanding of gender-related issues in politics. She views gender as “a process within institutions” (p.184). Gender is understood differently in different institutional settings and a comparative approach towards their analysis may help identifying successful institutional change that improves gender equality (Chappell, 2010). In the view expressed here, whilst this approach bears potential for uncovering and addressing gender equality issues, caution needs to be exercised when drawing lessons from comparisons between very different contexts where gender has different meanings and conceptualisations, since Level 1 institutions will largely determine the success of Level 2 institutions. In her research on institutional transfers in the area of innovation policy, albeit not focused on gender, Selmanovic (2015) finds that institutional transfers are more likely to succeed if informal institutions, particularly culture, have similar dominant traits (see also Espino and Underhill-Sem, 2012; Ridgeway and Kricheli-Katz, 2013; Fernandez, 2013 for the relevance of cultural characteristics on gender systems).

Whilst Level 2 of Williamson’s (2000) NIE framework represents ex ante institutions, i.e. those that are in place prior to any transactions between human agents, Level 3, the governance level, refers to institutions that are agreed ex post. The main focus here is on contracts and due to the scope of this review, only marriage and employment contracts were selected as particularly relevant examples of gender-related labour discrimination. With her book, The Sexual Contract, Pateman (1988) made an important contribution to feminist thinking with a special focus on interpreting contracts in gender relations. One of her main arguments in this contribution is that in classical contract theory, individual freedom is always stipulated when in reality every contract establishes some kind of power relationship whereby domination and subordination are central features of contracts (Pateman, 1988). Three decades later, she neatly links the legally implicit asymmetry of power in employment contracts to the marriage contract:

“In the traditional marriage contract, when a single woman said “I do,” she thereby became a wife, subordinate to her husband, who decided how the property in her person should be utilized. In Anglo‐American jurisdictions, it was not until the early 1990s that the last remnant of the legal powers of husbands was finally eliminated. The employment contract can be seen as the exemplification of free labor if it is held that pieces of property are for sale, not, as in slavery, a person. But it is impossible for an individual to send a piece of the property in their person to a workplace. That is the fiction. The worker has to be there too if the property is to be “employed.” But workers are instructed how to use their property by a boss; by entering the employment contract, the worker becomes a subordinate” (Pateman, 2015, pp.1-2).

She observes that whilst a lot has changed in the nature and content of contracts in recent times, e.g. same sex marriage in many states or improvements in participation and working conditions of females, parts of the sexual contract are still prevalent in society across all cultures (Pateman, 2015). In some cultures, marriage still establishes de facto ownership of females by their husband, for example in a large part of the Muslim world. In terms of employment, major gender imbalances still exist in terms of both participation and the nature of work performed by males and females. For example, Petrongolo (2004) analyses a large data set from the European Community Household Panel Survey containing information on employment data of men and women across 15 European countries between 1994 and 1999. She finds that females are more likely to be subject to “atypical” labour, i.e. part-time and temporal work. Job satisfaction with part-time work is lower in Southern European countries than in northern or central European countries (in some northern European countries it is actually higher), whilst temporary work reduces satisfaction for all females, albeit more so in the south than the north (Petrongolo, 2004). Gash and McGinnity (2007) show on the basis of the same data set that in France and Germany women have suffered from significant pay gaps in comparison to men and temporary contracts have been particularly disadvantageous for French females in contrast to their male counterparts (Gash and McGinnity, 2007).

Albeit very limited in scope, the discussion above demonstrates the importance of contracts (Level 3 of the NIE framework) for gender-related labour discrimination. The characteristics of contracts on this level directly translate into Level 4 (neoclassical economics, resource allocation) where prices, costs and wages are determined. Female wage discrimination is a particularly relevant example of how one can relate this level to gender-related labour discrimination. The so-called wage gap is being widely debated by scholars (Blau and Khan, 2007, 2017; Weichselbaumer and Winter-Ebmer, 2005; Gash and McGinnity, 2007; Christofides et al., 2013) and in policy circles (Boll and Lagemann, 2018). It is encouraging to see that in many settings, particularly in Europe, the gender wage gap has considerably decreased. However, the discrepancy in earnings between equally-skilled/educated male and female employees for the same work is still high in many places around the globe.

**2.4 Gender-related wage discrimination and institutional change**

An abundant literature has emerged in the area of gender-related wage discrimination since the 1970s and the subject area of labour economics has flourished with empirical and micro studies on the subject (Weichselbaumer and Winter-Ebmer, 2005; Drydakis, 2018). Only a few relevant examples can be appraised here, but these persuasively demonstrate the nature of this global phenomenon and the importance of institutions. For example, Christofides et al. (2013) examine the gender wage gap across 26 European countries on the basis of a data set from the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions in 2007. They find significant wage gaps in all countries examined, albeit to very different degrees, and that these are strongly influenced by country-specific political and institutional factors, mainly policies in relation to work-family reconciliation and the nature of labour market regulation. Countries with generous work-family policies tend to have smaller gender wage gaps as do countries with more regulated labour markets, i.e. strong labour market formal institutions (Christofides et al., 2013). This contribution shows that in a relatively large set of countries (the European Union), which share a high proportion of formal intuitions, informal institutions, albeit not measured here, are highly relevant for gender-related wage discrimination and the effectiveness of the related institutions on levels 2, 3 and 4 of the NIE framework.

In a recent contribution, Blau and Kahn (2017) investigate the levels of and reasons behind the gender wage gap as well as the related trends between 1990 and 2010 in the United States. They find that the wage gap has substantially decreased during the period under consideration, however a significant wage gap still exists in the US. The largest reduction took place in the 1980s and since 1990 it has been declining at a much slower pace. Education levels of females have increased substantially, topping those of men, and their levels of experience have also risen. Consequently, the proportion of the unexplained gender gap (the gap that does not relate to education levels or experience) has decreased substantially, however again mainly in the 1980 and has since been stable (Blau and Kahn, 2017).

Blau and Khan (2017) also find that the top earning females (those in the 90th percentile in terms of earnings) had the highest discrepancies in wages in comparison to men and this wage gap has been the slowest to close throughout the period under consideration. This could suggest the existence of a “glass ceiling” (p.804) whereby women face higher obstacles when attempting to enter top positions in the labour market. Garcia, Hernandez and Lopez-Nicolas (2001) obtain similar results for Spain where they show that the higher the position, the higher also the discrepancy between earnings of men and women: for the top 50 per cent in terms of earnings in their sample, there is a 12 per cent wage gap and for the top 10 per cent the gap is 15 per cent (Garcia, Hernandez and Lopez-Nicolas, 2001).

There has been a recent surge in the literature examining the relevance of psychological factors for gender-related wage discrimination (see, for example, Mueller and Plug, 2006; Semykina and Linz, 2007; Fortin, 2008; Manning and Swaffield, 2008; Nyhus and Pons, 2012; Reuben, Sapienza and Zingales, 2014). This strand of literature is directly related to Level 0 of the NIE framework, i.e. “an evolutionary level in which the mechanisms of the mind take shape” (Williamson, 2000, p.600) and bears potential to create promising insights into the underlying reasons for gender-related labour discrimination, which are not directly observable or measurable quantitatively. These include, for example, attitudes towards negotiation and risk, self-confidence, career orientation, locus of control, and the importance of family over money, amongst others (Blau and Khan, 2017).

The short discussion of gender-related labour discrimination viewed through the institutional lens and the application of Williamson’s NIE framework to some concrete issues around gender related labour discrimination shows that the NIE framework, albeit simplistic, is sufficiently comprehensive and well-suited as a conceptual lens for the analysis of institutional factors of gender-related labour discrimination. Its focus on the interconnectedness of the various levels and the compatibility of Level 1 and Level 2 institutions are particularly relevant for the topic of gender discrimination in the labour market and workplace. The above discussion also revealed a strong need for institutional change on all levels of the framework. Such change, albeit to a varying degree depending on the Level of the NIE framework, is usually slow and for the most part endogenous as well as context specific.

Waylen (2014, p.217) identifies four types of institutional change as defined by Mahoney and Thelen (2010): “Displacement” (replacing old with new institutions), “Layering” (simultaneous introduction of new institutions alongside old ones), “Drift” (institutions get a new meaning) and “conversion” (working within existing institutions and using any opportunity to adapt them). She advocates for layering and conversion to be more appropriate strategies to achieve gender equality (as opposed to drift and replacement), since they are “gradual, endogenous and potentially more achievable when actors have sufficient power to create some new rules or use existing rules in creative ways but not enough to displace these existing rules” (p.219). Opting for the somewhat more gradual strategies for institutional change seems reasonable since the resolution of conflicts between formal and informal institutions is of central importance for the success of institutional change.

Whichever type of change is embraced, it is important to note that institutional change is a central theme of feminist movements (see, for example, Kenny, 2011; Waylen, 2007, 2011) and feminism has a particular interest in the interaction and change of various forms of institutions and their impact on gender within the institutional environment. Furthermore, viewing change in the context of gender relations through an institutional lens may be particularly valuable since such change could be a precursor for much wider institutional change in society (Mackay, Kenny and Chapel, 2010). It is evident that institutional theory and gender are highly interlinked on various levels and the above discussion has demonstrated the potential of Williamson’s (2000) NIE framework to enrich the analysis of gender-related labour discrimination issues.

The next section reviews Marxist-Feminist literature on the questions of the origins of gender inequality and discrimination in the context of the work-place and beyond.

1. **Marxist-feminist perspectives on gender-related discrimination**

While Marxism is predominately known for class analysis within the capitalist mode of production at its core, lessons can be learned from Marx and his analytical tradition about gender inequality for both theoretical and empirical inquiry. Indeed, such lessons can be found in a plethora of literature at the intersection of Marxist and Feminist theory, which have been written over the past few decades (see, for instance, Dalla Costa & James, 1970; Wood, 1981; Brown, 2012; Fraser, 2014; Bhattacharya, 2017; Gimenez, 2019; Pettinger, 2019). While the scope of this chapter would not allow delving into all the aspects and discussions of this literature, some of the most relevant methodological principles Marxism offers the reader to analyse gender inequality in the workplace, will be presented here. As mentioned above, most of the reviewed literature has primarily a binary gender view, i.e. male-female distinction, in its application of those principles. Thus, it will be argued, and shown, that they continue to be applicable when moving away from this gender dualism towards a wider, non-binary concept of gender.

**3.1 Why Marxism in context of gender discrimination and inequalities**

Marxism, with its roots in the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, can broadly be described as the philosophical study of society, political economy and history. The methodological basis of Marxism is a mixture of Hegelian dialectics combined with, or enriched by, a materialist focus, i.e. the aforementioned study of society, political economy and history must be grounded in material conditions of reality. Thus, Marxism and its rich body of literature provides the interested reader with principles to analyse contemporary social issues with reference to the material conditions underlying even the most complex social structures. Especially the Marxist project of discovering the underlying and invisible structures and laws in the capitalist mode of production seems most fruitful here as a starting point for the proposed inquiry into gender inequality and discrimination, because “the systematic study of appearances [i.e. the visible social relationships] cannot provide a scientific knowledge of social reality”, instead one must uncover those structures “and laws of motion of the capitalist mode of production concealed by the visible reality created by its functioning” (Gimenez, 2019, p. 54). Forms of gender inequality in the workplace, together with other forms of social discrimination in the workplace and beyond, such as unequal pay, unequal education, domestic violence, childcare and a high share of female domestic work responsibilities, are mere visible manifestations of underlying social structures determined by the capitalist mode of production.

Hence and firstly, the methodological principles of Marxism dictate that the analysis of those visible appearances of social formations must be accompanied by the systematic investigation of the underlying structures of social reality to gain scientific knowledge about these appearances. Without the investigation of those invisible social structures one will fail to fully understand these visible manifestations. Secondly, only the study of structures and laws and their functioning will allow the interested reader to understand their historical origins and future evolution (Gimenez, 2019). Thirdly, precise scientific knowledge about any social phenomena can only be gained by recognising its historical specificity and not by the use of general categories. That is to say that “there is no production in general (…) instead, there is capitalist or feudal or subsistence production. (…) there is no general production or general reproduction, [they] are always particular, e.g. industrial production, reproduction of specific social classes, etc.” (Gimenez, 2019, p.351, italics in the original). The following section will investigate the historical and contemporary application of these principles to illustrate their analytical depth and utilisation.

**3.2 A short introduction to gender in Marx**

While Marx himself did not develop a substantive theory on gender, Brown (2012, p.3) shows that he has written some works on (a binary view on) gender and family that go beyond conceptually including women in the proletariat labour force only. According to her interpretation of Marx’s writings, the category of gender is essential for “understanding the division of labour, production, and society in general”. A central aspect for Marx to understanding the structure of society, and consequently the relationship between men and women, is that of labour alienation. “Alienation is not merely the loss of control over the product” (Brown, 2012, p.24), instead alienation makes labour under capitalism inhumane because wage labour is forced upon the working class for survival, and the product of this labour, i.e. goods and services, are no longer the workers by default and must be purchased instead. The entire existence of the individual within capitalism requires the participation in its mode of production where labour is alienated through the separation from its work and the outcome of its work, the commodity, and where members of this society must take part in the exchange of commodities for survival. But alienation goes beyond the workplace, “[w]hat is true of man’s relationship to his labour, to the product of his labour, and to himself, is also true of his relationship to other men” (Marx, as cited in Fromm, 2004, p.56). While Marx, historically determined, focuses much on traditional work, and according to Di Stefano (1991) is predominately masculine biased, alienation remains a contemporary relevant concept. For instance, a number of scholars have applied this concept in their critical, political economy analyses of communication and digital media (as initially developed by Smythe, 1977, p.6, and subsequently build on by, for instance, Andrejevic, 2002; Artz, 2008; Cohen, 2008; Fuchs, 2014; Jarrett, 2016; Lee, 2011; Manzerolle, 2010; McGuigan and Manzerolle, 2014; Napoli, 2011; Shimpach, 2005; Scholz, 2013), especially when considering that “the principal aspect of capitalist production has become the alienation of workers from the means of producing and reproducing themselves”.

**3.3 From Marx to Social Reproduction**

Especially this latter idea of the capitalist mode of production, and the inherent alienation of workers, being present not only in the relationship between wage labour and the production of commodities but also in the 'reproduction of oneself' has motivated the development of a range of Marxist inspired social reproduction theories concerned with everyday life under capitalism (see, for instance, Dalla Costa & James, 1970; Fraser, 2014; Bhattacharya, 2017; Pettinger, 2019). The central goal of these theories is to establish an understanding of what the underlying, necessary processes are for “the worker to arrive at the doors of her place of work every day so that she can produce the wealth of society” (Bhattacharya, 2017, p.1), such as the role of education or recreational processes outside of work and so forth. The focus of investigation here is the relationship between material production and daily and generational reproduction of human beings in society, whereas the conceptual starting point is to say that i) labour is always “at the heart of creating or reproducing society as a whole” and ii) the role of “oppression (gender, race, sexuality) (…) as structurally relational to, and hence shaped by, capitalist production” (Bhattacharya, 2017, p.2-3). Moreover, this particular relationship has intensified and changed over time due to the fact that “the socially reproductive sphere [is] being increasingly pervaded by logics of market dependency and commodification (…) meaning that ever more practices, relationships, times and spaces, which formerly deepened non-capitalist relations and life practices (…) are being co-opted into the capitalist system of production” (LeBaron, 2010, p.907; see also Wood, 1981). This creates a special kind of power dynamic between these two spheres which establishes and continuingly enforces oppressions and inequalities, even if this socially reproductive sphere is actually outside of the simple capitalist/labour relationship (see, also, Wood, 1981). Here, again, the above mentioned methodological principles of structuralist analysis can be seen at work, but with an extension in its application towards non-waged labour and activities. This is further evident in Gimenez's (2019, p.69) argument that one needs to have such a structuralist analysis of oppression, specifically “it is necessary to first analyse the structure of the household as a mode of reproduction” in the capitalist society. As she argues, “[w]orking-class families live off the sale of their labour power of their adult members and rely on the domestic labour of [predominately] women for the daily and generational reproduction of labour power” (Gimenez, 2019, p. 73).

Therefore, working-class women are placed in a special position within the capitalist mode of production as they are not only part of the proletariat, owning nothing but their own labour power to sell, but also providing domestic, unpaid labour necessary for enabling the adult (predominately male) member of the household to earn wages which give “access to the material conditions of reproduction”, i.e. consumption of goods and services, while simultaneously i) creating and maintaining material consumption through social reproduction and ii) being put into a position where they themselves have “little or no access to those conditions” (Gimenez, 2019, p.76). The relational power dynamics Gimenez (2019) is referring to here is the nuclear family, which she argues is determined by the underlying social structures of the capitalist mode of production, distribution, consumption and social reproduction. Importantly, those social formations and the dynamics of the division of labour in areas such as domestic work, childcare etc. in the capitalist society cannot be reduced to the male-female relationship in the context of biological reproduction only. The differences between men and women in terms of physical reproduction of the species are not enough to explain the complex social differentiations and the resulting power dynamics and kinds of oppression. Instead, any analysis of types of inequality must “be sought in the articulation between class relations or relations of production and the relations of physical and social reproduction” (Gimenez, 2019, p.69). In addition, Gimenez (2019, p.353) argues that production always determines reproduction, because the former establish the material basis for the latter, which “implies that some forms of the mode of reproduction are structurally excluded, while some possible forms are more likely than others”. This means that the dominance of the classic nuclear family arises from its symbiosis with the capitalist mode of production, whereas other possible forms of social institutions are more and more structurally excluded the less they are compatible with the capitalist mode of production.

**3.4 A continuation on gender in Marx**

Marx himself, together with Engels, makes a number of similar observations regarding the particular role of both bourgeoisie and working-class women, and the sources of their oppression, throughout his work. In The German Ideology (Marx and Engels, 1970, pp.50-52) they describe the gender inequality in the family, “where wife and children are the slaves of the husband”, by reference to the division of labour in its natural and social dualism, whereas the former refers to the biological division in procreation and the latter to “the co-operation of several individuals, no matter under what conditions, in what manner and to what end”. In his Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 Marx (1844) criticises the institution of marriage in which women are exclusive private property, and consequently argues that in order to overcome these inequalities between genders such social institutions must be overcome (Brown, 2012). Third, in The Holy Family, Marx and Engels (1845) discuss gender alienation with reference to prostitution in Eugène Sue's novel “Les mystères de Paris” (1844). As Brown (2012, p.37) summarises, “Marx points out the difficult situation faced by working-class girls and women. As members of the proletariat, they have nothing to sell but their own labour and, when there is not enough productive work, women are forced to sell their bodies in order to survive”. The oppression those women face is the result of their economic situation within the capitalist society where survival requires participation in exchange, as well as the other underlying social formations they face. Lastly, in his article “Peuchet: On Suicide”, Marx (1999) discusses the topic suicide, for the first and only time in his writings, as a (extreme) manifestation of women's oppression in the bourgeoisie family (Anderson, 1999; Löwy, 2002; Brown, 2012). Out of the four suicide cases he discusses, three centre around young bourgeois women and the investigation of the reasons of their suicides. Despite all three cases having different motivations for suicide, Marx (1999) identifies the commonality of them in the existing power relations inside the bourgeois family these women are members of. As Löwy (2002, n.p.) concludes, the essay “amounts to a passionate protest against patriarchy, the enslavement of women, including bourgeois women, and the oppressive nature of the bourgeois family”.

**3.5 Limitations to Marxism and the role of Feminism**

Despite these applications of Marxist methodological principles to the question of women's oppression, there are a number of authors who have outlined limitations to these principles or have outright rejected Marxism for the analysis of, at least, women's oppression. Di Stefano (1991), as mentioned above, sees Marx's writing as particularly masculine “in at least three ways: an aggressive discursive style, a teleological and dualistic ontology; and in his discussion of labour as primarily male labour” (Brown, 2012, p.12-13). Marx therefore fails to fully grasp the nature of human labour by omitting work that is traditionally done by women of his time. Leeb (2007) argues that Marx is failing to overcome binary hierarchies in his writing on working-class women and not making the link between capitalism and patriarchy, evidencing that he is “unable to overcome the nature/culture dualism (…) deeply embedded within [his] consciousness under capitalism” (Brown, 2012, p.16).

Federici (2012), on the other hand, admits that Marx's lack of discussion of domestic, unpaid work done by women is not only contingent with his chauvinism but also due to historical factors, especially considering the fact that the nuclear family, as described above by Gimenez (2019), did actually not exist in the form known today and instead, women, along with men, worked long hours in factories. However, as she argues, the feminist critique of Marxism developed from the 1970s mostly revolves around the contention that Marx’s analysis of capitalism has been hampered by his inability to conceive of value-producing work other than in the form of commodity production and his consequent blindness to the significance of women’s unpaid reproductive work in the process of capitalist accumulation. Ignoring this work has limited Marx’s understanding of the true extent of the capitalist exploitation of labour and the function of the wage in the creation of divisions within the working class, starting with the relation between women and men (Federici, 2012, p.92).

Hartmann (1997, p.97), while seeing the merge of Marxist and Feminist as necessary and beneficial from both an analytical and methodological point of view, warns that earlier attempts to do so have been unsatisfactory because the feminist struggle has been considered subordinate to class struggle, and that Marxism is inherently “sex blind”, thus evidencing serious limitation in its ability to analyse the phenomena of sexism. However, as the previously mentioned literature on social reproduction theories has shown (LeBaron, 2010; Fraser, 2014; Bhattacharya, 2017; Gimenez, 2019; Pettinger, 2019), the application of Marx's methodological principles here provides a unifying approach to the analysis of the structures on the macro level and individuals on the micro level in the economy. It allows a more thorough inquiry into gender and racially segregated paid and unpaid work as well as into visible and hidden processes, tendencies, privileges, disciplinary and/or power relations within the sphere of daily and generational social reproduction that are still determined by the capitalist mode of production (Dalla Costa and James, 1975; Wood, 1981; LeBaron, 2010; Fraser, 2014), even if Marx did not enquire into these topics himself. Hence, the shortcomings of Marx’s work should not be taken as a basis for rejecting his methodology. As Brown (2012, p.210) concludes, “[i]t is true that Marx's writings on gender and the family are located sporadically throughout his work, and he does not provide a completely worked-out theory of gender-relations. However, this does not necessarily mean that Marx was not interested in understanding gender-relations, or that he was a sexist”, instead he “showed considerable insights into the gender-relations of his own time, pointing to the need for a total transformation of society”.

**3.6 A summary of Marxists-Feminist methodological principles**

In conclusion, Marxism provides the interested reader with a number of methodological principles, and an ontology, that allow one to conceptualise gender inequality and discrimination in the workplace as a particular appearance of social relations that are determined by the capitalist mode of production. To paraphrase Gimenez's (2019, p.44) conclusion about the role of women in the capitalist society and loosely extending it to other genders, “the discussion of the position of women [and other genders] within capitalism (…) cannot end without a brief discussion of some of the contradictions and antagonisms”, such as

1. Male dominance over means of production, exchange and consumption as conditions for physical and social reproduction and its link to visible oppression of women and other genders, for instance in the form of the nuclear family or other forms that are compatible with the capitalist mode of production.
2. Contradictory interests arise as a result of the division between those with access to means of production and those without, members of the working-class are antagonised by members of the capitalist-class even if they have otherwise common interests due to their struggle arising from point 1. This is why, as Gimenez (2019) argues, there is no strong, mutual feeling of sisterhood among women across classes despite their shared oppression in the capitalist society.
3. An antagonism between members of the working-class resulting from a scarcity of jobs in the gender and sex segregated labour markets, creating the formation of the reverse army of labour (Engels, 1887; Marx and Engels, 2010) and leading to competition among those members for employment necessary to gain the means for consumption and consequently for physical and social reproduction.
4. An antagonism between members of the middle class and working class perceived as 'class differences' in the context of social stratification, whereas members of both of these categories make their living almost exclusively from selling their labour power. Thus the material differences between those different groups are mere manifestations of the underlying position in the capitalist mode of production, with the proposed dualism between owners of means of production and owners of labour power only.
5. Additionally, the contradictions between members of the working-class arising for their competition in the labour market as mentioned in 3., while simultaneously cooperating in physical and social reproduction in social formations such as families, whereas these forms of modes of reproduction themselves must be understood in the context of their position in the capitalist mode of production and the subsequent alienation etc. described above.

Given those five points the argument here is that there is no reason that these methodological principles cannot be extended beyond the binary categorisation of gender in the male-female dualism and the specific discussion of oppression of women found in the literature, as evidenced by Jarrett's (2016) critical discussion of alienation in the context of queer theory, McNally's (2017) linkage between the aforementioned social reproduction theories with intersectionality, Sears' (2017, p.171) enlightening discussion of “the general dynamics of sexuality in relation to capitalist reproduction”, Hartsock's (1983) inquiry into women's oppression and the institution of motherhood, or Hartmann's (1997) attempt to combine Marxism and Feminism for a successful analysis of patriarchy under capitalism. Therefore, the three main lessons one can learn from Marxism are these: First, the different forms of gender, and also racial, oppression and discrimination noticeable today in, but also outside of, the workplace are visible manifestations of the underlying structural features of the capitalist society and its predominant mode of production. Second, any scientific analysis of these manifestations must always be undertaken together with an investigation into the underlying, invisible social structures with respect to the predominant mode of production. Thirdly, “the study of the internal functioning of a structure must precede and will throw light on the study of its coming to being and subsequent evolution” (Godelier, 1970, p.347; Gimenez, 2019, p.54), meaning that the historical analysis of the manifestations in question can only be done successfully if a prior understanding of the contemporary social structures is established.

1. **Summary and a way forward for policy makers**

In this chapter a number of methodological principles from (New) Institutional Economics and Marxist-Feminist theory have been offered to conceptualise gender discrimination and inequality in the workplace by appreciation of the wider social context. Specifically, the NIE framework by Williamson (2000) allows us to understand persistent forms of discrimination in the context of different institutional levels and their potential conflicts, which evolve and change over time but at a different pace depending on the level. As a consequence of these different evolutionary paces, forms of discrimination can persist in society due to being present in one level of the institutional setting (Level 1) whereas they are actively removed from others (e.g. Level 3). Furthermore, it has been argued that for this reason the analysis of Levels 1 and 2 in Williamson’s (2000) framework is particularly important to understand forms of specific labour market and workplace discrimination. Arguably, initiating changes to remove forms of discrimination at these levels through intentional changes in higher levels through legislation is rather difficult, but it has been shown by reference to relevant literature that it is not impossible. Thehe difficulty of having different institutional levels from which different forms of discrimination arise require not only a more holistic conceptual framework, as it has been argued here, but also more unconventional and creative policy solutions to overcome these issues.

The Marxist-Feminist literature, on the other hand, allows the conceptualisation of gender inequality and discrimination in the workplace as a particular appearance of social relations that are determined by the predominant mode of production, in this case the contemporary capitalist mode of production. As a result, it has been argued that any analysis of the visible forms of workplace inequality and discrimination can only be achieved in combination with an investigation into the underlying, invisible social structures with respect to the predominant mode of production and their internal functioning. Of particular relevance are the dominance and ownership over the means of production, exchange and consumptions as conditions for physical and social reproduction as well as several contradictions and antagonisms arising from i) different social classes, those with access to the means of production and those without, and/or ii) competition among those of the same class for the means necessary for physical and social reproduction.

As it can be seen, both bodies of literature offer the interested reader different conceptual frameworks, but they are united in the approach to understand specific forms of inequality and discrimination in the workplace in the context of the wider social context, either through the relationship between different types of institutions or the way the mode of capitalist production shapes social relations. What are the implications for policy makers of these frameworks then? As already indicated above, in the case of Williamson’s (2000) framework policy is implemented, depending on the aim, at levels 2 to 4 only, with varying degrees of successful implementation periods. Informal institutions on the other hand are difficult to change by policies, and there might even be instances of resistance. However, this framework also argues against a one-size-fits-all policy approach and instead promotes policies that are specifically designed for the relevant social and cultural environment. For example, Selmanovic (2015) shows that institutional transfers in the area of innovation policy in the ICT sector in developing countries, which can increase female participation in the labour market, are much more likely to be successful, if the reference context from which the formal institution or policy is imported is similar in terms of informal institutions, especially locally dominant cultural traits. Likewise, the Marxist-Feminist framework outlined above requires caution and context sensitivity in any policy design, first-and-foremost to avoid, at least, the support of the aforementioned contradictions and antagonisms identified in the capitalist mode of production. Instead, policies should not only be designed so that, for instance, gender pay equalisation, equality of opportunities in jobs and training as well as political participation is achieved, but instead to also recognise the work done, predominantly by women, identified in the social reproduction of labour and to create policies which change the above identified structural inequalities existing here. This can further be extended to the question of the relationship between social reproduction within the capitalist mode of production and the necessity of maintaining the ecological environment the human race lives in.

This contextual characteristic is, as it is argued, a strength of these frameworks for the investigation of any type of discrimination, in the workplace and beyond. In the light of the strengths and weaknesses of these frameworks the authors wish to abstain from outlining a clear preference, in fact allowing to have a choice between these two, and potentially more, frameworks must be actively encouraged (see Meyenburg, 2018, for a comprehensive argument). Interested scholars should explore these, and other, conceptual frameworks to inform their research in the future.

**Cross References**

Gender Stereotypes and Gender-Typed Work

Gender, Gender Self-Perceptions, and Workplace Leadership

Gender Roles and Families

Masculinity, Femininity and Workplace Outcomes

Gender Wage Gaps and Skills

Gender and Income Inequality

Gender and Precarious Work

Gender Mainstreaming Poverty and Social Inclusion

Trans People, Transitioning and Well-being

Gender Identity Minorities and Workplace Legislation in Europe

Discrimination against Transgender Employees and Jobseekers

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in the Workplace: A Review on Employees’ Experiences

Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation in Later Life

Labor Force Status of Transgender Men and Women

Social Interaction Methods

Ethnicity, Race and Minorities

Social Integration and identity

Migration and culture

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2. Rutherford (1999) and Yonay (1994, 1998) detail the debates between institutionalists and neoclassists of the 1920s and 1930s around the scientific validity of their respected approaches, in other words which one of them counts as ‘modern science’. Whereas the intensity of these debates was at their height in the interwar period, the directions of these two schools were already argued for much earlier. Founder of Institutional Economics Thorstein Veblen (1898) wrote that the basis for modern economics should be an evolutionary approach, while for Francis Edgeworth (1881, p. v) the analogy must be drawn “between the Principles of Greatest Happiness (…) and those Principles of Maximum Energy (…) [in] which mathematical reasoning is applicable to physical phenomena quite as complex as human life”. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)