

Learning about gender in areas of conflict – from the standpoint of the subject

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Abstract

This article provides an insight into “Lernen über Geschlecht. Genderkompetenz zwischen (Queer-)Feminismus, Re-Traditionalisierung und Intersektionalität” (Krämer 2015). In addition to presenting the key results of this study, this article will focus on the subjective perspective for conducting research into learning processes that are long-term in nature. The question is not how learning processes on gender relationships can be observed or reflected from the outside, but how people who grapple with gender experience these learning processes themselves. Selected episodes will illustrate how the subjective perspective in these processes is realised. An overview will explain the resulting areas of conflict discovered. Any ensuing theories about conclusions and connections provide further findings as regards the theory and practice of adult education.

1. Background and reasons for the research issue in the context of gender education research

To start with, the background and reasons for selecting the issue will be examined and put into a context of gender-education research.

For decades, feminist educational research, also called gender education 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 were produced which look at learning about gender relationships in particular. This type of learning is an important part of political education, combating discrimination and preventing violence. It remains unclear how these learning processes occur from the perspective of the subject, in other words what obstacles and opportunities arise for those learning.

The purpose of education that looks at gender or gender education is to enable and to accompany a type of learning that permits scope for taking action and provides access to resources, regardless of classifications to gender stereotypes and restrictive gender structures. However, practice repeatedly demonstrates (taking resistance to learning about certain issues as an example) that this type of learning about gender appears to be complicated and that therefore a differentiated view is required.

2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework and the key terms of the research are described to start with. They are described in detail in the first part of the study mentioned. In the following section, selected aspects will be discussed which illustrate this research perspective. In the following chapter, the method and the qualitative design of the research will be described.

2.1 Gender

Gender will be understood following more modern gender theories (Butler; West/Zimmermann), that is as a socially powerful construct. Gender is also understood as

being intersectional, in other words intertwined with and not detachable from other categories of social differentiation (such as ‘race’¹, class and body).

This understanding of gender results in aspects that have consequences for research. Two are to be accentuated 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 the normative-forced character of 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 considers 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. 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 political-strategic aspect of this type of reproduction in the name of any decline in the importance of gender desired (Spivak 1993, p. 3; Nandi 2006). The reference to what appear 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, gender relationships are virtually never mirrored in laws which advocate discrimination publicly, but in interaction between people and because of the discursive subjectification due to normalisation. Today for example, the reason for gender segregation on the labour market (which still generates unequal pay between the sexes) is to a large extent the result of the 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 are going in three discursive directions which influence subjectification processes, some of which contradict and some of which support one another (see Fig. 1):

¹ As regards the categorical use of the terms ‘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 it is the choice of language which is to enable a link to be made to German history and society (see Eggers 2005a, p. 12). The word is placed in quotation marks in the German in order to underline the reason for the category when the biological construct of ‘Rasse’ is meant.

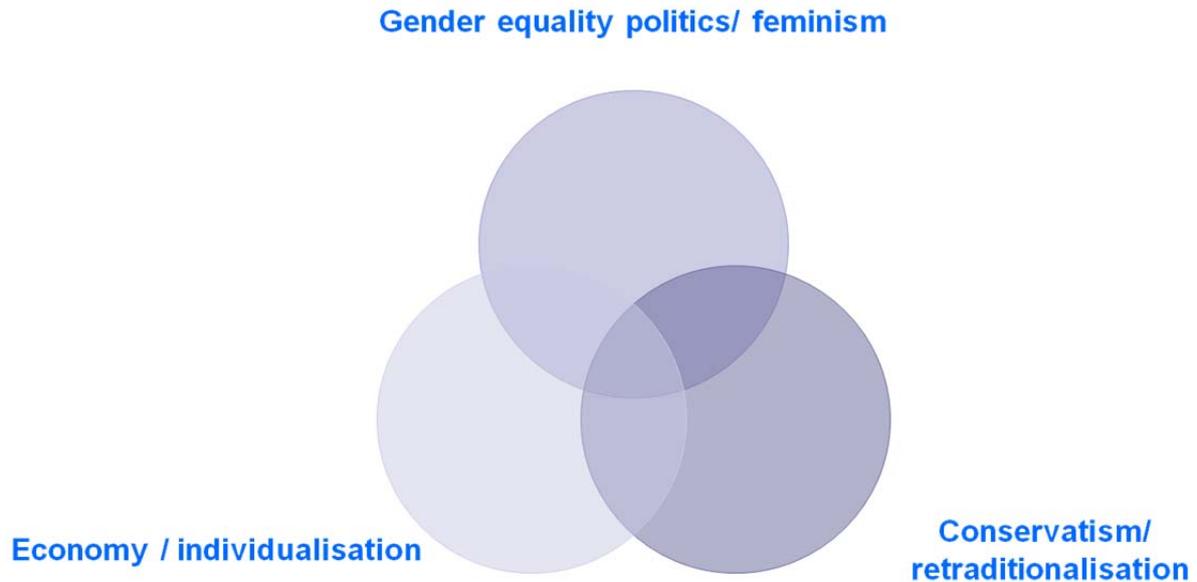


Fig. 1: Interlinked discourses which have an impact on the current gender relationships.

1. Gender mainstreaming discourses and feminism: Institutionalisation processes also spawned feminist research at German universities, the abolition of discriminatory legislation² and the introduction of gender mainstreaming laws, officers and authorities. Since May 1999 the EU has adopted a Gender Mainstreaming (GM) strategy.³ Many demands by feminist movements have been responded to and represented by government parties. Gender is now a mainstream issue. Currently, a statutory quota of women (30 per cent) has been specified for one of the last male-dominated areas, supervisory boards of companies listed on the stock exchange. In the public arena, some of the feminist movement can still be seen and heard on the streets, in campaigns and participating in activities. These are often selective and diverse movements, such as the Twitter “#aufschrei” (outcry) debate which opposes everyday sexism or as other examples, that include protests and groups which focuses on the social distribution of care-related duties, the “Lady festivals” (feminist music and DIY festivals), protests against opponents of abortion, or global activities such as the slut walks which have been taking place since 2011 and the global “OneBillionRising” campaign.⁴
2. Re-traditionalisation and conservatism: Conservatism, biologisms and tradition are still issues of public debate. “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.⁵ Various authors made their voices regarding anti-feminist issues heard 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-

² The latest changes: Since 2013, a legal right to kindergarten places has existed in Germany and for taxation purposes civil partnerships have been placed on an equal footing with heterosexual marriages.

³ Rooted in and implemented via the Amsterdam Agreements

⁴ The approaches are very different regarding the impact of their social criticism and their organisational structures

⁵ 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 organisations.

help literature (Pease 2000; Evatt 2004).⁶ Anti-feminist comments are particularly common online where the men's rights groups are active in numerous forums and networks (see Homann 2013).

3. 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 relationships. In this case, the growing subjectification of labour, the blurring of working 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 are all playing a role. These developments are changing the dominating patterns of the gender-specific manner in which emotions are dealt with. 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 supporting and contradicting each other. Traditional images are still encountered that illustrate men as strong, muscular, competent, successful and in positions of leadership. Women are portrayed as caring, attractive, thoughtful and wanting someone to lean on. But images of the "new" woman and the "new" man can equally be found. The "new" woman does of course work, is career-minded, assertive and brings up her children at the same time. The "new" man is a caring partner and father, but at the same time a narcissistic consumer⁷ and still gainfully employed. At the same time his characteristics are strangely vague, but he primarily stands apart from "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, heterosexual consumers of both sexes.

The goal of economic change is not equal distribution, even if it sometimes dilutes gender dichotomies, but it is much more to use all the manpower available. This is 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 in gender-mainstreaming and women's rights policies. In conjunction with anti-feminist and right-wing debates, the consequences are that in many places feminist achievements (such as refuges and emergency hotlines for women) are affected by or threatened with radical cuts. Feminist and gender research courses at universities are discontinued, or pedagogical projects with girls or girls' meet-ups for example are cut or threatened by cuts. Pedagogical projects on gender in education are overwhelmingly among the first to go under the neoliberal banner of austerity.⁸

2.2 Intentional learning

In order to understand the subjective perspective of those learning, as a theoretical basis, an understanding of learning from the standpoint of the subject is ideal (Holzkamp 1987; 1993). The benefits and consequences of a research perspective from the standpoint of the subject and why it is ideal for the project outlined will be summarised below.

⁶ 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).

⁷ 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).

⁸ For example, the residential adult-education centre "Alte Molkerei Frille", which was one of the first educational facilities in Germany to adopt a consistent gender-based approach to the way it worked and which also defined "Friller Schule", had to close in 2012.

The theory of learning from the standpoint of the subject focuses on the ability of the subject to act as the core category. The reason and goal of learning is for those 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 the 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 when learning, subjectively sensible reasons have to exist for those 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 that which is actually possible (see Holzkamp 1993, p. 182).

Important for the perspective looked at here is Holzkamp's analytical differentiation, which he performs in the two categories of restrictive and generalised ability to act. Restrictive ability to act, understood as remaining or arranging oneself in dependencies, is opposed to generalised abilities to act as an increase in options available with regard to social conditions. The subject is therefore always in a position to decide whether to merely repulse threats, or change threatening conditions himself. Generalised and restrictive abilities to act are always understood as constantly available poles, also called the two-fold scope of opportunities (Holzkamp 1983, p. 370; Holzkamp 1990, p. 37 cf.). The fact that the subject is not always aware of the options or that areas of learning are always intertwined with different, sometimes contradictory power games, can lead to resistance to learning (see Holzkamp 1987).⁹

2.3 Informal learning

Based on Holzkamp however, only intentional learning processes can be focused on. As learning about gender extends far beyond intention-based learning practices and includes many informal learning processes, it is a good idea to complement the perspectives with learning and interest theories proposed by Frigga Haug, Käthe Meyer-Drawe and Anke Grotlüschen. Similarly to Holzkamp, these theories focus on involvement in society and the subject's ability to act, 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 interaction of this theoretical framework and the empirical analysis of gender learning processes is focused on, the next paragraph will outline the study's methodology.

3. Methodological and qualitative research design

Qualitative research design allows the adoption of the individuals' perspectives as a place from which to start the research. It allows identification of the interviewee's subjective purpose and reveals how the reasons are related. The empirical analysis is based on 11 transcribed interviews with people who are or were involved in gender education. The

⁹ In adult education, research is looking into resistance to learning (Grotlüschen 2003; Faulstich/Grell 2005; Grell 2006; Schepers 2009).

interviewees have a personal, strong interest in gender issues. In order to provide maximum contrast and considering theoretical sampling, people of different age groups were interviewed who had various social backgrounds, origins, family backgrounds and lifestyles and who have different self-specified gender roles (women, men, trans*¹⁰).

The analysis will be based on the grounded theory research style. The grounded theory poses a set of questions to analyse the data and is called the coding paradigm. 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 concentrated 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. Abilities to act.

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	Abilities to act
Initial learning process	Reasons for tackling the subject area	Reasons for not tackling the subject area	Abilities to act
Advanced learning process	Reasons for tackling the subject area	Reasons for not tackling the subject area	Abilities to act

Fig. 2: 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 abilities to act.

Further limits were set because of focuses on the part of the interviewees and due to the theoretical contrasting with the three-phase model of interest development. As a result, the analysis focuses on the following points (which have a light grey background here):

¹⁰ Trans* also includes transgender, transsexual, cross-dressers, drag queens and kings, transvestites, transidents and others. Some of the terms are applied synonymously and some of them are clearly defined from one another. The asterisk denotes neutrality of the term. It is used as an umbrella term connoting transgender, transsexual, cross-dressers, drag queens and kings, transvestites, transidents and others. Compared with lesbians and homosexuals, transgender still has very low visibility (see Hartmann 2012, p. 165). This definition is not static.

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 – Holzkamp 1987; 1993) which occurred in the initial learning process
3. Abilities to act which were generated at the advanced stage of the learning process.

4. Results: Learning in areas of conflict

So how are learning processes from the standpoint of the subject accomplished? 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 was used to generate sub-categories which will be described briefly below. This overview highlights which section the excerpts of the interviews were taken from 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	Abilities to act	<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. An arrow highlights the sub-category that the example stems from.

The analysis categories are shown in the white column on the right-hand side.

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 women, men or trans* within the social two-gender positioning. This positioning has on the one hand grown in socialisation processes associated with the person's history. On the other hand it is repeatedly 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 perception¹¹.

Political-ethical reasons include arguments and feelings that interviewees describe as the driving forces for conflicts considered unjust from outside influences. 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. 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. This section however only looks at the background and initial reasons for learning.

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 inner 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 abilities to act. Deliberate (non) positioning saves resources, protects individuals and is an economic-strategic way of acting. In certain situations it is considered necessary, unavoidable or dilemmatic. Firstly, conciliatory attitudes within teaching-learning arrangements are established as professional positioning. As a clear point of reference to a standpoint, political positioning is determined as the second form of positioning. As the third form of positioning, options of a questioning positioning are looked at where a doubting and contemplative standpoint occurs.

The key result of the study produced different areas of conflict where learning about gender relationships takes place from the perspective of the subject. Two excerpts from interviews in the first-contact phase shown below 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.

The quotes below are from interviewee Laura Janssen¹² (aged 30 when the interview was carried out). In the interview she talks about when gender as an issue entered her life for the first time.

"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 example from the interview clearly shows the interviewee's conflict with gender norms. This is an experience with the discrepancy between expectations and attributes which Janssen experienced from an outside source and her own, gender-based image. The fact that she felt "worried" indicates a confusing, physical experience. It could be seen as an unsettling doubt about her own perception.

The analyses from the "gender-based reasons" category show that where individuals' (gender-based) identities collided with gender norms and were therefore key reasons for learning, these reasons are recalled in varying degrees of intensity and included insecurity, fear or confusion. Some of the interviewees described the way they dealt with these feelings as "turning against themselves" (in the form of doubt, self-deprecation, withdrawal or

¹¹ This positioning is not valid life long, 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.

¹² All names have been changed.

depression). 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 accentuates 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 diffuse feelings were not reflected on until afterwards, in other words at later stages of Janssen’s learning process, when she was 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 transformed¹³.

The following aspects can be observed here: The example stated underscores 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 allocated a social meaning through language afterwards.

Meyer-Drawe’s phenomenological perspective of strengthens the argument for the use of subject-centric learning-theory approaches in order to look at long-term learning processes better.

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, Janssen finds herself here, still unreflective and caught in the conflict between experiencing her own gender-based form of expression and the normative expectations and characteristics ascribed to her by her environment. This conflict can also be considered one in the sense of the two-fold scope of opportunities: Janssen feels she has a choice between the restrictive option to act and the generalised option to act. In other words she has to opt for averting a threat by adapting to external expectations and acting out her own gender identity. The result is a risk to the status quo, but also a chance to build on the action she and others can take.

The analyses of the resistance to learning category show that the unsettling moment of discrepancy in comparison with the norm might not be just a reason to learn, but also relevant to internal resistance to learning. If the gap with the gender norms is perceived as being too vast, the subject may be unable to reconcile the advantage learning can provide. Learning about gender first seems too dangerous and threatening to the familiar way of perception. As a result, resistance to learning can occur. In other words, the subject has good reasons not to learn. If reasons for not learning dominate, then subjects do not learn. This is particularly the case if the subject’s own personal freedoms, form of expression, or sense of justice are impaired. Consequently, reasons for learning and resistance to learning are both rooted in experience with discrepancy.

When looking at the results of the analysis across categories, it becomes clear however that the subjects rarely have to surrender to just one single experience of discrepancy regarding a subject of learning, but that it is much more about positioning in a field which includes different poles. This positioning is not to be taken one-dimensionally and nor is it

¹³ 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).

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.

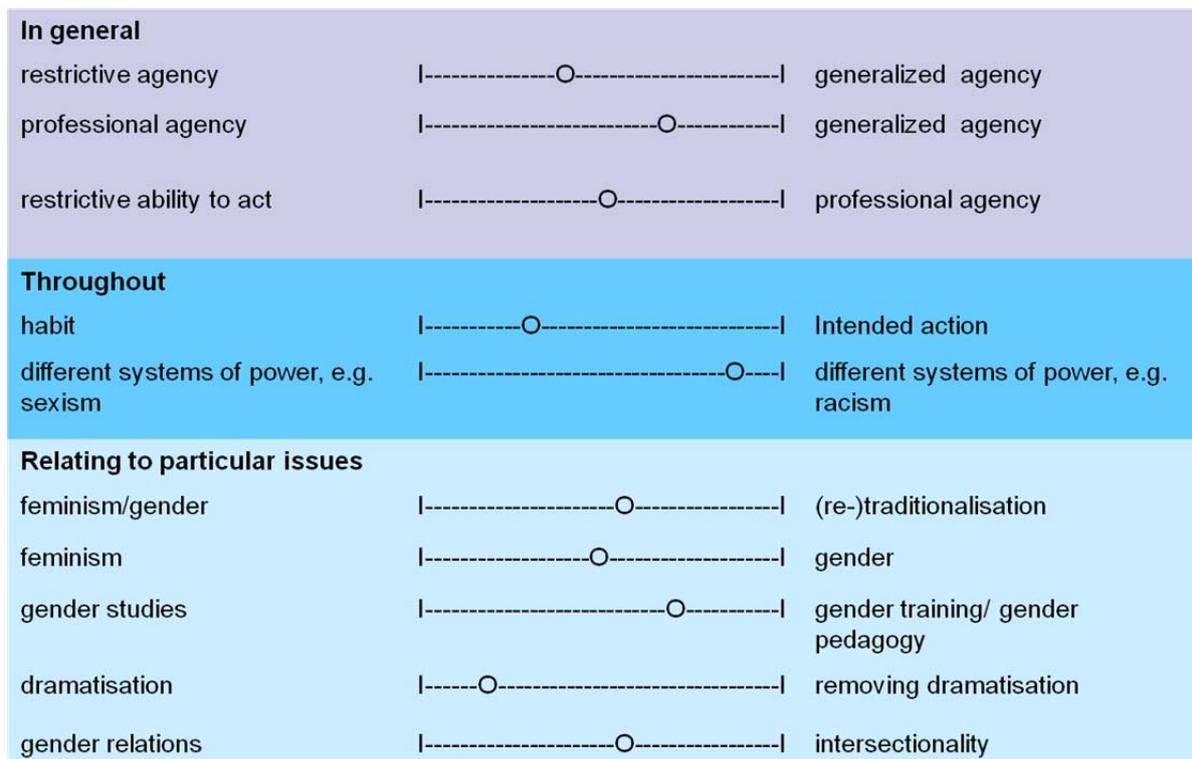


Fig. 4: Areas of conflict deduced from the analyses in which learning about gender and gender competence are located

The control buttons (shown here in the form of circles) are never in all areas of conflict on the emancipatory pole. In the model this is highlighted by the fact that the circles are situated at different positions. The graphic is a diagram – the subject personally and situationally selects the positioning vis à vis the areas of conflict. 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. One example of this is the ambivalence between individual political positioning and the rejection of feeling overwhelmed in the situation concerned. A response cannot be provided in detail to each area of conflict. Based on the overview however, the meaning of the three levels (shown here in different shades of grey) will be explained.

The first level (a medium shade of grey) shows “general areas of conflict”: between a generalised ability to act, restrictive ability to act and professional ability to act. This is the area of conflict which Janssen experiences most acutely. A third ability to act was added to Holzkamp’s definitions: professional agency. This was identified in the empirical analysis from the abilities to act 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. Regardless of the core issue, these general areas of conflict are encountered in learning processes again and again.

The second area in dark grey encompasses transversal areas of conflict. These refer to routines and subjective relevance or multiple relevance of differentiating categories. These areas of conflict can be applied to learning in general, however they are relevant to learning about social inequality in particular. For example, in subjective learning processes transphobia and experience with racism can have an inhibitory and a crippling effect. However, insight gained can be used by the subjects synergetically or reflexively and engender new reasons for learning or taking action.

The third area (shown in light grey in the graphic) illustrates the conflicts of interest related to certain areas. The problem of reification, the contradictory social discourses on gender and theoretical and practical contradictions related to the object are reflected here.

5. Conclusions and touchpoints for the theory and practice of adult education and education in general

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 us that learning theories from the individual perspective must be supplemented to concentrate on experiences, spontaneous acts and crises. This suggests theoretical complements to the neo analysis from the standpoint of the subject (see Grotlüschen 2015) and provides categories of reflection on learning processes.

The study also produces new issues which indicate a need for research: What 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 gender-related dimensions of resistance to learning that become apparent?

Finally, we need to ask what 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, regarding gender as an issue, core personal issues are broached which are linked to deeper identity processes.

Gender formation requires protective spaces for biographical reflection in which a renunciation of the competitive style of hegemonic-male idealised images and allowing and sharing feelings are possible. 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 is defined that we can work through what appears diffuse and threatening, therefore putting us in a position to act. Last but not least, the research results and the overview of the areas of conflict in the graphic can help teachers and students.

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