

Promoting Gender Sensitivity in Social Work

BY ANN-KARINA HENRIKSEN

ABSTRACT

The article reflects on teaching gender theory to students who are not enrolled in a gender programme. It argues that learning can be facilitated to social work students by tapping into their own gendered experiences and by linking gender to wider concerns about social inequality. The article draws on personal notes from teaching gender and social diversity to social work students. In this context, two main obstacles are identified: anti-feminism and individualization. These obstacles can be addressed productively. First by bringing students' gendered experiences and social categorisations into play, and second, by demonstrating how social problems are shaped by gender structures and unequal power relations.

KEYWORDS

*teaching, anti-feminism, individualization, social work, structural inequality/
undervisning, antifeminisme, individualisering, socialt arbejde, strukturel ulighe*

Ann-Karina Henriksen is an Assistant Professor in Social Work at Metropolitan University College and a Postdoctoral Researcher in Criminology at Aalborg University. Her research focuses on gender, crime and social work, and she is currently engaged in research on juvenile girls in surrogate confinement, funded by the Danish Council for Independent Research.

One female student says: “I just can’t stand that whole feminist crap about having to feel sorry for women. I mean, we all have a choice. If you are not happy with it, just do something about it.” Another student, female as well, echoes: “Yeah, like in the readings for this course – somewhere it said that it would be better for women to invest in a sex change than in higher education. I mean, what is that?”

(Extract from personal notes after teaching session; recited from memory).

This conversation takes place between two female students in their early twenties at the School for Social Work at Metropolitan University College in Copenhagen, Denmark. They are entering the classroom engaged in a discussion on the readings for a lecture on gender and social diversity. Their negative stance to feminist perspectives is not uncommon, and it seems that feminist perspectives part sides, at least in a Danish context. A few students embrace feminist perspectives, but many reject such perspectives as politicised and outdated. This article particularly addresses the challenges of teaching gender and diversity to students who have not enrolled in a gender programme or gender course. It is in this context of teaching gender that I found myself saying ‘no, it’s not about feminism’, in an attempt to reframe the lecture as a critical reflection on how gender constructions underpin and frame social work practices.

The article draws on personal experiences and notes from teaching gender and diversity in the past year, which are used to reflect on the broader didactical challenges of teaching gender and diversity. I identify two main barriers among students that tend to obstruct a gender-sensitized understanding of social problems and social work

practices among social work students. The first is a critical stance to feminism and discussions of gender inequality, which I refer to as anti-feminism. The second is individualization. Both of these tendencies seem to produce an oppositional stance to structural perspectives and gendered vulnerabilities. The article produces insights into the specific challenges of teaching gender and diversity to social work students, though the proposed didactical tools and reflections are relevant to university level teaching in other courses as well, such as criminology and sociology.

In the article, I first reflect on my own pathway to feminist thinking and feminist pedagogy, and then reflect on how feminist theory links to students’ lived experiences and shapes social problems such as crime, homelessness and domestic violence. I then reflect on how discourses of individualization frame students’ perceptions of self and social work in late modernity, and present didactical methods for moving past such individualized understandings. The third part reflects on teaching intersectionality by highlighting how intersecting structures of power and inequality produce social problems of a certain form and intensity. Finally, the article concludes with further didactical reflections and a call for scholars to engage in gender-sensitized research and teaching in social work.

PATHWAYS TO FEMINIST THINKING AND FEMINIST PEDAGOGY

The ‘feminist crap’ that the young female students are complaining about as they enter the classroom produced some tension and unease on my part. To begin with, I found such remarks disturbing and counterproductive, until I began to reflect systematically on how their criticism could be explored and engaged with in order to facilitate learning. I recalled my own critical sentiments regarding feminist thinking

when I was a student myself, enrolled in a Master's programme in social anthropology. Like the social work students I now teach, I also sighed when feminist scholars identified patriarchal structures and gendered disadvantage. I, too, was hesitant to accept the gendered vulnerabilities and subordination that preoccupied feminist thinkers, as it resonated poorly with my lived experiences as a young Danish woman, living on my own, enrolled in my education of choice, and feeling very emancipated and resourceful. It took six months of studying at the University of Cape Town and living in post-apartheid South Africa for me to comprehend the gendered vulnerabilities and inequalities that can shape women's experiences. Feminist thinking grew on me through an iterative process of reading feminist scholarship and experiencing social inequality through the critical lens of feminist scholarship.

Re-exploring my pathway to feminist thinking was productive for understanding students' critical sentiments. I came to realize that rather than lecture on feminist theory, I needed to bring students' lived experiences of disadvantage and gendered constraints to the forefront of attention through dialogue and shared reflection. My didactical reflections were heavily influenced by feminist pedagogy (hooks 1994; Lather 1991) and feminist social work theory (Dominelli 2002; Morley 2008; Pease & Fook 1999;) in my emphasis on engaging students in critical reflections on gender and social inequality. From this scholarship, I found inspiration to pursue a line of teaching that emphasizes participatory learning and the development of critical thinking. Thus, the interactions in the classroom shifted from aiming to teach feminist theory towards providing students with tools to deconstruct common sense logics, hierarchies and power relations and, through critical thinking, pave the way for more (self)reflexive and gender sensitive social work practices.

The article is a reflexive account of my teaching practice rather than a complete model for teaching. I reflect *on* teaching feminism in an article to be used *for* teaching. I invite students to join the reflexive space of teaching by making the didactical reflections transparent and open to critique. I see this as a part of creating an interactive learning space where power relations between teacher and learner, between theoretical and practical knowledge, can be destabilized and reordered to enable new ways of thinking, teaching and learning.

"No, it's not about feminism," I told the students, in order to please the antagonists. In Denmark, feminism and feminist scholarship have strong political undertones, and are often rather referred to as gender theory and gender research (Knudsen 2010). In this article, I use feminist research and feminist thinking as synonyms for gender theory and research. In this context, feminism does not refer to a political ideology, but to theoretical perspectives that provide the tools for destabilizing common-sense knowledge on gender and structural inequality. Like most critical theory, it has the potential to challenge power relations and provide the impetus for social change. As future social workers, the students share a vested interest in social inequality, which serves as a didactical hook for advancing gender-sensitized perspectives on social work practices and students' own lives. However, the first step is to engage with students' understanding of what feminism is and then explore its relevance for understanding men and women's dispositions and gendered identities.

MULTIPLE FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES

I identified two major points of criticism of feminism among the students: first, that feminism is about promoting women's rights and privileges, and therefore inherently political and biased; and secondly, that feminism constructs women as victims

without agency or power. In order to promote more nuanced understandings of feminism and its potential for gender-sensitizing social work practices, I introduced students to a plurality of feminist theories. This introduction aims to illustrate how feminist theory is relevant for exploring a range of social problems and interventions.

Different feminist perspectives would enable different analytical approaches to social work practices. The radical feminist characteristic of the 1970s was mainly occupied with patriarchy and male dominance in both private and public space. This is often referred to as second-wave feminism, which is engaged in displaying men and women's unequal access to the labour market, public space and positions of power (Lykke 2008). While first-wave feminism in the early twentieth century had fought for economic and political rights, second-wave feminism targets the informal structures that maintain inequalities between men and women in private and public space. Research within this line of inquiry demonstrates how gender structures and patriarchy continue to shape the choices, dispositions and everyday practices of men and women. From the mid-1990s, a third wave of feminism arose to engage theoretically and empirically with the multiple intersections between sexuality and gender. This is also referred to as queer theory and aims to go beyond dichotomies between male and female and to unsettle hetero-normativity. Today, feminist thinking consists of a multitude of perspectives that critically explore the structures of power and inequality that position men and women as marginal, vulnerable or disadvantaged. Gender theory is not confined to advocating the rights and privileges of women, but rather installs a destabilizing perspective on the structures and inequalities that produce gendered constraints and vulnerabilities for both men and women.

GENDERING SOCIAL WORK

In a range of academic disciplines, feminist thinking has destabilized theory by building critiques that such theories are male-oriented and omit women's experiences and practices. Danish scholarship on social work and social problems largely omits gender, and textbooks rarely reflect explicitly on the gendered dimensions of social problems, social policies or social work practices (see Guldager & Skytte 2013; Hansen 2013). Yet, in Denmark, as elsewhere, poverty, crime, homelessness and prostitution are social problems with gendered dimensions. Inspired particularly by Swedish social work studies (Karlsson & Piuva 2012) and international feminist social work (Pease & Fook 1999; Fawcett et al. 2005; Dominelli 2002), the following empirical examples suggest how feminist thinking can introduce a destabilizing perspective that allows us to explore the gendered vulnerabilities and gendered pathways to troubled lives for both men and women.

Crime as a gendered social problem

Most crime is conducted by men, which makes crime, imprisonment and rehabilitation highly gendered social problems. In Denmark, female inmates constitute approximately five per cent of the prison population, and in all types of offences, women are less frequently convicted than men (Justitsministeriets Forskningskontor 2012). Feminist scholars argue that theories of crime have been developed *by men about men*, and need to be tested and developed in the light of women's involvement in crime (Miller & Mullins 2006). American criminologist Jean Bottcher theorizes about the gendered pathways in and out of crime, arguing that social expectations limit and encourage youth involvement in crime along lines of gender. Young women become oriented towards family and child-rearing at an earlier age than their male peers, which limit their prolonged involve-

ment in crime and reduce their risk of incarceration (Bottcher 2001). From a similar perspective, violent crime is perceived as incompatible with femininity, and female involvement in severe violence is limited through social sanctions on girls' violent behaviour (Henriksen 2013). A gender perspective can also contribute towards explaining how expectations for men to be providers and successfully manage their lives places a gendered strain on young men to compensate for marginalization and poverty by means of crime and illegal income. Dominant gender discourses account for some of the push and pull effects leading to crime, and they regulate criminal involvement, especially for women.

Gendered patterns of homelessness

Homelessness is another area with significant gender patterns, approximately 75 per cent of all the homeless in Denmark being male (Olsen 2013). Pathways in and out of homelessness may have similarities for men and women, but nuanced understandings of the gendered pathways and experiences provide useful knowledge for early interventions. Dominant gender discourses construct men as strong, assertive and in control, rather than as in need of help, vulnerable or victimized. This has implications for men's pathways to homelessness and their readiness to seek aid from social services (Brandt 2010). Similarly, it also seems relevant to explore further how women enter into and cope with homelessness in a Danish context. Women's homelessness is more difficult to register, as it can be obscured by phenomena such as 'couch surfing' and 'grey-zone' prostitution, where sexual favours are exchanged for favours such as food, a lift or accommodation. Gender-sensitized knowledge could feed into early interventions or the establishment of alternative housing programmes, ultimately providing improved support to men and women at risk of homelessness.

Gendered aspects of domestic violence

Domestic violence is also a highly gendered social problem shaped by commonplace distinctions between female victims and male perpetrators. Welfare state interventions linked to domestic violence reflect institutional understandings that women are the main targets of abuse at the hands of men. Women's shelters provide protection and services for abused women and children, which is a service all municipalities must provide under the Social Service Act §109. There is no legal requirement for the establishment of similar shelters for abused men and their children. However, it is estimated that 10,000 Danish men annually are exposed to intimate partner violence (Helweg-Larsen 2012). While the violence perpetrated towards men may differ significantly in scope from the violence perpetrated towards women, male victims of violence are largely left to find support in their own network or resort to shelters provided under the Social Service Act § 110. These services are not specialized in dealing with intimate partner victimization or practical needs such as permanent housing, therapy and the accommodation of children. Some private organisations provide services for men similar to the women's shelters, but they receive no public funding. It appears that images of the female victim and the male offender are deeply embedded in the legal and administrative structures underpinning social work, which places male victims of domestic violence at risk of further marginalization and disadvantage.

Gendered perceptions of youth at/as risk.

The dominant narrative of the female victim and the male perpetrator also seems to underpin social work with troubled youths. Historically, this work has shifted between conceptualizing troubled children as *at risk*, i.e. in need of help and protection, or *as a risk*, to be dealt with through punishment and removed from society (Bryderup 2010). Studies of young women engaging

in risk behaviour and crime suggest that such distinctions have a gendered dimension. Professionals are inclined to perceive girls and young women as victims of a disadvantaged childhood, their behaviour being perceived as ‘a cry for help’, and their deviance as rooted in various pathologies (Andersson 1998; Henriksen 2013). Such perceptions call for treatment, therapy and protection, rather than punishment and – ultimately – placement in secure care. Looking at social service provision for troubled children and young people in the light of feminist theory may provide insights into the gendered logics and sorting mechanisms that tend to see girls as being *at* risk and boys *as* risk.

Women in gender-integrated confinement

A feminist perspective can also be applied to advance gender-sensitive practices and create awareness of women’s needs and rights in gender-integrated confinement. A study of female prisoners in Denmark finds that women in gender-integrated confinement are at risk of sexual violence and exploitation, and that activities and practices are oriented towards male inmates’ interests, vocational training and needs for treatment and learning (Mathiassen 2011). A similar concern is raised in an ongoing study of juvenile girls in secure care (Henriksen 2014). The gender-integrated form of confinement places young women in a male-dominated environment designed to meet the needs and interests of young men. The male-oriented organization is manifested in both daily activities and facilities such as basketball courts, fitness machines with heavy weights, woodworking and metal workshops, etc. A range of practices and materialities produce gendered deviancy in secure care that places young women at risk of further marginalization and vulnerability.

ENCOURAGING REFLECTIONS ON GENDER, DIVERSITY AND POWER

Above, I have presented examples of how deviance, vulnerability and marginalization are underpinned by gender discourses, and provide an underlying logic for interventions with troubled youths, victims of domestic violence and homelessness. Gender structures shape the way social problems are recognized, interpreted and intervened in by social workers, and consequently these structures contribute to shape the production of social clients. Therefore, social work can never be gender-neutral because decision-makers, social workers and clients draw on gendered categorizations that are historically and socially embedded.

In order to make social work students reflect critically on gender, power and social diversity, I not only provide them with empirical examples of gendered aspects of different social problems, I also facilitate exercises as part of my teaching, for instance using online material produced in the project *Through Different Eyes*, developed by the anti-racist organization Global Stories. The website¹ consists of pictures in which people originating from different parts of the world have been given a makeover to change their gender, ethnicity or religious affiliation. For example, a ‘white’ boy is remade as a boy with dark skin, while a Nordic-looking woman is given a darker skin complexion and a headscarf to make her look Arab and Muslim.

As part of the exercise, the students were asked first to reflect, in pairs, on the differences between the real image and the make-over image, and to consider what the person in the make-over image would have experienced, for example, walking down the street or using public transport. Secondly, they were asked to reflect on whether they would expect these persons to have different social problems and pose different challenges to a social worker working in case management. A few students re-

fused to talk about such categorizations, claiming that they did not judge people and did not categorize other people. Most of the students, however, engaged in the exercise and, through shared reflection, it became clear, first of all, that categorizations exist and reflect one's own positioning in terms of gender, ethnicity and class; and, secondly, that our categorizations are intimately linked to perceptions of normality, deviance, and who is positioned with the power to define. These dynamics need critical consideration by welfare state professionals, because they link to knowledge production about welfare state clients and the identification of a social problem, which constitutes the basis for any form of intervention.

To further tap into students' understanding of normality and deviance, I encourage reflections on gender and sexuality. Third-wave feminism productively disturbs dichotomous constructions of male versus female and explores gender as a multitude of masculine and feminine configurations. The critical perspective on gender and sexuality is relevant in a range of social work practices, because perceptions of normality are permeated by dominant gender discourses and heterosexuality as the norm (Fahlgren & Sawyer 2005). While homosexuality is no longer banned in most Western countries, hetero-sexism and heteronormativity continue to frame homosexuality as deviant and marginalized (Rosenberg 2007). The social norms that prescribe sexual desire and orientation towards the opposite sex constrain men and women in significant ways. Gay, lesbian, bi- and transsexuals deviate from these norms and risk experiencing social exclusion and even violence. So, as part of my teaching, I encourage students reflections on heteronormativity and how it shapes social work interventions. In one class, this perspective was debated intensely when one young male student provokingly commented: "Is this your point of view or is it based on re-

search?" Before I had time to answer, a young female student interrupted saying,

Oh come on, you guys have no idea how hetero-normative this place (Metropolitan University College) is. You just have to deviate a little bit in how you dress or talk and then you feel it's inappropriate, like deviant and strange. It's so normative.
(Extract from personal notes after teaching session; recited from memory).

This young woman self-identified as lesbian and made the class cautious in openly expressing intolerance and further disagreement. However, the discussion potentially left the students reflecting on the normativity of heterosexuality and its minoritizing effects on gay, lesbian, transgender and bisexual individuals in the classroom, in the educational setting, and in society at large. This normativity underpins many social work interventions and thus risks further marginalizing non-heterosexual clients. By linking gender theory to issues of marginalization and discrimination based on sexuality and gender deviance, students' perspectives widen in relation to what feminism is and how feminist thinking relates to social inequality and marginalization.

CONTESTING INDIVIDUALIZATION

Standing in a class of social work students, I usually find myself gazing out over thirty female students and a handful of young men. Obvious questions to pose to the class are therefore: How can we explain gendered patterns of educational choices? Can gender theory explain why 75 per cent of employees in the Danish public sector are female? Or why occupations dominated by female workers are also often low-wage sectors? I raise these questions to generate students' reflections on how gender structures have played into their individual choices and make them reflect critically on the gendered economy of care work.

The Nordic countries are known for their advances in gender equality. Gender mainstreaming has been incorporated in a range of policies and continues to attract political attention in terms of securing equal access to education, employment and benefits for men and women alike. However, while gender inequality is no longer inscribed and maintained by law, it continues to permeate power structures in contemporary society. The average income of men remains approximately fifteen per cent higher than that of women; women remain few in number in executive positions; and women dominate in the public sector as care workers, performing similar tasks to those they have performed historically at home, namely being involved in raising children and taking care of the sick and elderly (Sjørup 2011).

The link between patriarchy and the devaluation of care work has been thoroughly analysed by feminist scholars. The low wages that characterize women's vocational areas shape the lives of women, resulting in their being at increased risk of poverty (Larsen & Andersen 1999); and low wages affect everyday lives in families and relate acutely to children's welfare. Nearly half of Danish children defined as poor live in single parent households with their mothers (Ottosen 2012). Similar trends are found in the Swedish *Kvinnomaktudredningen*. It is in this context that the researchers write, 'For women it would actually pay to have a sex change rather than getting an education' (cited in Hydén and Månsson 2007: 263), thus suggesting that gender inequality is so structurally embedded that bodily alterations may be easier and cheaper than changing a system of entrenched gender inequality.

The discussion on gender and care work aims at making students reflect critically on the power structures in which they are embedded, and which shape their lives and dispositions. The aim is to illustrate how agency is not freedom from such constitu-

tion but rather the capacity to resist or subvert such structures. Feminist thinking draws on a shared understanding that gender structures shape and limit identity, work and the life choices of men and women. There is no free choice, but rather structured agency. The humanist notion of free will has been the target of continued feminist critique, arguing that such conceptualizations of agency are a construct of malestream academia and male fantasies of power and rationality (Lykke 2008). Agency is linked to and framed by structural constraints and possibilities. As Judith Butler expresses it:

To claim that the subject is constituted is not to claim that it is determined. On the contrary, the constituted character of the subject is the very precondition of its agency. For what is it that enables a purposive and significant reconfiguration of cultural and political relations, if not a relation that can be turned against itself, reworked and resisted? (Butler 1995, cited in Davies 2000: 15)

Butler argues that subjects are not determined by structures, but constituted through them. Much feminist thinking is underpinned by the notion that it is through identification and purposive destabilization that structures of domination and inequality can be reshaped and reconfigured.

The notion of a subject constituted by discourses and relations of power is confrontational to some students, who perceive their choices and dispositions as the products of their free will. This is consistent with trends in late modernity and neoliberalism, where individualization permeates the educational arena, the labour market, and social work in the Nordic welfare state (Katznelson et al. 2009). Citizens are continually held responsible and accountable for the choices they make and the success they achieve. In Danish education, 2nd grade learners are held accountable for

their individual learning processes, learners in their teens for making qualified career decisions, and students in higher education for organizing their lives so they finish successfully and on time (ibid.). Failure at any of these stages implies individual failure and can be explained by either a lack of motivation or pathologies of some sort. Svend Brinkmann links the rise of diagnosed pathologies to the neoliberal and individualistic ideologies that permeate contemporary debates (Brinkmann 2010). He argues that the current level of children who are being diagnosed with psychiatric disorders suggests a culture of pathology where the slightest deviation from normality calls for a diagnosis of some sort. Other scholars link the social pressure to perform well with increased rates of depression and suicide among girls and young women in particular (Katznelson et al. 2009). With the increasing hegemony of liberal and individualistic ideology, success in life becomes a matter of competent individual choices and investments, just as failure to succeed is rooted in personal failure or pathologies.

Failure to succeed can also be explored as linked to structurally embedded relations of power and inequality. However, social work relies heavily on individualized explanations and interventions for social problems of various sorts. A Swedish study finds that, while social work research in Sweden largely rests on sociological concepts and perspectives, practical social work and social work education rests rather on psychological perspectives (Svensson et al. 2009). In Denmark, the explorative methods that case managers use in cases involving children also focus on the child and its immediate family, rather than meso- and macro-structural conditions (Bo & Warming 2003). However, individualizing social problems suggests a limited understanding of the larger forces that shape life trajectories and dispositions. Instead, it seems pertinent to maintain awareness of the wider generative mechanisms and contextual con-

ditions that produce (gendered) inequalities and disadvantages. My argument is that feminist scholarship can be applied to consider the structural conditions that underpin social problems, providing social work students with tools for critical thinking and gender-sensitive/transformational practices.

MOVING TOWARDS DIVERSITY

Inequality is shaped and produced by a range of social distinctions and hierarchies. Social class, race, ethnicity, age and (dis)ability constitute axes of power and privilege. These categories can be analysed separately, but they come into being in and through each other as intersecting categories (Crenshaw 1991). They cannot be explored as simply 'adding' class or age to gender, but rather need to be explored as unique intersections that produce specific modes of being, living and engaging with the world. An intersectional perspective expands rather than reduces complexity. In social work, it opens up understandings of how multiple structures of inequality produce very unique positions of vulnerability and disadvantage, and how the power relations and normalization processes of the welfare state are embedded in the gendered, ethnic and classed positionings of professionals and clients.

It is my experience that teaching intersectional theory can be difficult because multiple structures of power and disadvantage are brought into play simultaneously. To illustrate such complexities, I invited students to reflect on the dispositions and constraints of the young poet Yahya Hassan. His autobiographical collection of poems, *Yahya Hassan*, presents a raw critique of his violent and dysfunctional family, his troubled youth in a Danish ghetto and his interactions with the social authorities, which include placement in care and surrogate confinement. Hassan's parents were Palestinian refugees traumatized by war and life in refugee camps in the Middle

East, and his poetry depicts an image of an immigrant 'ghetto' society characterized by unemployment, crime and social fraud. As a case, he is quite suitable for social workers' reflections on the links between social structures, life trajectories and individual choices. During class the students watched a ten minute TV interview² in which Hassan is asked towards the end: 'But are you not also accountable for your own actions, your own life?' This serves as a starting point for unravelling the structural constraints and possibilities that can be identified in his life narrative. For similar didactic purposes, the students were asked to discuss selected poems in groups in order to identify how social class intersects with gender, ethnicity/race and age to produce a unique situation of marginalization and vulnerability to social problems.

Intersectional theory can enable more refined understandings of a range of social problems for instance domestic violence, which also dominates the narrative of Yahya Hassan. While studies suggest that domestic violence takes place at all levels of society, the effects of domestic violence shatter lives disproportionately along lines of gender, class and ethnicity (Danneskiold-Samsøe et al. 2011). A large proportion of ethnic minority women in women's shelters testify to this. Shelters are often the last resort for women, when support from families and the network has been exhausted. Ethnic minority women, especially those who have come to Denmark for purposes of marriage, often have a limited network outside the family, and their economic situation may be precarious due to limited working experience or education (Ottosen et al. 2014). These women risk losing more than their homes and partners when they resist the violence; they risk exclusion from their families, and risk losing their economic foundation, their children, and ultimately their residence permits. Intersectional theory enables a more nuanced understanding of domestic violence and its complexities

and allows a shift from a simple dichotomy between female victims and male perpetrators to an understanding of the unique troubles and constraints that some women face when resisting domestic violence.

IN CONCLUSION

By replacing the classic lecture with a reflexive space of learning, I rely heavily on students' participation and active engagement in shared critical reflection. The in-class exercises draw on the students lived experiences and often successfully engage also the less academic students. While this form of teaching can be demanding and somewhat less controllable than a classic lecture, the sessions seem to provide students with increased sensitivity to the structural inequalities that shape individual choices, and a more nuanced understanding of feminist thinking.

I have aimed to write an article *on* teaching feminist theory that can be used *for* teaching undergraduate students in criminology, sociology and social work. The aim of the article is therefore two-fold. The reflections on teaching feminist thinking are relevant for educators, reading like a meta-text on different possible ways to tap into students lived experiences of social inequality, and to encourage students to think critically about power, normality and deviance. I suggest that reflections on our own pathways to feminist thinking can guide teachers in opening up students' perspectives on gender and inequality. I also suggest that feminist theory needs to be applied to empirical problems to establish an understanding of how critical theory can be used to unpack complexities and gendered dimensions of social problems and social work practices.

The didactic tools emphasized here centre on reflexive dialogues with students and finding ways to link gender theory to students' lived experiences and current concerns. This resonates with the feminist ped-

agogy of bell hooks (1994) and Patti Lather (1991), emphasizing the need to rethink teaching practices and engage in strategies to enhance learning by establishing an inclusive learning environment. This entails reducing the power relations between teacher and students, thus allowing multiple experiences and interpretations to be voiced, even those antagonistic or resistant to feminism. Each classroom is different, and each educational context requires creative consideration of how to incorporate experimental teaching practices that facilitate learning on the generative mechanisms of gender and inequality. This article is a reflexive account exploring ways to encourage modes of thinking that destabilize constructions of normality and deviance, and to purposefully reconfigure relations of power and subordination. This, I believe, paves the way for emancipatory scholarship and emancipatory social work practices.

Providing social work students with a gender-sensitizing framework for understanding social problems and interventions may be a first step towards gendering social work practices. Teaching students ways of thinking that critically engage with and deconstruct existing power relations, categorizations, and institutional common sense practices is an important step towards social work practices sensitive to gender and diversity. A range of social problems, interventions and social work practices could be explored and refined using feminist theory. Further explorations could push forward gender-sensitized social work practices and refined interventions.

NOTES

1. www.medandreojne.com
2. http://www.dr.dk/Nyheder/Kultur/Oevrig_kultur/2013/10/07/144308.htm

REFERENCES

- Andersson, Berit (1998): Ett § 12-hem för flickor. Omdefinitioner i ungdomsvården. Rapport Nr. 2. Lund University Publications, Lund.
- Bo, Inger Glavind & Warming, Hanne (2003): *Når livet gør ondt – en undersøgelse af ordninger med kontaktpersoner og personlige rådgivere for børn og unge*. Frydenlund, København.
- Bottcher, Jean (2001): Social practices of gender: how gender relates to delinquency in the everyday lives of high-risk youths, in: *Criminology* 2001/39/4: 893-932.
- Brandt, Preben (2010): Socialt udsatte og udsøgte set i et kønsperspektiv, in: *Stof – Tidsskrift for stofmisbrugsområdet* 2010/15: 4-9.
- Brinkmann, Svend (2010): Patologiseringssten: diagnoser og patologier før og nu, in: Svend Brinkman (ed.): *Det diagnosticerede liv*. Forlaget Klim, Århus.
- Bryderup, Inge (2010): *Ungdomskriminalitet, socialpolitik og socialpædagogik: biografiske interview med unge om straf og behandling*. Forlaget Klim, Århus.
- Crenshaw, Kimberley (1991): Mapping the margins: intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color, in: *Stanford Law Review* 1991/6: 1241-1299.
- Danneskiold-Samsøe, Sofie; Mørck, Yvonne & Sørensen, Bo Wagner (2011): *Familien betyder alt, vold mod kvinder i etniske minoritetsfamilier*. Frydenlund, Frederiksberg.
- Davies, Bronwyn (2000): *A body of writing, 1990-1999*. AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek.
- Dominelli, Lena (2002): *Feminist social work theory and practice*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.
- Fahlgren, Siv & Sawyer, Lena (2005): Maktrelationer och normaliseringsprocesser i välfärdsstaten, in: *Tidsskrift för genusvetenskap* 2005/2-3: 95-106.
- Fawcett, Barbara; Featherstone, Brid; Fook, Jan & Rossiter, Amy (eds.) (2005): *Practice and research in social work: Postmodern feminist perspectives*. Routledge, London & New York.
- Guldager, Jens & Skytte, Marianne (2013): *Socialt arbejde: Teorier og perspektiver*. Akademisk Forlag, København.
- Hansen, Steen Juul (ed.) (2013): *Sociologi og socialrådgivning i socialt arbejde*. Hans Reitzels Forlag, København.
- Helweg-Larsen, Karin (2012): *Vold i nære relationer: omfang, karakter, udvikling og indsats i Danmark*. Statens Institut for Folkesundhed, København.
- Henriksen, Ann-Karina (2013): *Dramatiske liv: en antropologisk undersøgelse af pigeperspektiver på*

- vold og konflikter*. PhD afhandling. Institut for Samfund og Globalisering, Roskilde Universitet.
- Henriksen, Ann-Karina (2014): *Juvenile girls in surrogate confinement*. Unpublished research proposal for the Danish Council of Independent Research (FSE). Grant no.: DFF – 4003-00084B.
 - hooks, bell (1994): *Teaching to transgress: education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge, New York & London.
 - Hydén, Margareta & Månsson, Sven-Aksel (2007): Køn i teori og praksis, in: Meeuwisse, Anna; Svensson, Sune & Swärd, Hans (eds.): *Socialt arbejde: en grundbog*. Hans Reitzels Forlag, København
 - Justitsministeriets Forskningskontor (2012): *Udviklingen i kvinders kriminalitet de seneste 30 år*. København.
 - Karlsson, Lis-Bodil & Piuva, Katarina (eds.) (2012): *Genusperspektiv i socialt arbejde*. Natur & Kultur, Stockholm.
 - Katznelson, Noemi; Illeris, Knud; Nielsen, Jens Christian; Simonsen, Birgitte & Sørensen, Niels Ulrik (2009): *Ungdomsliv: mellem individualisering og standardisering*. Samfundslitteratur, Frederiksberg.
 - Knudsen, Susanne (2010): *Køn, pædagogik og pædagogiske tekster*. Frydenlund, København.
 - Kofoed, Jette (2005): Holddeling: når der gøres maskulinitet og hvidhed, in: *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning* 2005/14/3: 42-52.
 - Larsen, Jørgen Elm & Andersen, John (1999): Social polarisering og køn, in: Ervø, Søren; Andersen Hove, Peter & Mik-Meyer, Nanna (eds.): *Mænd på vej*. Ligestillingsrådet, København.
 - Lather, Patti (1991): *Feminist research in education: within/against*. Deakin University, Geelong.
 - Lykke, Nina (2008): *Kønsforskning*. Samfundslitteratur, Frederiksberg.
 - Mathiassen, Charlotte (2011): *Perspektiver på kvinders dagligdag i danske fængsler*. Department of Education, Aarhus University.
 - Miller, Jody & Mullins, Christopher (2006): The status of feminist theories in criminology, in: Cullen, Francis T.; Wright, John Paul & Blevins, Kristie R. (eds.): *Taking Stock: The Status of Criminological Theory*. Transaction Publishers, New Jersey.
 - Morley, Christine (2007): Engaging practitioners with critical reflection: issues and dilemmas, in: *Reflective Practice* 2007/8/1: 61-74.
 - Morley, Christine (2008): Teaching critical practice: resisting structural domination through critical reflection, in: *Social Work Education* 2008/27/4: 407-421.
 - Olsen, Robert (2013): Hjemløshed i udvikling, in: Jens Guldager & Marianne Skytte (eds.): *Socialt arbejde: teorier og perspektiver*. Akademisk Forlag, Frederiksberg.
 - Ottosen, Mai Heide (2012): *15-åriges hverdagsliv og udfordringer: rapport fra femte dataindsamling af forløbsundersøgelsen af børn født i 1995*. SFI: Det Nationale Forskningscenter for Velfærd, København.
 - Ottosen, Mai Heide; Liversage, Anika & Olsen, Rikke Fuglsang (2014): *Skilsmissebørn med minoritetsetnisk baggrund*. SFI: Det Nationale Forskningscenter for Velfærd, København.
 - Pease, Bob & Fook, Jan (eds.) (1999): *Transforming social work practice: Postmodern critical perspectives*. Routledge, London & New York.
 - Rosenberg, Tiina (2007): Queerfeminisme: Introduktion, in: Dorthe Marie Søndergaard (ed.): *Feministiske Tænkere*. Hans Reitzels Forlag, København.
 - Sjørup, Karen (2011): Kapitel 12. Køn som forskelsmarkør på arbejdsmarkedet, in: Bent Greve (ed.): *Grundbog i Socialvidenskab: 4 perspektiver*. Nyt fra Samfundsvidenskaberne, Frederiksberg.
 - Svensson, Kerstin; Johnsson, Eva & Laanemets, Leili (2009): *Handlingsmæssigt råderum i socialt arbejde*. Akademisk Forlag, København.