



# “Process not Product”: Rethinking Feminist Teaching Across Disciplines with Autoethnographic Dialogues

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## Abstract

In this paper, an interdisciplinary team of authors analyzes a series of autoethnographic dialogues addressing their approaches to teaching within and beyond gender studies environments. Sabine Klinger (education studies, social work; Austria), Nicole Pruckermayer (architecture, art, community education; Austria) and Daniela Jauk (sociology, criminal justice; Austria and US) are ethnographers, educators, and identify as feminists. They explore their sometimes similar and sometimes very different approaches of applying these intersections strategically in their feminist teaching praxes. The authors use autoethnography as method and as vehicle for analytic writing and self-interrogation in three voices. They referred to taped and transcribed dialogues and engaged ethnographic memoing for their analysis. They contextualize their experiences within the framework of “rhetorical modernization” (Wetterer, *Achsen der Differenz. Gesellschaftstheorie und feministische Kritik II*, Westfälisches Dampfboot, Münster, 286–319, 2003) and the “new gender contract” (McRobbie, *Top Girls. Feminismus und der Aufstieg des*

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neoliberalen Geschlechterregimes, Springer, Wiesbaden, 2010) which both denote a re-traditionalization of gender discourses. Keeping in mind these contemporary developments, we explore the question of whether and how it can make sense to use feminisms in teaching and scholarly work to offensively and subversively shape and inspire critical thinking and practice. It is not our goal in this paper to present feminist teaching as a canon or part of a canon. Instead, we have developed an awareness in our dialogues that science is historically constructed along axes of inequality.

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**Keywords**

Feminist pedagogy · Feminist teaching · Autoethnography · Higher education · Feminism

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## 1 Preamble

This paper is the product of bringing to the table our differently “disciplined” approaches to gender studies and to feminisms. Academic knowledge production is a deeply gendered process we re-construct in our teaching. Reflection and exposure of a heteronormative and patriarchal bias in knowledge production processes are essential strategies of feminist critiques of science and feminist teaching. We conceptualize feminisms as plural in our theory-building and practice in order to avoid the misconception of feminism as a monolithic block. Using plural feminisms also embraces the diversity in feminist thought brought to the table by queer, Black, transnational, disability studies, intersectional and many other researchers from around the world. We cannot and will not offer an exhaustive literature review on feminisms or on feminist teaching, feminist teachers or gender-sensitive didactics (a term that has been introduced and marketed more recently in European higher education institutions) in this paper.

What we offer is an exploration of feminist teaching in and beyond gender studies programs in interdisciplinary perspective against the backdrop of repressive gender discourses and backlash. How do we do feminist teaching? How can we integrate feminisms in structure and content of learning environments? What is the interplay between feminist didactics and feminist content? These are some of the questions we asked ourselves in hopes to open up the box of “feminist teaching” and share what we found in it. In this sense the paper is not a finished analysis but a start of a conversation that hopefully continues across disciplines, countries, and feminisms.

## 2 Methods/Process

We, the authors, have taught in various constellations, at various Austrian and US universities, in various disciplines in gender studies programs and other disciplinary programs (sociology, education studies, art/architecture), as well as in public, community, and adult education settings. We gathered in preparation for the Fourth Austrian Gender Studies Association Conference (Jauk et al. 2016) and started to ask ourselves questions about our teaching practice. We began conversations around the questions: What are the characteristics of a feminist learning environment? Can there be a "feminist teaching" at all? Is teaching necessarily feminist solely by discussing gender issues? How can we transport feminisms and feminist ideas in classrooms beyond gender studies programs? Are we comfortable using the "F-word" (feminisms) in every teaching context? As scholar-activists we continued the conversation in a local radio show (Pruckermayer et al. 2017) and presented a first analysis of the material in writing (Klinger et al. 2019). We crafted a performative ethnographic piece for the Eighth Rethinking Educational Ethnography (REE) Conference in June 2019 in Graz/Austria and are indebted to all participants and reviewers from the REE network who helped us sharpen our lens for this chapter that is a snapshot in time of our current process.

Over the course of two years, we met in workshop-like gatherings, and we taped and partially transcribed these conversations that were structured around the questions above. Our "trialogues" became data and offered new themes for further conversations. These autoethnographic explorations are based in feminist theories and praxes of "situated knowledges" (Haraway 1988). We strive to acknowledge the relevance and situatedness of each specific and subjective perspective on feminist teaching. In our trialogues, we compare and sometimes melt our perspectives into a more intersubjective framework that works for us, but we remain aware that "objectivity" is a chimera that has been utilized as instrument of power in the sciences. Aligning with Haraway (1988), we strive to disintegrate this power, as "feminists don't need a doctrine of objectivity that promises transcendence" (p. 579). We choose to be responsible for our words and actions and make visible their contexts and potential flaws.

Along these lines, we do not wish to distill "a" theory of feminist pedagogy or stage a "feminists' competition." We embrace autoethnography as a methodological framework because it allows us to discuss our feminist disciplinary praxes critically. We can also be vulnerable in these explorations and sometimes uncover unconscious bias and privilege and also celebrate the awareness that we

have local and limited knowledges. There is no need to be generalizable, because “feminist objectivity means quite simply situated knowledges” (Haraway 1988, p. 581). In our conversations, we have realized that our different disciplines do not necessarily require fundamentally different approaches to feminist teaching. Here we find spaces of solidarity and commonality across the boundaries of disciplines and geographic academic cultures. In particular, we are interested in how we can be aware about mechanisms of in/equality, domination, and in/exclusion that are engrained in academic work praxes and structures. The reflection of academic work praxes seems particularly relevant as we are confronted with rhetorical modernization (Wetterer 2003, 2013) and “politics of disarticulation” (McRobbie 2010) not only among the students in our classrooms, but also among co-workers, in media, and the social environment. The question is how can we address the backlash without provoking rejections that cloud or completely eliminate a learning experience?

According to Angela McRobbie, young women today are offered a new gender contract that includes the disarticulation of feminist claims and contents in a new gender discourse. For the price of silencing feminist voices, white, middle class women are offered the social perk of becoming more visible in public spheres of labor market, education system, as well as consumerist and civil culture (McRobbie 2010). We wonder, might it make sense to not use the F-Word obtrusively in feminist teaching and art, and to work in feminist manner more subversively? Along the lines of the proverb “actions speak louder than words,” we wonder if it is sometimes smarter to work with this disarticulation and have a “feminist attitude” in a given learning environment and to consistently use participatory feminist didactics instead of the “F-word.”

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### 3 Biographical Pathways

Even if this text is a theoretically traversed autoethnography, in describing our own experiences and subjective experience, we transgress the boundaries between the therapeutic, the political, and the scientific (Ellis and Bochner 2000). It is about taking our own embodied experiences as a source of knowledge and change for feminist teaching. bell hooks illustrates this knowledge-making when she says that classrooms can be a space “where teachers were willing to acknowledge a connection between ideas learned in university settings and those learned in life practices” (hooks 1994, p. 15). This confrontation with (our own and foreign) feelings and experiences is an inevitable and indispensable part of the autoethnographic research and writing process (Ploder and Stadlbauer 2013, p. 375).

Autoethnography is particularly suitable for the interdisciplinary discussion and (self-)reflection with feminist conceptions of teaching and artistic interventions in the practice of scientific work. It operates at the boundaries between science and art and thus also at the borders of the respective discipline (Ploder and Stadlbauer 2013, p. 401). Grappling with these boundaries can inspire new insights as well as sharpen and accentuate the (self-) understanding as teachers, researchers and artists. Limits, whether of disciplines or of one's own self-image, can be questioned and altered. Also, in our choice of autoethnography as a method of research and as a form of scientific writing, we already see a significant (subversive) feminist impetus, since this creates and links the reflection of power and hierarchy with an emancipatory claim (Ploder and Stadlbauer 2013, p. 395). Our dialogues are simultaneously the process and product of research (Ellis et al. 2011).

We teach in various constellations at various German and English-speaking universities that often have what we called "normative classrooms" in our dialogues. In these normative teaching and learning contexts, retrievable knowledge is prioritized over the reflection of social norms, orders and hierarchies. By neglecting implications of gender, sexuality or (in the worst case) normative action towards the students (e.g. by insisting on gender dichotomy), oppressive norms are reinforced. Normative teaching is also expressed in the dichotomy between teachers conceptualized in a hierarchical relationship with the students. Reflecting upon the setting of the classroom has a clarifying effect. In the non-normative classroom, we recognize the importance of (self-) reflexivity as an essential feature of feminist research (Hesse-Bibber and Piatelli 2012) and teaching (Schlüter and Justen 2009). We realized that our individual pathways to (feminist) teaching need to be a unit of analysis, and we start out here by introducing the authors-team and their respective individual backgrounds in our own voices:

S.K.: I am a partnered, childless cis-woman who grew up in rural area. I am the youngest of four daughters. From my early childhood I remember a story about my birth that my parents told me: I apparently cried a lot in the first minutes of my life and because my father wished he had a boy the midwife interpreted my crying as sadness over not being a boy. I always found this story strange and it made/makes me feel uncomfortable and insufficient. I guess that is way I have always been very sensible about gender issues and inequality. In my family I am a first-generation college student with a PhD in education and training. Currently I am teaching and researching at the university of Graz (Austria). My main topics are feminist, gender, and migration research and processes of digitization in social work. I have studied education and gender studies and was interested in gender issues since the beginning of my university education. I deepened my knowledge by attending numerous seminars, discussions with fellow students, family and friends, as well as my choice to

be pedagogically active in gender-related fields of work. Furthermore, it was and is natural for me that I am to be interested in gender issues and critically question normative, hierarchical, polar notions of gender roles, relationships and orders. However, in exchange with others, I have noticed that this consideration of gender as a (pedagogical) relevant category is far from being shared by everyone, and that my position often requires seeking? legitimacy and is seen as an individualized interest or individual orientation. For me, I wonder why the feminist thematization of gender in educational thinking and pedagogical action is often considered obsolete, when (in my view) a reflective treatment of the sexes is not (yet) part of (social) pedagogical practice.

D.J.: I was about 13 years old when I painted a Venus symbol ♀ on my green 70s wallpaper in my nursery with red car paint, to the horror of my parents. The room was in a house in a remote Styrian village. The village was so remote it lacked a grocery store. In the midst of wealthy farmers, my household was blue collar working class. Patriarchy and domestic violence fuelled by alcoholism were dominant norms across all classes and backgrounds. I have dedicated my life and work to this feminist symbol of women that I marked upon my mural. In my work as a social worker and in my political work as a women's representative of the city of Graz, I have collected many individual life stories of women, girls, and transgender people, which I later tried to understand in a sociological framework. I completed my PhD in sociology in the USA where I am now married with a child – a heteronormative exterior for a (still) queer identification and intention. In recent years I have taught at various universities in Austria and the USA, but I come from the field of feminist group work with girls, and I have experience in adult education and facilitating workshops. Currently, I am helping to build and evaluate organic gardens in women's prisons in a feminist participatory action research framework. As of the fall of 2019, I embarked on a tenure track journey as an assistant professor for Sociology and Criminal Justice. I move within this field of tension that on the one hand, I am part of a normative and disciplining 'prison industrial complex,' and on the other hand, I strive to work against this system, at least to slightly undermine or erode it.

N.P.: I am currently working as a freelancer, an artist, a cultural worker and a forester. I have studied biology and architecture, and hold a PhD in visual culture and cultural anthropology. I am married and have a child, and I have taught at various Austrian universities, mostly in the field of contemporary art, but often in connection with gender-sensitive topics. In retrospect, I would say that I grew up as a tomboy, at that time I did not know the term yet. I was proud when strangers identified me as a boy. My parents did not try to bend me. My father wished he had a boy, and so he supported my then classic male education as a structural engineer and later as an architect. He absolutely wanted me to get a truck driver's license, and later on I pleased him with my extended training in forestry. And yet there were limits. People often told me subtly or less subtly that I was invading a foreign domain and did not belong have lost nothing here. At the age of fifteen, I could not grasp these structurally limits structurally. But through continuous search, countless discussions, books, and the many courses in gender studies that have emerged since the 1990's, I developed a clearer picture of what constitutes the impact of expected

gender dichotomies. I have also encountered possibilities of emancipatory and feminist concepts of life, which, irrespective of whether they are now in the field of content, have shifted my focus of interests from initially strong technical orientations, to including media art into areas of humanities, art and cultural subjects of the natural sciences which are highly similar, sometimes completely interchangeable.

What we all have in common is that we teach in feminist ways and we often experience resistance or negative reactions when we introduce feminist content in classrooms and art projects. Contemporary feminist teaching takes place in a context in which misogyny and anti-feminism are (again) socially acceptable (Scambor and Jauk 2018). We encounter audiences claiming that feminism is an outdated topic and that they have no interest in engaging with it. Schlüter and Justen (2009) also address the fact that many students have a defensive attitude towards gender issues. Social transformation processes obscure gender inequities. For instance, the decreased publicity of gender-hierarchical contradictions can mask gender hierarchies and differential advantages, and the individualization of social conflicts frames gender work as a private task (Bitzan 2002, p. 30). All three of us have seen those student-faces disinterested, sometimes reddish-excited when the F-word (feminism) often consciously, sometimes unconsciously, is put into the academic learning and research space. Gender relations have started to evolve in contradictory ways in recent years. On the one hand, there seems to be a gradual weakening of gender-specific dividing lines in the world of work and employment (Kutzner 1999). On the other hand, an astonishingly stable persistence of gender hierarchies, differential power structures and even solidification can be observed more generally (Wetterer 2002).

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## 4 Analytic Framing of Our Subjective Experiences

The assertion of “no-longer-necessary-behavior” and the assumption of the existence of feminist politics are not particular and individual phenomena, but part of current social developments to which we now turn. As a theoretical reference frame, we use the concept of rhetorical modernization processes (Wetterer 2003) and a new neoliberal gender contract (McRobbie 2010). Wetterer (2003) describes a coexistence of equality and inequality and the discrepancy between the beliefs and actions of individuals. She uses the term “rhetorical modernization” to describe an innovation “that shows itself in discourse and language, but rarely in practice” (p. 12). She observed a gap between how people act in regard to gender roles and equality and how people think and talk about it. People think

that gender equality and equal partnerships are already a social norm, yet they do not live accordingly. This contradiction is resolved through de-thematization of inequality, which—while not eradicated—is protected from criticism. The hierarchical structure of gender distinction is excluded from individual experience and language repertoire and thus made invisible. Inequality is understood as the “consequence of a free and conscious choice” (Wetterer 2003, p. 298) for which the actors themselves are responsible; structurally created problems are thus personalized and individualized.

With this development, young and well-educated women from Western countries are pop-culturally exposed to “a new gender contract” (McRobbie 2010, p. 57) and “a kind of rhetorical equality” (p. 18). Women can now, for instance, participate in the public sphere and the labor market, have education and have some say about their reproductive desires and be consumers. The images of women produced in media performatively show the achieved successes and suggest that feminist interventions and criticism of patriarchal power relations are no longer necessary (Klinger 2015). However, in return for public visibility, women are implicitly expected to forego feminist policies and positions (McRobbie 2010). While this practice acknowledges the achievements of feminism, feminist social criticism is dismissed as outdated. Angela McRobbie calls this renunciation of feminist content and demands “politics of disarticulation” (p. 47). This process unfolds within the context of neoliberalism, in which the co-optation of emancipatory, feminist concerns is reduced to questions of gainful employment and competitiveness in a neoliberal market (Maurer 2006). While high education attainment level of women has become the gold standard of equality (McRobbie 2010, p. 113), women are not hired at the same rates as men, especially in positions of power. They are also still underpaid everywhere.

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## 5 Of Searching and Finding Feminist Teachings and Practices

In the following section, we explore the question of what constitutes teaching for us in a dialogic—autoethnographic process, which is located between scientific work and socio-critical impetus. We also explore the question of whether and how it can make sense to in teaching and scholarly work to use the F-word (feminism) explicitly and also subversively to shape and inspire critical thinking and practice. Our autoethnographic narration is not to be understood as a finished analysis and does not end with the production or submission of this text. It “becomes” only with the sensual, emotional experience of respective readers (Ellis and Bochner



2000). The text is thus to be provided as a process of understanding on the part of the writers. As writers/authors of this article we want to encourage the reader to co-produce meaning as we offer an examination of our subjectivity (Ploder and Stadlbauer 2013). This process is also connected to the tenet of feminist pedagogy to provide spaces and opportunities to reflect and break through hierarchies (hooks 2000), while not covering up the structural hierarchy between teachers and students (at least if unilateral grading systems are applied). There are no simple if-then causalities for the implementation of feminist teaching and practices. In the following sections, we provide three applications of our process of searching and finding feminist teaching practices. We deliberately chose to present our edited autoethnographic excerpts here, insinuating a feminist methodology that makes space for participants' voices (Sprague 2005) and also to represent the multivocality of an open, reflective, and vulnerable pedagogical practice. Despite the our differences, we converge in our attempts to 1) allow students to study the unusual and also the very usual invisible norms in order to better understand the social world; 2) shift focus away from the individual and towards social, historical and cultural contexts; and 3) trying to open multidimensional discursive spaces that including the non-academic community.

D.J.: I'm inspired by Halberstam's gagafeminism (Jauk et al. 2017). The "Art of Gaga" is "a policy of free fall, wild thought, and imaginative reinvention best represented by children under eight, women over 45, and the armies of marginalized, abandoned, and unproductive people" (Halberstam 2012, p. xv). For me this means to enable learning in non-normative places, and to allow students to study voices that are not usually amplified. What does this look like? It looks like an empty classroom at times, because we are out there in the community participating in a social protest or volunteering for a community organization. It looks like a full classroom at times because we bring in activists, artists, collaborators across campus and into our classrooms. In other words, we make room for people we typically do not see at the university and also making our classrooms accessible to them. My students enjoyed a drag queen in full gear talking about her performance art and drag kin networks for a lunch class. A student had urged me to invite her, and it was hard to say no, since I had promoted my feminist want for student led activities. Yet I was so scared of other students being disrespectful, asking "wrong questions," or "presenting her" like bearded lady in a circus tent. What if I cannot "control" the conversation and smooth over the discomfort that might arise among all of us? I supplemented with materials on queer kinship and we could contextualize with data on staggering homelessness of queer folk in the US due to discrimination and family strife. The end of the story is that it led to a really great encounter in the classroom. I felt the student who had made this connection was very proud that two seemingly different spheres are connecting in this conversation that evolved and in the fact that. Drag Queen was walking the college hallway in broad daylight. Femi-

nist teaching is taking risk. Getting out of that comfort zone. Making myself vulnerable. I try to supplement normative discourse and stray from textbooks. This also makes sense because textbooks cost an average of \$100.00 in the US and present exclusionary practice. I include other learning materials such as art, artifacts, and multimedia and have students suggest texts. I try to bring technology-positive and community-positive feminisms to the classroom. For instance, we can skype in a guest speaker from Guatemala (and at the same time reflect on access to technology, resources and activist discourses in less privileged regions), or we could invite cyberfeminists to teach us online feminist hacking. We can connect with local activists who fight food insecurity and plant community gardens. As a feminist teacher, I also want to bring students to communities in a resource-sensitive way, so that they contribute, and not burden. I want to co-create learning spaces and meet students as learners who are aware that they are responsible for equitable information input into our learning space. Sharing the construction of the learning space helps me convey to students that I am not a mechanical and consumer-oriented 'lesson automaton'. I want to evoke and endorse questions that feminisms do not exist in either/or spaces but in in both/and.

S.K.: For me, the question of the formation of subjects through social discourses arises again and again. This opens up perspectives on the interaction of different social discourses, by means of which central social norms are conveyed and in which individuals must orient themselves in their ways of life and existence. For this reason, it is important for me, in addition to conveying theoretical and technical content, to take greater account of the analysis of social discourses and their influence on processes of perception, action and evaluation together with the students. This means that the current social discourses and processes of social transformation are taken up in the theoretical conception and within empirical research. Considering this, together with my students, we re-negotiate the question of the socializing horizon of (de-)addressing gender and the meaning of feminism and feminisms before the background of neoliberal appropriation.

Here, the imparting of theoretical knowledge is just as central as the consideration of critical social diagnoses and gender-reflective and diversity-aware content. The theoretical references vary depending on the main focus of the course. An interactive instead of an instructive or unidirectional editing of the content is of great importance. I try to implement this renegotiation on different levels, including using interactive teaching methods, making connections with community members, and utilizing case studies and self-reflections. In order to communicate feminist content, a practice-oriented approach is very important to me. Students are particularly enriched by the guest lecturers from various feminist contexts and artists who are regularly invited to my courses. In addition to guest lectures, we use case-related collegial consultation (Schlee 2012), sociometric surveys (Ameln and Kramer 2014), observation assignments, analysis of newspaper articles and Youtube videos as didactical methods. In addition, I have had particularly good experiences integrating a biography-oriented approach to teaching. Especially when it comes to dealing with resistance, this self-reflexive level and the value-free survey of the respective realities of life is an important tool. The awareness of patterns of thinking and action as well as the lifting and harnessing of life-historical resources are important, since

social issues as well as aspects of education are subject to biographical influences, which often remain unconscious. Biography-oriented approaches offer important starting points and points of reflection. This involves raising awareness of patterns of thought and action as well as raising and utilizing life-historical resources, including gender-sensitive language. The focus of biographical work is not only on the individual, but also on the social, historical and cultural context. In addition, I recommend an interactive rather than instructive approach to gender and gender issues in order to identify individual references to the topic and make them useful for personal learning processes. An important part of biographical work is also to develop a common orientation of (self-)reflection and a feedback culture among students. One example of how I implement a biographical approach is via creative and self-reflective work. Therefore, I like to work with 'poetry slam' instead of an academic presentation or a seminar paper. The task of the students is to write and present a text or poetry which refers to their theoretical knowledge, practice-oriented experiences and self-reflexive biographical work. Let me give you one example: In a course with the focus on gender, diversity & intersectionality, students spent a semester learning about social categories of difference and belonging (race, class, gender etc.) while reading and discussing related literature. In addition, I encouraged the students to reflect on their own socio-pedagogical professional attitudes and on their biographical experiences in free writing sessions. The students presented their analyses in a poetry slam session at the end of term in the classroom. While rhyming, rapping, choral speaking and whispering students share their biographical work enriched with theoretical knowledge (see Klinger 2019 for details on this assignment).

N.P.: My actions and my thinking are profoundly shaped by the biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling. She has significantly shaped my view of gender identity. Her conception of a multidimensional sex space, in the early 1990s, knows no pole formation, such as male or female, sex and gender, but has a multi-dimensional axis system (e.g., genetic, cellular, hormonal, anatomical, environmental influences, experiences, age, etc.; see 1993, 2000). The dissolution of gender categories, together with the queering of our identities, offer enormously important processes that ensure humanity to all different genders. I am currently working on a larger interdisciplinary art, research, and peace project exploring issues of democracy in public urban space. My starting point was to promote a more realistic view of different genders in public spaces. This project focuses attention on dignity, a life without degradation and, above all, safe border crossings. The project is about framing a process of seeing and hearing people as fully-fledged individuals, while also reflecting upon our respective gender identities and challenges. With who we are and what we can do, we can work together to develop a positive vision of the future, but all genders must be brought in dialogically. In my work with students and others, I try to open discursive spaces that do not end in rigid counter-positions, but in the best cases, evoke a constructive response (Rosa 2016). Project-oriented and research-led work offers good opportunities here. In the context of teaching, it is important for me to open a safe space and then keep it consistently protected and reflective. Injuries and violent experiences (which include linguistic oppression processes) that occur within protected spaces are even more degrading than elsewhere,

as they strike within apparent security. I am convinced that with constructive criticism and “staying in the conversation,” we can negotiate (social) conflict situations, including those based on a lack of gender equality or the fact different needs of different genders are not addressed.

In our shared conversations we addressed the implementation of our feminist teaching. In doing so, we shared the experiences of repeatedly being confronted with resistance, defensiveness, and negative reactions. At the same time, our individual and context-driven handling of the F-word was different, which resulted in a lively and interested exchange. The essence of this discourse is presented along the following question: What can a feminist teaching attitude and practice look like that works with and/or without the term feminism or feminisms? What does our concrete handling of the F-word look like?

N.P.: From my experience, it's important to stay true to feminist teaching content. That is, the constant demand of feminist themes is necessary, otherwise they are easily disappearing, not out of intention but also out of habit, since otherwise they are often absent. For example, for many years I worked with definitely non-feminist activists, even in classrooms. It was more important to me not to allow a gender preference in my interactions with students or in the selection of illustrative examples – than to actively show a feminist attitude. Proclaiming a feminist conviction would have brought more problems than benefits. Which does not mean that I always choose a more subversive gait. Context matters. It has been my experience that in some contexts, I simply cannot listen when I say something offensively. And it is important for me to have a dialogue in order to have an exchange with someone else, not a confrontation. For me it makes sense to work subversively, because sometimes it is simply impossible not to do it! Gayatri Spivak's “Strategic Essentialism” (Spivak 1996) seems to have a possible answer here in order to remain able to have agency. Spivak is concerned that it may be politically necessary to think of identities, from a strategic perspective, to expose these identities as false and to point out the constructive character. The reflected action is the highest premise here.

D.J.: I'm very clear in most of the classrooms I've taught in and put the F-word on my hat. I carry it in front of me, I pronounce it, I put it in the middle of the room on the first day. I treat it like a diamond. I am proud of feminisms and all the thinking practitioners who have prepared paths for us. I think it's important to be transparent and authentic, and ‘feminist’ is what I AM, what I've always been, even though meanings of the word have changed for me and are always multiple. I make myself vulnerable and I advertise the F-word. When students get the ‘reddish-excited face,’ as they hear me out myself as feminist, sometimes I get scared, but I've never been ashamed. Then it is so wonderful and helpful to remind everyone that we are anchored in science and our work is evidence-based. Here I want to see data! Here I want to debate based on systematic research. My dear colleague and team-teacher Dr. Solveig Haring has taught me to make clear in the first class session that ‘private statistics’ are not welcome in this classroom. These are the individual examples and

exceptions that we all know. For example, the neighbour who earns more than her husband, who in turn cleans the house every week. Or the grandfather who was a chain smoker for 50 years and never got lung cancer. As a scientist, I want to see data. I want to help identify patterns. And I want to make one thing clear — wage differences, violence, gender stereotypes, the binary gender system as a forced corset for all people — it's not just about women. Feminism is for everybody (hooks 2000). Yet I admit, I also had the privilege of teaching in sociology and gender studies, which is a safe environment. I am sure that in architecture and technology classes I would encounter many reddish-excited faces and perhaps undermine my authority with this offensive F-word strategy. When I aggressively perform my feminism in the classroom, then maybe I take away the 'aha experience' and the surprise. I mean the surprise that comes when people learn to understand data and own it and see themselves that 'gender' 'sometimes literally destroys lives and opportunities and prevents life (keyword: selective abortions, femicide), without me telling them.

S.K.: In my teaching I deal with my own feminist attitude rather defensively. Also, I rarely use the F-word, especially at the beginning of a class. From my experience, feminisms are hardly known by students, or it annoys and only occasionally meets with approval from them. In order not to dazzle the students, as it were, with the gleaming and bright light of the feminist diamond (see above) in the middle of the room, I prefer to embody feminist principles and concerns (eg solidarity, questioning of normativities, pointing out structural inequality, taking the lives of the students seriously, to convey intersubjectivity, emancipation) and to act according to them. Different categories of social inequality (class, race, gender, age, etc.) are at the center. Here I also like to use didactic strategies of gender-reflected pedagogy. These are the dramatization, the de-dramatization and the non-dramatization of gender (Debus 2012, p. 150). Dramatizing approaches are useful, among other things, if the pedagogical work should encourage the participants to think about gender relations. I highlight gender differences in class to encourage students to reflect gender hierarchies and discrimination, and to make gender visible as a relevant structure of social inequality. This approach is necessary when students dramatize gender and bring gender stereotypes into discussion, especially if this happens regularly. For example, they may claim that women/girls or boys/men do not possess certain abilities, are particularly suitable for specific activities, are not allowed to wear these clothes or those colours, etc. One option is to first carry out one's own pedagogical dramatization, for example by talking about gender images and differences, in order to de-dramatize them afterwards.

Through a de-dramatizing approach, it can be made visible that gender is not the only difference category and to show individual differences within the gender groups. The strategy of non-dramatization is characterized by the fact that it keeps gender in mind, among other things as an analytical approach, but does not place it at the center of educational activities. Non-dramatizing offers a start in a room where gender is not set as central. The goals of this strategy are: promotion of individual diversity and individual competencies, addressing issues other than gender. Non-dramatization differs from de-dramatizing because they do not seek to relativize an initial dramatization but begin in a space in which gender is not (yet or

currently) defined as central (Debus 2012, p. 155). But it is important to stress that de- or non-dramatizing gender differences does not mean to ignore gender inequality or to become gender-blind. By focusing with the students on these strategies, they also start to learn more about an intersectional approach. While talking about and introducing other strategies and approaches it brings the students to a place where they are using the F word without rushing and reflect on a rhetorical modernization. This can also mean constantly questioning whether existing categories correspond to the complexity of human realities and asking the question of “other” categories and thus to include various systems of relevance. It is important to me to establish a fundamental social connection that is intertwined with the students’ entire life experience. For that it is important to me to make enthusiastic and not (always) to convince ‘combative and serious’. My goal is not to continue to transport the normativity of social expectations of competence and action in an unchecked manner. In my classes, it is important to critically scrutinize these norms themselves and, if necessary, to change them in relation to an alternative lifestyle and a more humane world. At the latest, if this ‘subversive’ strategy comes to fruition and the students want to be able to question their own ideas and prejudices at least once because of the content-related discussions, then it is time for me to say the F-Word proudly, offensively and enthusiastically. In this context, I require students to take distance from the surrounding world and to engage with a reflective and possibly new and unknown knowledge.

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## 6 Final Thoughts and More Open Questions

You may be disappointed now if you expected a classical academic paper, as our piece is characterized by multivocality, discrepancies and in-between spaces. It should instigate (self-)criticism and along the lines of situated knowledge (Haraway 1988) and it should be an invitation to connect and further explore together. From hooks (1994), we learn that teaching and learning means to give space to different forms of knowledges by creating connections between academic knowledge and lived realities. Autoethnography as a method is appropriate to navigate this endeavour as we understand it as an invitation to recipients, listeners, and readers to enter a dialogue with us. We do not attempt to present a perfect and streamlined taxonomy of what feminist teaching might be, but much rather we question the universality of such an idea and make transparent how our unique feminist stance in a classroom is shaped by our social locations and individual pathways and how we might further develop it together. Our goal is a pedagogical attitude that is characterized by empowerment which makes it possible to critically reflect and shape the world.

It is possible to be ambivalent and at the same time very clear about one’s own identities and values. In this sense, we also want to continue to reflect on our

own ambivalence towards the F-word and problems that come with our analysis. For example, the legitimate question arises as to whether it is paternalistic to deny learners the F-word and what image of teaching as a strategic interaction might underlie a subversive strategy. In addition to the already mentioned "strategic essentialism" (Spivak 1996) as a subversive and strategic perspective, an evolved form of gaga-feminism could point the way, making room for a creative combination of methods and didactics. For gaga-feminism is "a scavenger feminism that borrows promiscuously, steals from everywhere, and occupies the ground of stereotypes and clichés all at the same time." (Halberstam 2012, p. 5). In a gaga-feminist framework, we can "play," try, make mistakes, and experiment (as in this article), because "gaga feminism is a form of political expression that masquerades as naive nonsense but actually participates in big and meaningful forms of critique" (Halberstam 2012, p. xxv). Also, the question ambivalence arises for us as teachers who work in a system that we want to criticize and change at the same time. Meyerson and Scully (1995) call such individuals "tempered radicals." It is radical to want to change the system, but human beings have to act "tempered," often strategically and with moderation. In English, "tempered" means hardened, improve the consistency of something. A second interpretation of "temper" is "anger." So as feminist teachers we for sure are angry about power differentials, but we also live in and through them. We improve over time how we navigate systems of privilege and oppression. We may not act our anger outwardly at times, seemingly complying—having improved in our consistency and elasticity to grapple with them. Meyerson and Scully (1995) do not see ambivalence as a problem that needs to be "solved", but as a resource that allows nuanced action.

We are also ambivalent about the label "feminist" because it can become something static and loaded. We would thus like to conclude by reaffirming that we must repeatedly question ourselves in how we legitimize and normalize feminist discourses and thus make them instruments of power and empowerment by canonizing radical strands of knowledge. Instead, we should strive to denaturalize feminisms in self-reflexive practice and deliberately leave questions open, as Luke and Gore (2014) also show. If there is a preliminary conclusion of our dialogues, then it is not the one answer to the question of what exactly feminist doctrine is or the demand for it to be an exclusively pro-feminist doctrine. It seems more important to us that there should be no anti-feminist or misogynistic or xenophobic attitude and positions in teaching and science that ignores or distorts empirical results and science (sic!) stemming from inequality research. If we look to gaga-feminism in this piece we do this fully aware that gaga-feminism does not include a sufficient criticism of capitalist, neoliberal, and colonial structures, we

so desperately need. This is a topic for one of our next dialogues. However, there is agreement that we need feminist teaching as we move into a political climate characterized by radicalization, legitimized anti-feminism and social inequality. This paper is not a finished analysis, but rather a start of a conversation that hopefully continues across disciplines, countries, and feminisms. In conclusion, we deliberately do not offer a product here, we offer a process – and we hope you feel inspired to engage.

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