

Gender relations: From the standpoint of the subject¹

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Abstract

This article provides an insight into the qualitative study “Lernen über Geschlecht. Zwischen (Queer-) Feminismus, Re-Traditionalisierung und Intersektionalität” (Krämer, 2015). In addition to presenting this project, the article focuses particularly on the relevance of the subjective perspective for conducting research into long-term learning processes in the realm of gender relations and subsequent changes in agency. The research question of this project aims at understanding how people who engage with the topic of “gender” on different levels experience these learning processes themselves and how these processes result in changes of agency. Interviews and analyses are based on the grounded theory research style (section 3). The question is not how learning processes on gender relations can be observed, assessed, or represented from the outside. In the following article, selected examples illustrate how the subjective perspective in these processes is realised. As a result of the study, several areas of conflict are presented that learning subjects necessarily have to face and engage with. Any ensuing theories about conclusions and connections provide further findings as regards the theory and practice of Critical Psychology and (political) education.

¹ This article is an in-depth version of the article “Lernen über Geschlecht in Spannungsfeldern – aus der Perspektive des Subjekts“ that was published in the collection “Literalitäts-- und Grundlagenforschung“ by Anke Grotluschen and Diane Zimmer at Waxmann-Verlag in Münster in 2015 (pp. 285-300). An English translation of that article (“Learning about gender in areas of conflict: From the standpoint of the subject“) can be found online at http://blogs.epb.uni-hamburg.de/leaverlinkungsstudie/files/2015/09/Learning-about-gender-in-areas-of-conflict-%E2%80%92-from-the-standpoint_Kr%C3%A4mer_2015.pdf

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Keywords

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1. Background and rationale of the research issue in the context of feminist educational research and queer-feminist (critical) psychologies

My research is related to the history of feminist educational research, also called gender education research. For decades, feminist educational research has dealt with the importance of gender in learning and teaching, in terms of access to education, curricula, and the way teaching is carried out. However, only very few empirical studies have been conducted that look at learning about gender relationships in particular. This form of learning includes engaging with privilege and limitations, with privileging and discriminating structures and institutions and with cultural judgements and systems of reference along the category of gender, which is understood as a category interrelated with further structures of inequality.

The basis of this study is a critical, society oriented understanding of 'learning' that cannot be taken for granted and that thus needs a more detailed definition (which will be provided in the next section of the article).

The type of learning to which the study relates takes place in the context of gender-conscious pedagogy which, in turn, is an important part of political education that combats discrimination and prevents violence. The purpose of gender-conscious education is to enable and accompany the type of learning that creates room for action to be taken and provides access to resources, regardless of classifications into gender stereotypes and restrictive gender structures.

However (taking resistance to learning about certain issues as an example), practice repeatedly demonstrates that this type of learning about gender appears to be complicated from the standpoint of the subject and that a differentiated view is therefore required. Findings regarding resistance, typical counterarguments and actions against feminism have been collected for a long time and from different perspectives (for example regarding feminism: Dohm, 1902³, Beauvoir, 1945, Pusch, 1984, 129 et seq., Schüßler, 2002, 225; regarding defensive strategies against allegations of racism: Kilomba, 2010).

³ The women's rights activist Hedwig Dohm coined the term 'antifeminism' in German-speaking countries by publishing „The antifeminists – a defence” (1902). She analysed and criticised the reasoning and thinking of the opponents of the women's rights movement, therefore parallels to contemporary antifeminism can be explored.

It remains unclear how subjects retrospectively reconstruct resistance as part of the learning process on the way to greater agency. In other words, further investigation is needed to understand how these learning processes occur from the perspective of the subject and which obstacles and opportunities arise for those who are learning.

2. Theoretical framework

Firstly, the theoretical framework and the key terms of the research are described. In the following section, selected aspects will be discussed that illustrate the research perspective.

2.1 Gender between reification and the conflicting nature of social discourses

Gender will be understood as defined by more modern gender theories (Butler; West/Zimmermann), that is as a socially powerful construct. Gender is also understood as being intersectional. In other words, gender is intertwined with, and not detachable from, other categories of social differentiation (such as ‘race’⁴, class and body).

This understanding of gender results in aspects that have consequences for research. Two highlighted here:

Firstly: The problem of reification

An emancipatory-critical reference to gender always faces the contradiction of having to constantly repeat and therefore create the category, and its normative-forced character, which it seeks to diminish. Judith Lorber called this contradiction “Using Gender to undo Gender” (Lorber, 2000) or the gender paradox (Lorber, 1999). As a result, research that takes into account the masculine or feminine influence of the way their interviewees act, still refers to the dichotomous category of gender. Therefore, on the one hand, from a gender-theory standpoint, the normative and forced character of these categories is reiterated, as from a mainstream standpoint, they are equated with essentialising attributes. However, reality is more complex; there are more genders, that is to say, there is more gender diversity beyond the binary gender system, such as

⁴ With regard to the categorical use of the term ‘race’, my study uses the German word ‘Rasse’. In many German publications, the English word *race* is deliberately used due to the racist implications and historical associations that the word ‘Rasse’ implies in German. In my study I use “Rasse” in order to link to German history and society (see Eggers 2005a, p. 12). The word is placed in quotation marks in German in order to underline the reason for the category, when the biological construct of ‘Rasse’ is meant.

non-binary trans*⁵ or inter identities. On the other hand, highlighting and analysing traditional norms and the resulting findings can also help to address and break down outmoded gender structures. Spivak coined the term *strategic essentialism* to underline the politicostrategic aspect of this type of reproduction (Spivak, 1993, p. 3; Nandi, 2006). The reference to what appears to be rigid identities (such as women and men) can therefore only be understood as a temporary political-emancipatory method of action.

Secondly: The conflicting nature of social discourses

Gender as a construct suggests that a reflection of current gender debates would be helpful. Nowadays, hierarchical gender relationships are only apparent in a few clearly discriminatory laws (in Germany e.g. the so-called “*Transsexuellengesetz*”)⁶. Thus, it is necessary to redirect attention to the interaction between people and to the discursive subjectification due to normalisation. Today, for example, the reason for gender segregation in the labour market (which still generates unequal pay between the sexes) is to a large extent the result of subjective career aspirations, or, in other words, the higher-education courses or apprenticeships young people choose and are encouraged to choose.

To summarise, gender discourses exhibit three directions that influence subjectification processes.

- Anti-discrimination/diversity has not only become a priority in Germany but in the EU in general. Institutionalisation processes led to the introduction of anti-discrimination offices and public funding for projects that combat racism and exclusion and that campaign for gender diversity and inclusion. Apparently, the issue of gender is of particular public interest. Political parties have adopted demands of feminist movements and have started to represent these. Gender has become a mainstream issue. In the public arena, some participants in feminist movements can still be seen and heard on the streets, in campaigns, and participating in activities.
- Re-traditionalisation and conservatism: Conservatism, biologisms, and tradition are still issues of public debate. Right-wing parties have been

⁵ Trans* identities can also be understood and lived as binary identities and thus do not challenge the binary gender norm per se. Trans* is an abbreviating term that includes binary and non-binary identified transgender people, transsexual people, cross-dressers, drag queens and kings, transidents, genderqueers, and others. Some of the terms are applied synonymously and some of them are clearly distinguished from one another. The asterisk denotes the neutrality of the term and questions which concept should be used as an umbrella term and whether a concentration on one superordinate category is appropriate at all. This footnote reflects the German discourse about the term “trans*”.

⁶ A more comprehensive analysis of the TSG has been published at <https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/service/publikationen/geschlechtervielfalt-im-recht/114072>

gaining strength throughout Europe, the number of racist assaults is rising in Germany⁷. “Masculinist” groups campaigning for male rights (see Gesterkamp, 2010; Kemper, 2011), as well as religious groups (Lambrecht/Baars, 2009, cite evangelical fundamentalists, for example) should be mentioned in this context.⁸ Various authors have made their voices heard regarding anti-feminist issues in major daily newspapers and magazines (Klaus 2008, p. 176). Conservative tendencies appear to be just as capable of becoming mainstream as the political strategy of gender mainstreaming itself. Examples abound in best-selling, self-help literature (Pease, 2000; Evatt, 2004).⁹ Anti-feminist comments are particularly common online where the men’s rights groups are active in numerous forums and networks (see Homann, 2013).

- Economic discourses and individualisation: The economic transformation processes of western, capitalist societies, as they occur during the globalisation process, have an impact on the current constellation of gender relationships¹⁰. In this case, the growing subjectification of labour¹¹, the blurring of work and private lives, tendencies towards individualisation, the outdated model of the man being the sole breadwinner, demographic change, and the erosion of the traditional small family towards blended families all play a role. These developments are changing the dominant patterns of the gender-specific manner in which emotions are processed. As a result, they are transforming traditional gender structures (see Jurczyk, 2009).

Images in the media reflect how these three different discursive directions interact, often both supporting and contradicting each other. Traditional images of *white*¹², fit¹³, heterosexual and cisgender¹⁴ people are still encountered that

⁷ Sources: <http://www.belltower.news/artikel/kriminalstatistik-2015-belegt-massiven-anstieg-rassistischer-straftaten-11092>; <https://www.berlin.de/sen/justva/presse/pressemitteilungen/2017/pressemitteilung.571693.php>

⁸ Frey (see Frey 2013, p. 10 cf.) defines five groups of gender opponents: 1. The journalist gender opposition group, 2. evolutionary biology believers, 3. Christian fundamentalism, 4. explicitly anti-feminist players, 5. right-wing organizations.

⁹ An overview of current key anti-feminist sources, for example newspaper articles, books, networks and online literature is included in Hinrich Rosenbrock’s study (Rosenbrock 2012).

¹⁰ These processes of transformation take place on a global level, while the effects vary between nations. Since the interviewees have grown up in Germany and lived in Germany at the point of the study, discourses specifically relevant to German contexts are discussed.

¹¹ Nowadays subjects are forced to organise labour individually more than ever: the number of employment relationships, the duration of contracts and the distribution of working hours is decreasing, while the responsibility to organise timing, location, steps, objectives, and quality around work is increasingly pushed onto the working subject.

¹² The notation in italics point to the construed character of the category ‘*white*’. This notation is chosen deliberately to mark a difference to capitalizing the category ‘Black,’

portray men as strong, muscular, competent, successful and in positions of leadership and women as caring, attractive, empathic and dependent. But images of the “new” woman and the “new” man can also be found. The “new” woman does, of course, work, is career-minded, assertive and rears children at the same time. The “new” man is a caring partner and father, while being a narcissistic consumer¹⁵ and still gainfully employed. His characteristics are strangely vague, but he primarily stands apart from the “alien”, “other” and “pre-modern” man (see Klaus, forthcoming, p. 12). Therefore, we refer “more to a modernisation than a radical change” of traditional female and male images (ibid.). Modernised role portrayals do not apply to everyone, but are mainly directed at white, middle-class, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied consumers of both sexes.

Even if we see those modernizations of gender roles that partly dilute gender dichotomies and are connected with economic transformation processes, the consequence is not equal distribution. It is much more about using the entire labour force available. This becomes evident in the following example: capitalist neo-liberal cutbacks, the drive for efficiency and questions of where businesses are located entail cuts in social areas; in other words, cuts to policies for gender-mainstreaming and women’s rights. The consequences are that in many places feminist achievements (such as refuges, girls’ meet-ups, counselling offices) are affected by, or threatened with, radical cuts.

2.2 Intentional learning

To understand the subjective perspective of learners, an understanding of learning from the standpoint of the subject is an ideal theoretical basis (Holzkamp, 1987; 1993).

The theory of learning from the standpoint of the subject focuses on the agency of the subject as the core category. The reason and goal of learning is for

which refers to “meaning of Black potential to resist that has been inscribed by Black people and people of colour.” (see Eggers 2005: 12).

¹³ ‘Fit’ includes a number of different aspects ranging from the capacity to work to not being physically or mentally disabled.

¹⁴ ‘Cisgender’ stands for the congruence between the sex assigned at birth and the gender expected by binary gender norms. The syllable ‘cis’ is derived from Latin and means ‘on this side of’. The term is used by trans* activists to decentralise the dominant group and to highlight that cisgender is only one gender identity among others.

¹⁵ These modifications of the male image were referred to for some time as the ‘metrosexual’ man. As a narcissistic consumer, the man looks after his appearance, uses fragrances and cosmetics and attaches importance to clothing and the way he looks. This image “enables a much stronger inclusion of men in capitalist consumer industry than was possible when the traditional male image prevailed” (see Klaus in preparation p. 13).

those who are learning to be able to engage with society. Therefore, learning is always related to conditions in society. This is a significant point of departure from the majority of theories of learning, which focus on the individual's behaviour or on neurophysiology. Subject-centered theories of learning also differ by aiming to understand individual perspectives, particularly of those on whom the research is being conducted.

One of the key assumptions is that, subjectively sensible reasons have to exist for those who are learning. Holzkamp maintains that the reasons for learning lie in subjective problems in terms of action: there is a perceived discrepancy between intentional action and action that is actually possible (see Holzkamp, 1993, p. 182).

Important for this perspective is Holzkamp's analytical differentiation, which he performs in the two categories of restrictive and generalised agency. Restrictive agency, understood as remaining or arranging oneself in dependencies, is opposed to generalised agency as an increase in options available with regard to social conditions. Subject are therefore always in a position to decide whether to merely repudiate threats, or to change threatening conditions, themselves. Generalised and restrictive agency are always understood as constantly available poles, also called the two-fold scope of opportunities (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 370; Holzkamp, 1990, p. 37 cf.). Contradictory discourses (such as continuing (re-)traditionalisation that results in the devaluation of women and LGBTI* people despite official discourses of diversity policies), can hinder and slow down learning processes and lead to resistance to learning (e.g. through tiredness, feelings of repulsion, lack of interest)¹⁶. The legitimate fear of loss of resources may be one reason for the resistance. The fact that the subject is not aware of the options or the fact that areas of learning are intertwined with different, sometimes contradictory power interests, can lead to resistance to learning (see Holzkamp, 1987).¹⁷ However, the causes of resistance, and thus the interrelatedness between the object of learning and power interests, can be transformed into central motivations to learn more and hence promote further engagement with the issue.

2.3 Informal learning

By Holzkamps theory of learning, however, only intentional learning processes can be addressed. Since learning about gender extends far beyond intention-

¹⁶ For a more comprehensive overview regarding resistance to learning in the realm of „gender“ see Krämer 2015, section 6.2.

¹⁷ Research on adult education has investigated resistance to learning in more detail (Grotlüschen 2003; Faulstich/Grell 2005; Grell 2006; Schepers 2009).

based learning practices and includes many informal learning processes across learners' life spans, it is a good idea to complement this perspective with learning and interest theories proposed by Frigga Haug (2003), Käthe Meyer-Drawe (2008) and Anke Grotlüschen (2010). Similarly to Holzkamp, these theories focus on involvement in society and the subject's agency, which is why they are relevant here.

Haug states that self-criticism and self-doubt need to be frequently perceived as an unpleasant, but necessary, part of learning processes (Haug, 2003, p. 156, 288).

Meyer-Drawe describes the origin of learning as an experience, as the origin of learning for which there are no words or terms and which cannot be fully articulated. This experience shatters the intention of consciousness by it being surprised and seized by the world (Meyer-Drawe, 2008, p. 188). This understanding explains longstanding interest, dedication, and a passion for learning (Meyer-Drawe, 2008; 2012).

Grotlüschen's interest theory allows the observation of long-term learning processes in different phases; the social, habitual dimension becomes clear through routines and the fact that influences on learning are forgotten (Grotlüschen, 2010; Grotlüschen/Krämer, 2009).

Before the empirical analysis is discussed, the next paragraph will outline the study's methodology and discuss its limitations and benefits.

3. Methodological and qualitative research design

The research questions aims at understanding how people who engage with the topic of "gender" on different levels experience these learning processes themselves and how a change in agency is achieved. Qualitative research design is appropriate to examine this question as it adopts the individuals' perspectives as a place from which to start the research, identifies the interviewee's subjective purpose and reveals how the reasons are related. The empirical analysis is based on eleven transcribed interviews with people who are or were involved in gender education. The interviewees have a personal, strong interest in gender issues, ranging from activist to occupational motivations. Interviews were structured by guidelines that were developed and revised during the research process in exchange with interviewees and fellow researchers. Interviewees were interested in the research question and open to discuss the question and the research design. Due to lack of resources, it was not possible to allow for reinterpretations of my interpretations by the interviewees at advanced stages of the research process. Thus, the degree of participation in this methodological design is relatively low

and does not fulfil the strict standards of a research design from the standpoint of the subject.

In order to provide maximum contrast and considering theoretical sampling, interviews were conducted with people of different age groups, who have various social backgrounds, origins, family backgrounds, and lifestyles and different self-specified gender roles (cis women, cis men, trans*).

The analysis is based in grounded theory. Grounded theory poses a set of questions, the so-called coding paradigm, to analyse the data. It is used here in a justification logic instead of a causal logical context (see also Nienkemper in this volume).

“Reason(s) for ➤ subjectively interpreted context ➤ action ➤ consequences”.

(See Felden 2006; Grotlüschen 2010, p. 177).

Using the grounded theory’s coding paradigm, the research process focused on the selective coding of three core categories (shown in the table below horizontally) as:

1. Reasons for tackling the subject area,
2. Reasons for not tackling the subject area and
3. Agency

Phase of the learning process	1. Core category	2. Core category	3. Core category
Initial contact with the subject area	Reasons for tackling the subject area	Reasons for not tackling the subject area	Agency
Initial learning process	Reasons for tackling the subject area	Reasons for not tackling the subject area	Agency
Advanced learning process	Reasons for tackling the subject area	Reasons for not tackling the subject area	Agency

Fig. 1: Analytical focuses within the various phases of the gender-learning process

Each category appears in this table three times, because a subsequent section of the analysis looks at different phases of the learning process (shown here in the

dark grey axis in the left-hand margin). Each phase includes reasons for learning, not learning and agency.

Further differentiation, the distinction between the stages “initial contact with the subject area”, “initial learning process”, and “advanced learning process”, was set because of foci on the part of the interviewees and due to the theoretical contrasting with the three-phase model of interest development: latent stage, expansion stage and competent stage. According to Grotlüschen, (2012), each learner passes through different stages while tackling a subject area which can be observed in different attitudes to learning and changes in awareness. These stages cannot be demarcated exactly; rather they are characterised by fluent transitions and by moving forwards and backwards. During the latent stage, contact with the subject area takes place (sometimes across years, sometimes unconsciously) and is often forgotten again. Withdrawal from the area of interest is still considered. Tackling of the subject area is fragile. Pausing or detours in the interest process are possible. Drop-out of the interest process might also occur. The subject area is associated emotionally with aversion or attraction, which can result in feeling challenged or fascinated or in the pausing and stopping of the interest process if aversion is too big ('resistance to learning' can show up when unconscious aversion is mixed in). Outside influences are negated in the second stage, the expansion stage. Subjects experience their actions as self-determined. Interest in the subject area has stabilised and withdrawal is no longer considered. Steps in the development of interest are reported in linear sequences. The interest can be linked to previous and future areas of interest, and active tackling of the subject area becomes relevant, for example through aspirations of affiliation, opportunity for individuation, self-reflection, preservation and development of abilities. Finally, the interest process leads to the competent stage. During this stage, learning subjects take into account outside influences or actively participate in shaping their environments. Withdrawal from the subject area would result in major losses. The interested person autonomously generates knowledge about the subject area and is capable of raising questions, establishing connections and using abstract terms. This stage is also characterised by the adoption of a critical position within the area of interest; scopes are expanded, networks are founded, and exertion of political influence becomes very likely (see Grotlüschen, 2012, p. 290).

As a result, the analysis focuses on the following points (which have a light grey background here):

1. Reasons for tackling the subject area which were relevant to initial contact with the subject area
2. Reasons for not tackling the subject area (called resistance to learning by Holzkamp (1987; 1993) which occurred in the initial learning process

3. Agency which was generated at the advanced stage of the learning process

Next to the above presented theoretical perspectives about gender and learning, elements of intersectional inequality analysis (Winker, Degele, 2009) provided important tools for differentiation for the creation of categories.

Constructions of identity	Symbolic representations	Structures
Reasoning of the subject, self-positioning, self-image, actions	discourses, social norms and values, images, unwritten laws	materialisations of symbolic representations: laws, concrete relationships (persons), institutions

Fig. 2: Three levels of analysis

These levels of analysis allowed an analysis of the subjective interpretations of the interviewees, such as an analysis of the subjective reasons for action and learning, resistance to learning and (self-)reconstructions. Degele and Winker follow a methodological approach in inequality analysis that combines deductive and inductive methods. After the first categorisations and dimensionalisation (presented above), phenomena became more comprehensible and tangible through the three-part distinction between structure, symbolic representation, and construction of identity¹⁸. WHAT is winterschool [in the footnote]???

From an analytical perspective, the three levels are located on different dimensions and discrepancies can be experienced between them.

1. 'Constructions of identity' encompasses the level of reasoning of the subject. Self-positioning within social power relations, self-image, actions, but also the manner of self-reflection and self-awareness, are all part of it.

2. 'Symbolic representations' comprises social discourses and ideologies, ie. what is defined as 'right', 'normal', and 'beautiful'. They refer to all unwritten laws, norms, values, and images that come into effect in any realm to which the dominant majority is oriented.

3. 'Structures' include all consolidated and formalised rights, traditions, habits, and experiences that have materialised within institutions, family structures, concrete relationships, and laws.

¹⁸ I became familiar with this conceptualisation and applied these concepts to data at winterschool 'Intersektionalität' (intersectionality) in 2010. According to Degele and Winker, they are particularly relevant in the first steps of analysis.

4. Results: Learning in areas of conflict

So how are learning processes accomplished from the standpoint of the subject? Considering the above-mentioned theoretical framework and the coding paradigm, this question can be broken down even further: how are social frameworks reflected in the subjective perception of the person learning?

The data were used to generate sub-categories which will be described briefly below. This overview highlights (written in bold and italic letters) from which section the excerpts of the interviews were taken for this article.

Phase of the learning process	Focus	Sub-categories
Initial contact with the subject area	Reasons for tackling the subject area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Gender-based reasons</i> ▪ Political-ethical reasons ▪ Professional reasons
Initial learning process	Reasons for not tackling the subject area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Defensive arguments ▪ Internal conflicts
Advanced learning process	Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Deliberate (non) positioning ▪ Professional positioning ▪ Political positioning ▪ Contemplative/(self) critical positioning

Figure 3: Sub-categories in the focal points of the analysis. The bold and cursive letters highlight the sub-category that the example stems from.

In the initial contact phase, three different reasons for tackling the subject area were identified: gender-based, political-ethical and professional reasons. Gender-based reasons include subjective reasons which are related to the gender-based identities of the interviewees. This denotes the self-image and biographical development of the interviewees as cis or trans women/man or non-binary trans* within the binary gender system. This positioning has, on the one hand, grown in socialisation processes associated with the person's history. On the other hand, it is generated each day anew in active gender processes. The analysis category includes experiences of discrepancy between social norms and structures and the

person's own personal gender perception ¹⁹ which will be elaborated in more depth in section 4.1.

Political-ethical reasons include arguments and feelings that interviewees describe as the driving forces for confronting conflicts in the outside world, which are perceived as unjust, such as the 'unfair' treatment of boys and girls at school or at home. This category describes the discrepancy between perceived social realities and an individual's own notions of justice and an ideal world. The category includes reasons and positions taken by the subjects on issues of justice, social inequality, or visions of what constitutes a good life.

Job offers, professional interest or career prospects are some of the reasons why individuals might start to grapple with gender-based issues (one of the interviewees rather accidentally started to engage more fully with the topic after a job offer). However, there should be no confusion here with the fact that a professional analysis of gender can also mean consistent continuation of a political or individual interest and can therefore frequently occur at advanced stages of the learning process.

In the initial learning process, the following categories were developed as reasons for not tackling the subject area: on the one hand, defensive arguments (reasons conveyed to the outside world for not learning) and, on the other hand, "inner"²⁰ conflicts (these are inner reasons for not learning that were reflected on afterwards).

In the advanced learning phase, deliberate (non) positioning and three kinds of positioning were identified as agency.

1. Deliberate or ambivalent (non) positioning: it saves resources, protects individuals and is an economic-strategic way of acting. In certain situations it is considered necessary, unavoidable or dilemmatic.

2. Gradual or reflected (self-)positioning as professional positioning: conciliatory attitudes within teaching-learning arrangements are established which include patient justification, vivid explanations, transparent description of contradictions, but also the redirection of othering (one of the interviewees

¹⁹ This positioning is not necessarily valid during one's entire life time, but for the majority of people is subjected to a certain amount of inertia and continuity. Aspects that are considered male, female or trans* by individuals are comprised of an endless number of cultural, class-based, ethnic etc. assumptions.

²⁰ Quotation marks are used as interviewees located these conflicts in themselves and as the conflicts are experienced through affects such as fear. Still, a dichotomy of internal and external conflicts would be misleading. One interviewee points out that one of his "inner" reasons for engaging with the issue of masculinity and gender was the fear of being (perceived as) gay. That fear makes a reference to the heteronormative context as a social framework. Hence, "inner" reasons/conflicts to avoid the subject area map the apparently "external" social relations.

describes that he, as a person of colour²¹, is frequently experiencing othering in his role as seminar facilitator by participants. By refusing and redirecting these attributions, he successfully promotes self-reflection processes among *white* participants).

3. Political positioning as a clear point of reference to a standpoint: by using resistant-strategic practices of designation and legitimisation, relationships to discourses and appeals are established.

4. As the fourth form of positioning, options of questioning positioning are looked at where a doubting and contemplative standpoint occurs, ambiguities in designation are uncovered (for example the balancing act between stabilizing practices of self-designation and the confrontation of fixed categories), boundaries are made transparent and future perspectives and utopias are developed (as an example, one of the interviewees opined that the time had come for a critical men's movement).

The key result of the study produced different areas of conflict where learning about gender relationships takes place from the perspective of the subject (see section 4.2).

4.1 Empirical insight: gender-based reasons to learn

In the following section, excerpts from interviews from the “gender-based reasons” sub-category highlight how one of these areas of conflict is shown in detail and what conclusions can be drawn as a result (an overview of all areas of conflict will be presented in section 4.2).

The presented quotes illustrate challenges that arise from the feeling of “not fitting in” or “not wanting to fit in” before or during early stages of consciously engaging with gender relations. Where conflicts between the individual construction of (gender) identity and gender norms were central reasons for learning, these conflicts are recalled in varying degrees of intensity and included feelings of insecurity, fear or confusion. Furthermore, conflicts in the construction of gender identity were closely related to “ideas of good life and justice”. They will be discussed as an independent category of reasons for learning (see Krämer, 2015, section 5.1.2).

²¹ The term 'person of colour' is based on the practice of self-designation among people negatively affected by racism. „It was coined as a political term in the US in 1960s by the 'Black-Power'-movement to point towards the commonalities between communities with different cultural and historical backgrounds. Thereby a solidarity perspective across racist divisions into ethnicities and 'races' should be established which promotes anti-racist alliances“ (see Nghi Ha 2009). This footnote reflects the German discourse regarding the term “people of colour”.

The following quotes are from interviewee Jan Biro²²; here, he answers my question about the beginning of his engagement. Jan Biro is interviewed as a queer-feminist activist. He is in his early thirties, was assigned female at birth and growing up, has a second-generation working class 'immigrant background'²³ and identifies as a guy or trans*, depending on the context.

“I think I felt this quite strongly in puberty, I didn't use the term gender or sex then, but it was rather, uh, there are boys and there are girls and somehow girls should be like this and boys like this, and somehow they should like each other quite a lot, but somehow they cannot even talk to each other and I think puberty and my experience of not fitting into my role, or not wanting to fit in and to be too aggressive for a girl, or a woman, and my conflicts with the role expectations, but not from a position to riot, rather from a position of withdrawal or an internalisation of power relations, thus looking for faults in myself (...).” (Jan Biro, section 22)

Jan Biro describes his lack of terms like 'gender' or 'sex' as categories (see quote above). In retrospect, he can understand the conflicts between gender norms and gender relations that he experienced (e.g. “boys and girls should like each other quite a lot“ vs. “they cannot even talk to each other“). Personal reasons for learning that are understood as norm conflicts later in life remain vague and blurred at the time of the emerging discrepancy as there are neither supportive structures nor applicable concepts to comprehend this conflict, to question normality or rather allow another normality to come into being.

He describes his experiences of being “too aggressive for a girl“, of “not fitting” in, which led to “internalisation” of power relations.

“So, I felt very much depressed then [...] I completely shut down emotionally and turned my aggressions towards myself, so I blamed myself and I possibly allowed myself very little.” (Jan Biro, section 58-59)

²² All names have been changed.

²³ The term immigrant background/migratory background contains several pitfalls (see Heinemann 2014, 16). On the one hand, the term evokes the idea of an homogeneous group. On the other hand, it may lead to stigmatisation. Furthermore, it suggests that “Germans“ do not have experiences of migration in the histories of their families (Brodén/Mecheril 2007, 11). Thus, it produces a division between people with and without a immigrant background and thereby suggests that there are clearly distinguishable “Germans“ and “Non-Germans”. The benefits of the term ‘immigrant background’ are that it is currently the only term widely used and that it encompasses more than demographic aspects such as point of immigration and nationality (see Heinemann *ibid.*). Hence, I use the term to uncover a likely social reality. To underline the construed character of the category, quotations marks will be used in the text.

For Jan Biro, the experienced conflict, the long-term consequences for his well-being, are based on his unwillingness to fit the experienced gender norms. Thus, it is a conflict between the individual construction of identity and the socially dominant symbolic representations of gender that are expressed to Jan Biro through other people's expectations.

The quotes below are from interviewee Laura Janssen. She is in her thirties, *white*, self-identifies as cis woman with educated middle-class background and is interviewed as a feminist and lecturer in the field of 'gender'. She talks about the experience of discrepancy between attributions and the individual, gender-based self-image.

“As a child I was always told I was a tomboy. And that worried me because I knew I felt like a woman and that I was a woman. But at the same time I was given a characteristic untypical of women”. (Laura Janssen, section 2)

The fact that she feels “worried” indicates a confusing, physical experience. It could be seen as an unsettling doubt about her own perception. In the following section, Janssen describes her subjective experience of this type of unsettling moment even more clearly:

“... suddenly I felt weird or something was weird, something vague. And suddenly I was able to articulate what it was. But this unsettling feeling was already there earlier, that’s how I’d describe it”. (Laura Janssen, section 36)

This highlights a non-cognitive, affective experience of surprise and a sense of being powerless and of being at the mercy of things. It is connected with an understanding of learning as described by Meyer-Drawe. She describes a moment of sudden experience and of being overcome as the origin of learning and as the moment for developing a passion for learning. The quote from Janssen also shows that diffuse feelings were not reflected on until afterwards, in other words at later stages of Janssen’s learning process, when she is able to use new terms and language. There is a link to Meyer-Drawe here too: By developing terms later on, the origin of the learning processes can be picked up on and transformed²⁴.

The next quote from Stefan Krueger underscores how experience (here the example of falling in love) can promote processes of reflection and tackling of

²⁴ This transformation of diffuse aspects into a level structured by specialists terms is also contained in Scheper’s study based on the theory from the standpoint of the subject (2014).

the subject area. Stefan is *white* and in his thirties when the interview was carried out. He describes his parental home as middle-class and caring.

“Yeah, there are quite a lot of different aspects [that were relevant to start engaging with the issue of “gender”], I think one of the first one was that I fell in love with a [male] friend, I was 18 then. And I didn't manage to express it or to pursue it any further [...] and I think I started to reflect on masculinity at that time and a certain type of masculinity or situations where men dominated spaces by being loud, it started at that time that this became very uncomfortable for me.”

“Why?”

“I don't know, that was never my way of being and I couldn't deal with it. It was a bit like “That's not me – and that's not what I want to be”. Maybe it was that, too. Yeah, but that was, I would say now, I didn't think about its meaning so much then, I also didn't think about it so much at some later point, it was more like a feeling.” (Stefan Krueger, section 1-4)

Stefan Krueger begins to consciously look at gender through the topic of masculinity after guessing as a teenager that he might be gay, which conflicts with perceived expectations of masculinity. He starts to perceive a certain hegemonic masculinity that “dominates spaces” as unpleasant. He experiences masculinity as related to heterosexual norms. Due to experiencing these external norms, he feels incapable of following his feelings and disclosing that he was in love feels taboo and shameful. It does not fit his former ideas of masculinity to fall in love with another man. At that point, the experience of 'unpleasantness' is vague, on the level of feelings and without appropriate terms.

In contrast to Stefan Krueger, Nazim Özer can hardly name the starting point of feeling uneasy with gender norms. Nazim Özer is almost 40 when the interview is carried out. He has a second-generation 'immigrant background' and self-identifies as Black (within the meaning of a political category).

“I can almost not relate to time, I think, not that exactly, I cannot say how it used to be, what is like now. Yeah, but I think that I am bit more exact, but maybe that's a consideration from today, I don't know, I would say that I actually always felt a little bit that this is not the beat I want to follow or so, and meanwhile I can argue for this better, I can understand it better and I can represent it better, too [...]” (Nazim Özer, section 128)

In retrospect, Nazim Özer assumes that a certain type of 'spectacular' or sensational masculinity performance as it has been described in detail during the

interview by an observation of his son's sports class²⁵ has never been “the beat he wants to follow”. According to that metaphor, the beat of masculine expectations did not resonate with him. The image points to the physical experience of discrepancy. It becomes also apparent that the first experiences of discrepancy between the individual construction of identity and gender norms remain very vague at that point and that they can be reconstructed only with difficulty in retrospect (“I would say”, “maybe”, “actually”, “not that exactly”). Like Laura Janssen and Jan Biro, he addresses the fact that the previous blurred feeling can only be explained through later verbalisations.

Following the discussed excerpts of interviews, these aspects can be observed here:

- Conflicts with gender norms that relate to the experience of not fitting in or not wanting to fit in are construed as starting points of the learning process by the interviewees.
- These experiences demonstrate how Meyer-Drawe's phenomenological perspective strengthens the argument for the use of subject-centric learning-theory approaches to better understand long-term learning processes. The examples underscore how definition-based knowledge helps to describe an experience as one of discrepancies afterwards, in other words as a reason for learning and to categorise it in the learning process via gender relationships. As a result, an initially ambiguous perception is only given social meaning through language afterwards.
- Verbalisation can only be achieved within a secure social environment that provides options for identification, and thus a shared language (see quote Biro).
- The speechlessness and unpleasant feelings, however, also indicate the equitemporality of the reason for learning and learning difficulty which Holzkamp calls the two-fold scope of opportunities (see Holzkamp 1983, p. 345). In the initial stages of the learning process, Laura Janssen, Jan Biro, Nazim Özer, and Stefan Krueger find themselves here, still unreflective and caught in the conflict between experiencing their own gender-based form of expression and the normative expectations and characteristics ascribed to them by their environment. This conflict can also be considered one in the sense of the two-fold scope of opportunities: the interviewees feel they have a choice between the restrictive option to act and the generalised option to act. In other words, they have to opt for averting a threat by adapting to external expectations and acting out their own gender

²⁵ NÖ: [...] “it was last week, one of the fathers came around [...] there were some ropes in the gym dangling from the ceiling, and suddenly he climbs up a rope. And all the children “wow”, my son, too. (laughs) And then I realised that this is somehow – yeah, I don't want that, I don't want to be that guy [...] I know, that is actually quite simple to be that spectacular ...” (Nazim Özer, section 122)

identity. The result is a risk to the status quo, but also a chance to build on the action they and others can take.

- The analyses of the ‘resistance to learning’ category show that the unsettling moment of discrepancy from the norm might not be just a reason to learn, but also relevant to “internal” resistance to learning. If the gap between the subject and gender norms is perceived as being too vast, the subject may be unable to reconcile the advantage learning can provide. If there is no safe environment to start learning, resistance to learning might occur. These resistances can also take the form of turning the conflict against oneself or others, for example through auto-aggression, physical symptoms, aggression directed toward others, internalised and externalised misogyny, homo- and/or trans*-negativity. In other words, the subject has good reasons not to learn. If reasons for not learning dominate, then subjects do not learn even though the subject’s own personal freedoms, form of expression, or sense of justice are impaired.

4.2 Agency in areas of conflict: an overview

An analysis across categories makes clear, however, that the subjects rarely have to surrender to just one single experience of discrepancy regarding a topic of learning, but that it is much more about positioning in a field that includes different poles. This positioning is not to be taken one-dimensionally nor is it bipolar, but options to act and learn are often located on a continuum between two forms. Therefore, the contradictions, which exhibit what Holzkamp calls the equitemporality of the reason for and resistance to learning or two-fold scope of opportunities, are defined in the project as areas of conflict. These areas of conflict are shown in the following graphic (Fig. 4).

Graphics are problematic in that they are either highly complex or highly simplified. The advantage of the slide bar (also called a graphic equalizer, similar to a mixing console) is that complex positioning options can be captured two-dimensionally. The slide bars here act as metaphors for the subject’s positioning options within various areas of conflict. Depending on the situation, the person’s own history, specific integration in structures, routines and the extent to which they are affected by various hierarchical relationships, any positioning or action takes place in this range of contradictions.

The slide bar model provides an overview of these different areas of conflict.

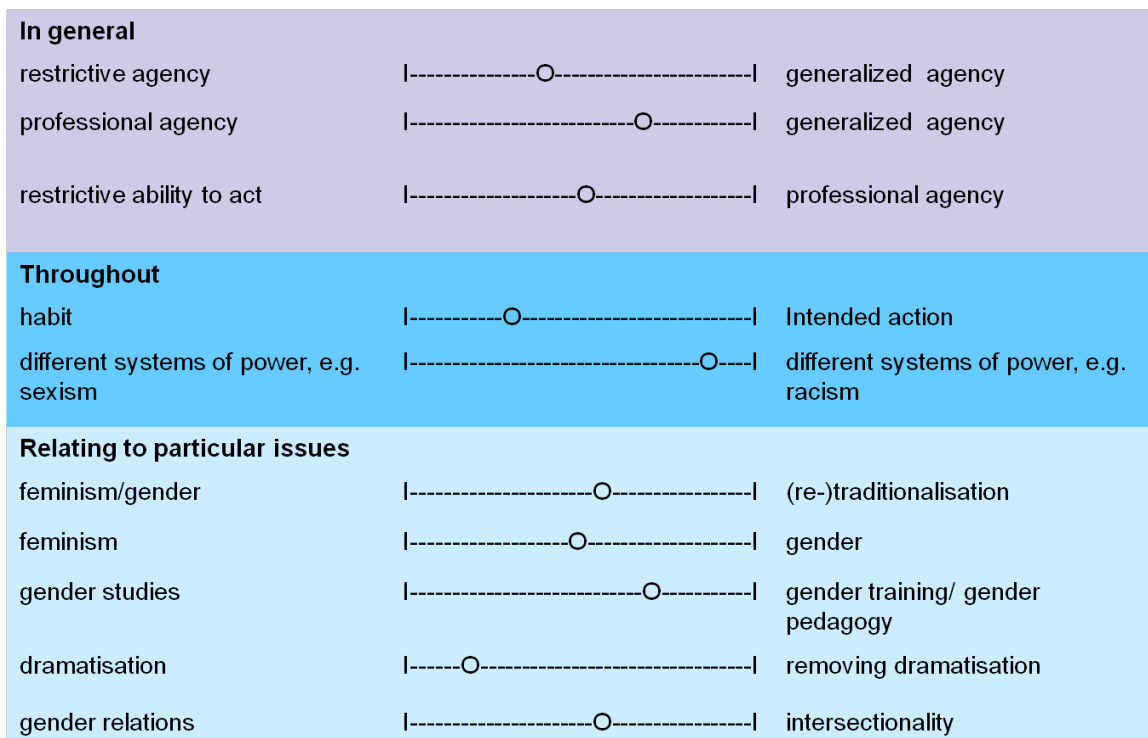


Fig. 4: Areas of conflict deduced from the analyses in which learning about gender and gender competence are located. (*The location of the control buttons serves as an example and does not relate to a specific situation in the interviews!*).

The control buttons (shown here in the form of circles) are never on the emancipatory pole in all areas of conflict. It can only be decided situationally from the standpoint of the subject which positioning will result in a rise of agency within a multi-dimensional field. In the model, this is highlighted by the fact that the circles are situated at different positions. At advanced stages of the learning process, the subject gains greater awareness of the multi-dimensionality of the field (however, this does not necessarily entail a greater sense of agency or more option for action). To shift a bar in an emancipatory direction, it must be considered whether a direct positioning, possibly as too fast a shift in one direction, could cause another bar to shift in an anti-emancipatory direction. Based on the overview, however, the meaning of the three levels (shown here in different shades of grey) will be explained.

“General” areas of conflict

The first level (a medium shade of grey) shows “general areas of conflict”: between generalised agency, restrictive agency, and professional agency. A third agency was added to Holzkamp’s definitions: professional agency, which can also be referred to as mediating or “conscious” agency. This was identified in the empirical analysis of agency at an advanced stage of the learning process. This denotes a deliberate course of action from within the ranges of poles specified. Therefore, the subject might be aware of the various options, as well as the contradictions of these options and the potential consequences. Acting professionally should not be equated to “acting as a professional”. However, professional agency is frequently expressed and useful in professional settings. “General areas of conflict” can also be called “areas of conflict of agency”. Regardless of the core issue, these general areas of conflict are encountered in learning processes again and again.

1. Restrictive agency <> generalised agency

Restrictive agency and generalised agency can conflict with each other. Restrictive agency is understood as the pursuit of security of social and material resources within a given structure, whereas generalised agency encompasses the pursuit of political-ethical expression and free (nonconformist) gender expression. This area of conflict is present in the first reasons for learning through vaguely defined feelings of unpleasantness and awkwardness. When resistances to learning are reflected, this feeling can already be described more precisely as fear and insecurity. At an advanced stage, this “inner” conflict causes actions to be postponed or suspended to later, more effective situations of (collective) action. This is possible without the experience of fundamental or existential insecurity for the learning subject as this person is already aware of options and fields for actions. When structures or hegemonic discourses (for example presented by supervisors or other people the subject is deeply dependent on) are threatening resources, non-positioning might be particularly preferred, or rather actions to save resources are chosen over free articulation. This point illustrates that a sufficient amount of resources (e.g. social integration and economic security) is necessary to allow for a nonconformist expression and emancipatory actions in the first place.

The desire for approval, affirmation, and appreciation by conforming to social norms is related to negatively experienced emotions such as fear (for example the fear of being gay or the fear of falling into old habits when speaking) in the interviews. The indecision between the pursuit of the preservation of resources (the defence against threats and the protection of the

individual options of action) and the development of agency can be understood as a reason for action and an “inner” resistance toward learning. In other words, subjects are challenged to learn while anticipating disapproval in their environment, experiencing physical sedimentation of the new knowledge, and developing a new sense of justice.

2. Professional agency <> generalised agency

This area of conflict is a variation of the previous one. Professional agency includes the ability to share knowledge and experiences in a useful and effective way. This implies, however, an awareness of the advantage in competence and professionalism, that is to say, knowledge of the respective imbalance within teaching-learning arrangements. Individually perceived (or rather 'spontaneous') generalised agency can be in opposition to this attitude. “Professionalism” means therefore that acting subjects can only partially position themselves in a given situation. Individual needs to express personal or political opinions are set aside to facilitate long-term teaching processes. It can be effective for teachers and social workers in the field of gender to keep their personal opinions and the extent of consternation to themselves in certain situations when structurally misogynist or heterosexist comments are made by participants. While it would terminate cooperation to clearly challenge the argument in a political context or to show anger and feelings of hurt, professional conduct might, in some situations, include raising thoughtful questions and pointing out contradictions.

3. Restrictive agency <> professional agency

A third area of conflict arises between restrictive agency that aims at preserving the status quo and professional agency. Lack of funding or low salaries can compromise the conditions for learning, and thus professional agency, within pedagogical contexts. Wording in the context of announcements or funding requests, which necessarily refer to hegemonic discourses to a certain degree, provide an obstacle to the dissemination of content that is critical of society. When only a short one-time seminar is offered due to low funding, in-depth processes of self-reflection, often needed to promote justified and long-term learning processes, are inhibited through limitations in time. Another risk is that gender training in the context of gender mainstreaming sees gender competence as an efficiency-enhancing 'social skill' pursuant to the 'optimisation of human capital'. Professional trainers are under pressure; engaging with political and historical questions of justice provokes resistance and disapproval in funders, because these questions are deemed as irrelevant or insufficiently job-related. As a result, gender mainstreaming provides the possibility of funding, while creating

opportunities to simplify and appropriate feminist demands and contents. Again, this reflects the conflicting nature of social discourses in terms of options for action (see theoretical framework, section 2.1).

The second area in dark grey encompasses transversal areas of conflict. These refer to routines and subjective relevance or multiple relevance of differentiating categories (see Fig. 2).

Transversal areas of conflict

These areas of conflict can be applied to learning in general, but they are relevant to learning about social inequality in particular. For example, in subjective learning processes cissexism and experiences of racism can have an inhibitory effect. However, insight gained can be used by the subjects synergetically or reflexively and engender new reasons for learning or taking action.²⁶

Habit <> intended action

Physical and emotional attachments to well-established ways of thinking and acting can thwart and undermine new knowledge and resulting ways of thinking based on understanding. Conscious and rational intended action can be destabilised through unconscious structures of the subject. Interviewees realize that falling back into habits causes problems, when for example, gender-neutral language is not used continuously, when emotions cannot be perceived adequately or dominant ways of speaking are apparently tied to the individual self as part of male habitus. Emotions such as fear and insecurity hint that relatively deeply rooted habits are questioned. That is to say: patterns of perception or evaluation cannot be clearly identified on the level of reasoning which relates to gendered aspects of identity or ideas of justice and a good life. They affect a more profound, subconscious, physical dimension that interviewees can hardly describe verbally and which underlies inertia and continuity.

²⁶ In theoretical debates around the issue of intersectionality during the last 20 years, theorists have moved away from an additive understanding of discrimination as this conception simplifies and homogenises distinct experiences or creates hierarchies between different power relations. The analysis of the present study showed that multiple affiliation with discriminated or marginalised differentiating categories can be subjectively experienced as a major limitation or challenge. The results of the questionnaire study published in 2012 by LesMigraS focusing on multi-dimensional discrimination in general and on racism, (hetero-)sexism, and cissexism in particular supports this finding (see LesMigraS 2012). Different axes of discrimination were often not perceived as equivalent, but as a combined burden by the participants even though discrimination operated quite differently. Further research is warranted to understand this aspect of intersectionality in more depth.

Inertia of habits was described as function of habitus by Bourdieu (1987). Subjects are involved in power relations in a complex way; through taste, which is experienced as 'natural', informal and unofficial power structures are established and habits are developed. That fact precludes the option of escaping power and refutes the assumption of a simple antagonism of social classes that clearly divides into 'oppressors' and 'oppressed'. An autonomous intentionality of the subject in the appropriation of the environment thus becomes apparent as an 'illusion of self-determination'. External influences are not reflected, because a typical function of the habitus is to make itself invisible. Social structures are established in the subject through habitus. Partial perception and reflection of physicality²⁷, which will never be fully understood rationally, cannot only inhibit, but also foster learning processes by providing new knowledge or promoting interest in a topic. This effect can be illustrated by the intersection of reasons for learning and 'inner' resistance to learning. In the interviewees' perception, emotionality and habit follow behind intellectual and rational understanding. Habits, old, deeply rooted patterns of perception and evaluation structured through habitus, are threatened at the initial stage of the learning process. Thus, they are first endangered through active engagement with an issue, but during that process the subject also becomes conscious of these habits, which then become susceptible to chance. Habits, also called incorporations, can only be identified by (time-consuming) reflections, and completely overcoming habits can never be guaranteed.

Interrelatedness between multi-dimensional power relations – e.g. experience of sexism <> experience of racism

The interviews revealed an area of conflict through multi-dimensional experience of discrimination. These experiences suggest different strategies for action that partially contradict and complement each other. Thus, they provide reasons for contradictions and entanglements, but also occasions for learning. The interrelatedness of power relations is discussed in particular on the level of the subject and structures in the interviews (see Winker, Degele 2009, see methodological and qualitative research design in section 3, fig. 1). Primarily, interviewees who were affected by othering addressed this issue. As a result of the topics discussed by the interviewees, the following section focuses on interrelatedness between (hetero-)sexism, racism, and cissexism. The study provided several examples of how interviewees experienced the multi-dimensional belonging to differentiating categories during the learning process.

²⁷ "What the body has learned cannot be considered as reflectable knowledge, that's what you are." (Bourdieu, Seib 1987, 135).

Areas of conflict were identified between identity categories that are either attributed by oneself or by others and that thus resulted in social hierarchies. Interviewees negatively affected by racism, for example, added further reflections on racist discourses when they talked about patriarchal family relations in their family of origin in my presence as a *white* interviewer. In contrast, interviewees without so-called 'immigrant background' could address patriarchal grievances in their family “without any problem” as they do not fear promoting racist discourses (see Krämer 2015a, 5.1.5.)²⁸. This observation corresponds to the finding of Black activists and scientists, as well as of critical whiteness studies that privileges are invisible to the privileged.

At the same time, the interviews give examples how synergy effects (for example through recognition/analogies, empathy and solidarisation) can be used while learning about power relations, and thus promote interest (see *ibid.*).

The third area (shown in light grey in the graphic) illustrates the areas of conflict related to certain areas. The problem of reification and the conflicting nature of social discourses on gender that were discussed in section 2.1 are reflected here.

Areas of conflict relating to particular issues

Feminism/gender <> conservatism/antifeminism

The learning process and critical engagement with gender relations is particularly at odds with conservative and antifeminist discourses (see 2.1 in this article). The study provides striking evidence of the influence antifeminist arguments still have. Their effects can be observed on every level, but most accurately when looking at resistances to learning. Antifeminist discourses are referred back to defensive lines of arguments (for example, “gender is an issue for women”, “men are hated/disadvantaged”, “sex is natural or god-given”) and those discourses advance inner unsettling dialogues and feelings found in “inner” resistances (for example, the fear of coming out as gay or feeling constrained and restricted as a man).

Conservatism and antifeminism also have rather indirect effects through normalisation processes: gender-based attributions or patriarchal structures influence reasons for learning and agency at an advanced stage of the learning process (for example through anticipation of resistance, non-positioning or gradual positioning, or tabooing of homosexuality in gender trainings).

²⁸“Migrants” (hetero-)sexism has been repeatedly used in German public sphere to argue in favour of racist policies (see Messerschmidt 2016).

Feminism <> gender

An area of conflict between gender and feminism is reflected mainly in positionings. 'Gender' represents a professionalised and institutionalised realm in the interviews, while the term 'feminism' is used synonymously with (radical) political practice and critical and emancipatory acting that is conscious of historical (dis-)continuities. 'Gender' (conceptualised as a binary category) serves to legitimise learning within institutionalised contexts and networks, whereas the critique of the binary gender system is rather seen as (queer-/trans-)feminist and extreme (see gradual positioning through language). One interviewee described the dilemma between using the rather open and encompassing term 'gender', which is relatively meaningless at the same time, and the expression of a feminist viewpoint that is more powerful through clear critique, but also might have a deterrent effect. The controversy around feminism and gender is tied to several debates, for example to the discussion whether a change in gender relations is predominantly achieved inside or outside of institutions.

Gender studies <> gender training

Educators and gender trainers face a conflict between sharing knowledge related to job-based qualifications, so-called factual knowledge, and the promotion of social skills such as teamwork, reflection on privileges, or internalised oppression that are often neglected in job contexts because of a drive for efficiency. Gender competence, which is developed by gender training, is frequently understood as a 'soft skill'. This classification of gender-based issues as less relevant and important enhances resistance to contact among participants (reasons for resistance) and thus hampers gender trainers, feminists, and educators. Perceived hierarchies also prevail in the realm of gender-conscious education. One interviewee stated that pedagogical knowledge related to gender is often less appreciated and valued than abstract feminist theories. Transfers and synergy effects are thus prevented through the creation of hierarchies and the division into theory and practice.

Dramatisation <> removing dramatization

The emphasis on persistent gender inequalities, on the one hand, and the demand for a dissolution of gender categories, on the other, creates another area of conflict. This means that “dramatisation of gender” (through continued use of gender as a category for analysis) and “removing of dramatisation” (loss of meaning through strategies of difference and deconstruction) are in tension (see

the problem of reification in section 2.1). This conflict comes into effect in individual learning processes as well as in pedagogical practice. In professional positioning, the conflict is expressed through conscious weighing of options and through illustrating the area of conflict to the participants. Bearing that in mind, the use of examples is checked for each situation to examine which side they will benefit. These considerations are also relevant in regard to the self-presentation of educators (for example to make the decision to speak openly about their own heterosexuality in front of the participants and to reproduce dominant norms, or to come out as trans).

Gender relations <> intersectionality/interdependence of power relations

A certain limitation in topics is needed to engage with gender relations. As a result, an area of conflict emerges between the sharing of feminist history and theories and the simultaneous critical engagement with further power relations. There is the potential threat of losing sight of other power relations, such as capitalism and racism, when too much attention is paid to the success of feminist movements. Appropriate methods to approach intersectionality are still scarce in gender-conscious education. At the same time, educators struggle to raise awareness of the historicity of gender and the significance of gender as a structural category.

5. Conclusions and points of contact for theory and practice

The individual's perspective proved a particularly good way of focusing on the complexity of subjective problems regarding taking action in learning processes. It emerged that research on the issue of learning about gender relationships also contributes to the empirical foundation of learning theory. As an example of learning about social inequality, learning about gender relationships shows that learning theories from the individual perspective must be supplemented by concentrating on experiences, spontaneous acts and crises. This suggests theoretical complements and provides categories for reflection about learning processes.

At the same time, the results direct attention to structures: how can the context for critical learning be safe enough for the subject in order to be open to

diverse feelings of insecurity that depend on the subject's position?²⁹ Which structures can support the learning subjects and relieve isolation?

The study also highlights new issues that indicate a need for more research: which terms can be used to describe the subtle social influences even better? How can we make the inter-subjective level in learning processes accessible to the subject? How can we examine in even more detail the identity-related dimensions of resistance to learning that become apparent?

Finally, we need to ask which consequences the results could have on gender teaching and learning processes. The realisation that the reasons for learning processes lie in discovering structures that are personally relevant is not new by any means. However, the interviews showed the way in which, with regard to gender as an issue, core personal issues are broached, which are linked to deeper identity processes.

Emancipatory education and anti-discrimination education requires protective spaces for biographical reflection in which a renunciation of the competitive style of hegemonic idealised images (*white*, male, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied, etc.) and allowing and sharing of feelings (e.g. sadness, shame, pain, etc.) is possible. The organisation of a learning setting that can temporarily offer the necessary (minimal) protection is dependent on the positioning of the subjects. Homogenous groups (cisgender, trans*, male, female, *white*, Black) are useful to engage critically with one's biography. Depending on the positioning in the respective power relation, these groups can provide space for empowerment or critical examination of their own privileges. This applies throughout the learning and interest process. In this case there is no insularity.

We might also argue that personal reflection without gender knowledge is not possible. It is only by applying knowledge that we can work through what appears diffuse and threatening, therefore putting us in a position to act.

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²⁹ Inspiring ideas around this question can be found in the following publication: "Diskriminierungskritische Lehre. Denkanstöße aus den Gender Studies" (2016 Zentrum für transdisziplinäre Geschlechterstudien, HU Berlin (ed.))

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