

Knowledge Construction about Intersectional Feminism in Liberal Arts and Science Programs

A qualitative study on Liberal Arts and Science Students from Global Responsibility and
Leadership

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Abstract

Liberal Arts and Science (LAS) education has made it one of its central purposes to train graduates in a way that equips them for an active engagement in society. Amongst other things, Liberal Arts and Science education aims to foster awareness of social injustice and take action. Feminism is essential for moving towards social justice as it helps to unpack and deconstruct biased knowledge and acknowledge the impact that gender has on one's position in society. Accordingly, this paper investigates the obstacles that LAS students face when constructing their knowledge of intersectional feminism. It furthermore sheds light on how the chosen case program, GRL, facilitates an environment that supports the understanding of feminism. This qualitative study conducted six in-depth interviews with students from the GRL program. The findings showed three obstacles in constructing knowledge on intersectional feminism: 1) the stigmatization of feminism, 2) feminist discourses that make people feel excluded, and 3) A lack of reflexivity among the students. The findings indicated a need for GRL education to provide their students with education on feminism to counter stigmatization and training in reflexive discourse practices. It is concluded that knowledge construction on intersectional feminism is significantly impacted by the degree of education received on feminism and reflexive practices. Due to differences identified in the level of knowledge amongst students attending courses in Global Health and students who did not, the practical implications of this paper advocate for a feminist foundation course at GRL.

Keywords: Intersectional feminism, Liberal Arts and Science, Education, Stigmatization, Reflexivity, Discourse

Acronym page

GRL: Global Responsibility and Leadership

CF: Campus Fryslân

RUG: University of Groningen

LAS: Liberal Arts and Science

TER: Teaching and Examination Regulations

TERF: Trans exclusionary radical feminist

Introduction

One of the central aims of LAS programs is to provide knowledge to the students in a way that encourages their active participation in society (Butler, 2017). Active participation in society is furthermore guided by valuing and promoting social justice. One of the possible ways to advocate for social justice is by taking a feminist stance. Feminism is crucial to achieving social justice because it, on the one hand, points out the existing scope of sexism in society, but it also unpacks biased educational content and offers a critical addition to knowledge production (hooks 2000; Miller, Armstrong, Valocchi, 1999). Nevertheless, it remains unclear to what extent LAS students are familiar with such knowledge and apply it within their own perspectives. Therefore, this study aims at locating the knowledge construction on intersectional feminism in LAS programs on the example of students from Global Responsibility and Leadership GRL, a Bachelor of Science at the RUG/ CF, by answering the following questions: 1) What are the obstacles when constructing knowledge on feminism? And 2) How does the program GRL facilitate a learning environment that contributes to the students understanding of intersectional feminism? Numerous scholars and activists have already considered and conceptualized how intersectional feminist thought can be taught and fostered among students. Existing literature includes, among others, hooks (2000) on black feminist education, intersectionality-based action by Hankivsky (2014), Freire's (1972) reflexivity in education and Connolly (2018) developing a framework for reflective practice and the feminist lens in education. Nevertheless, little is known about how we can engage more students in the feminist discourse and enhance their knowledge construction of feminism. Furthermore, little is known about how LAS programs provide education and facilitate a space in which the understanding of intersectional feminism can be promoted.

Although the scholastic body of reflective practices within education and literature published on intersectional feminism grows, only a small amount of literature addresses the role of LAS programs in fostering social justice by training student's critical thinking and reflection skills (Butler, 2017; Miller, Armstrong & Valocchi, 1999). However, almost none of these researches address the importance of feminism for LAS education (Grumet, McCoy, 2004). Moreover, there has been a lack of recognition for urgency to address feminist issues in LAS classrooms and insufficient methodology to implement intersectionality and reflexivity in feminist education (Case, 2016). This research offers insights on the construction of knowledge concerning intersectional feminism within the GRL program and particularly highlights three emerging challenges to intersectional feminist knowledge creation: stigmatization of feminism, lack of reflexivity and static discourse characters. The set-up of the study limited insights. Since no curricular analysis was conducted in this study, there is little information on what specific courses lack or promote intersectional feminism. It arrived at its findings by investigating six GRL students' often subjective perceptions of their experiences with feminism in GRL. The findings of this research could ultimately contribute to an improvement in the educational content provided in LAS programs, specifically in GRL. Although the study focused on the knowledge construction of intersectional feminism, the emerging insights could also prove beneficial in developing other GRL courses. The study starts with a literature review which will introduce topics relevant to the study, such as intersectional feminism, reflexivity and intersectionality, and feminism in the context of LAS education. Afterwards, the methodology will be presented, followed by the results. The paper then continues to discuss the findings and finally situate them into the relevant context of GRL. Finally, it will offer suggestions for future research and gaps that must be addressed.

Literature review

Feminism

Defining what feminism is, what it stands for and what it is supposed to stand for is an ambiguous task. Feminism is shaped into various definitions by various theorists who inherit diverse societal positions. Feminism can be defined as a “movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (hooks, 2000, p.viii). Terms such as ‘global sisterhood’ (hooks, 2000), which became increasingly prominent within the last years, imply the overarching connection between women all around the world based on their gender and transport the message of women coming together in global sisterhood, celebrating solidarity (Walters, 2005). Rightfully, the term has received as much criticism as approval. Especially women of color, as well as intersectional and decolonial feminists and scholars have pointed out that often white middle-class women, who so prominently stand at the center of the movement, turn a blind eye on the structures of white supremacy that uphold their privileged position within society and assume that all women globally are subject to the same kind of oppression (Herr, 2014). It has to be noted that feminism is a multifaceted movement and that there are no such things as a homogeneous ‘western’ feminism; some groups and individuals apply an intersectional perspective and thus are sensitive to other dimensions of discrimination. However, this is not the case among all feminists. Especially for women subjected to additional experiences of discrimination, for example, on race, class, ableness, sexuality or age, the lack of intersectionality within some streams of feminism leads to a failure in adequately addressing relevant issues for them. It furthermore clearly divides the ‘central’ definition of women, namely

that of a white middle-class heterosexual, from the rest, implying that the rest is too different from the center, making it incomprehensible (Lorde, 1980).

Although western feminism is very much concerned with the needs and problems of western women in western settings, it is often regarded as mainstream feminism, ascribing a false universality to this branch of feminism. It, therefore, not only limits the global picture of women in all its facets and the unique sets of experiences that are caused by different subjections to discrimination, it simultaneously misses to address any local issues, as these often are results of overlapping dimensions of oppression (Walters, 2005). Consequently, over the last decades' scholars, activists and feminists who reject the misleading concept of some western feminism being universal have created space in the academic realm for various streams of feminist thought and acknowledge their impact on the modern discourse of feminism; with an emphasis on the complex, unique experiences that women make based on intersecting discriminations (Herr, 2014). The numerous theories and concepts that have emerged, rather in protest to predominantly white, western feminism than in addition, include conceptualizations such as post- and decolonial feminism, transnational feminism, and intersectional feminism. The image delivered by popular knowledge has widely shaped feminism and the perception it portrays. On the one hand, it has been voiced that the media portrayal greatly impacts how feminism is perceived in popular culture. On the other hand, due to a one-dimensional illustration of feminism, this portrayal has led to stigmatization thereof (Helsdingen, 2016). Stigmatization can be defined as an attitude based on a one-dimensional perception that includes labeling, stereotyping, separating, and discriminating toward a certain group or an individual (Link & Phelan, 2001; Helsdingen, 2016). The stigmatization of feminism contains negative beliefs centred around the term feminism, including that feminists are a bunch of "extreme man-haters and lesbians"

(Helsdingen, 2016, p.16). In a broader sense, stigmatization of feminism is generalizing and dedifferentiating between various nuances within feminism. Nowadays, most presentations of feminism in media either focus on the wrongs of the movement or stick to a reformist approach to feminism. Reformist feminism, which focuses on achieving gender equality rather than reconstructing the system that upholds inequality, is thereby further framed as universal feminism (hooks, 2000). Especially amongst adolescents, the negative association with the term feminism has been prominently attributed to the portrayal of feminism in media (Helsdingen, 2016; Bargad & Hyde, 1991). Unfortunately, media representation is one of the most utilized sources for information provision, especially regarding matters of social justice (hooks, 2000).

Intersectional feminism

Intersectional feminism illustrates a theory that conceptualizes global patterns of oppression and the wide-reaching facets of experienced oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). It can therefore reveal how power dynamics are maintained, changed and experienced (Hankivsky, 2014). The concept of intersectionality highlights the critique that social identities are not merely constructed on the dimension of gender but that dimensions such as race, class, sexuality and others cannot just be erased from the picture (Zack, 2007). By conceptualizing how different intersections of oppression create unique sets of experiences for the person subjected to them, it highlights that it is not just a stronger extent of gender discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989).

Kimberle Crenshaw, a critical legal race scholar, coined the term intersectionality in the 1989 published article: “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”, in which she suggests that most the feminist and anti-discriminatory action has been prominently based on “a

single-axis framework” that treats different categories of oppression as isolated and independent from each other (Crenshaw, 1989, p.139).

This diminishes the complex dynamic of intersecting experiences of discrimination. In complex and multidimensional discourses such as feminism, a single-axis framework maintains a dynamic that focuses the discourse on white women’s experiences (Crenshaw, 1989). Consequently, women of color, poor women, disabled women and women who find themselves in and between different intersections of oppression have been pushed to the margins of the feminist movement. Before the term intersectionality was coined, the concept had been brought up in numerous contexts throughout decades of dialogue, particularly by Black, Latina, Indigenous, and Queer activists and researchers (Hankivsky, 2014). Scholars and feminists alike declared that the primarily white middle-class feminists at the heart of the movement had silenced the experiences of other women; without referring to the term intersectionality, they had theorized what intersectional feminism defines, such as bell hooks’ “Feminist theory: from margin to center,” where she gives a revolutionist definition that allows moving away from reformist, white, mainstream feminism (hooks, 1984). It contrastingly places central value on actively dissecting the causes of oppression, including sexism, racism, classism, and imperialism (Biana, 2020). hooks proposes that adding a multifaceted approach to analyzing oppressive processes could expand critical consciousness, generate enlightened participants, and ultimately alter culture (Biana, 2020). Today, intersectionality is widely regarded as an essential and fundamental part of feminist academia (Davis, 2008).

Intersectionality aims at dismantling and reconstructing the preexisting structures in which social injustice and oppression are analyzed, theorized and conceptualized, as these structures further serve to center more privileged positions within a group (Crenshaw, 1989). It,

therefore, offers a suitable tool for analyzing gender or racial oppression and emphasizes that an analysis of one isolated factor fails to capture the complexity of human life (Hankivsky, 2014).

Reflexivity in Intersectionality

Reflexivity implies the ability to critically evaluate knowledge and acknowledge the impact of one's position in society (Salzmann, 2002). Similarly to intersectionality, the principle of reflexivity emphasizes the power dynamics between the self and the interactions with others. It opens the discourse on social justice issues in a way that creates space for diverse opinions and truths and enables historically marginalized voices to be heard (Hankivsky, 2014). Reflexivity counters the static notions that intersectionality runs risk off, therefore making it an important method for intersectional action. Carstensen-Egwuom (2014) highlights the need to move away from simply reproducing presupposed labels and instead recognize their reciprocal action and construction. She furthermore advocates for applying reflexivity as it enables a deeper understanding of relevant concepts such as power, inequality, difference and identity. An intersectional approach enables researchers, educators, scholars, activists and others to reflect on how they support and adhere to power structures and systems and break the pattern of recolonizing themselves (Boyd, 2021). Additionally, adopting a reflexive approach can elevate the actor's recognition of their role in the knowledge creation process (Boyd, 2021). Since reflexivity highlights the importance of continuously questioning knowledge creation, it is closely interlinked with positionality (Salzman, 2002) and critical thinking skills (Emirbayer & Desmond, 2012), both constituting important reflecting practices and methods of knowledge creation. The former focuses on locating the researcher's position within the study (Qin, 2016), the latter being a part of the learning outcomes for LAS education (Becker, 2015).

Social Justice in Liberal Arts and Science

LAS education differs from other programs in the way that it aims to educate the minds of students to take in as much information as possible and to break it down independently, which will eventually lead to developing thinkers capable of combining intelligence, creativity and compassion into their worldview (Miller, Armstrong & Valocchi, 1999). This ultimately leads to the recognition that LAS education should foster an awareness of social injustices and an ambition to contribute to the construction of a just democratic society (Butler, 2017). In order to foster this critical thinking, it is necessary to acknowledge the relevant impact that especially gender has on one's position in society, which is essential to developing critical and independent thought (Miller, Armstrong & Valocchi, 1999). Essentially, curricula are powerful tools to decide which experiences and knowledges are worth studying and which are not. Feminism, in that context, points out the experiences and knowledges of people who have historically been taken out of the picture, namely women (Grumet, McCoy, 2004). This is supported by the recognition that the "free-for-all" (hooks, 2000) consciousness-raising group was quickly utilized by the women's studies classroom, which shows that social justice has been taught predominantly in humanitarian classes. However, it is a necessary component for educating LAS graduates in all disciplines. Incorporating feminist thought into LAS education is important for developing fair and inclusive education, as it uncovers biases in teaching methods and curricula (hooks, 2000). Therefore, feminism cannot be neglected as a relevant lens for achieving social justice, and social justice cannot be blindsided in LAS education.

Reflexive Practice and Feminist Lens

Connolly (2018) points out the importance of feminism for reflexive practices in education. She identifies a lack of feminist perspective caused by a neglect of recognition for gendered dynamics in existing reflexive educational practices. Moreover, England (1994) argues that the positionality and background of researchers impact their academic work. Consequently, the interpersonal relationship between researcher and participants also shapes the research outcome. Especially in feminism, the researcher must reflect on positionality and the relationship between researcher and participant. Therefore, adopting an intersectional and reflexive lens is crucial in feminism to avoid condescending, demeaning, coercive, imperialist, and recolonizing dynamics in research (Vanner, 2015). Locating the researcher's position concerning their own privileges and disadvantages offers an opportunity to minimize these dynamics.

Higher education and Intersectional feminism

Higher education often follows a prefixed analysis structured by western hegemony, perpetuating a narrow, exclusive and privileged representation of women (Case, 2016). These structures, often upheld by a lack of critical reflection and an assumption of normative value, require a bigger reconstruction process than merely adding diverse literature to the existing academic setting (Hooks, 2000). Intersectional education is not only important for the reformation of academia, it also makes students from different backgrounds feel seen and shows that their identity matters in academic contexts, which reinforces the prominence and permanency of intersectionality in academia and social justice discourses.

Moreover, intersectionality in pedagogic environments allows teachers and students to critically deconstruct dynamics of power and privilege, creating space for silenced knowledges

and recognizing the multidimensional character of identities, which develops mechanisms that further create space (Case, 2016). Additionally, Butler (2017) points out that, contrary to the critique that intersectionality promotes static separation and fragmentation, it is nevertheless an opportunity to explore societal complexity open-mindedly. Although the need for intersectional frameworks within education has been recognized (Butler, 2017; Hankivsky, 2014), the ambiguity of application due to the unbounded and interdisciplinary character of intersectionality has been highlighted (Case, 2016).

Undergraduate Liberal Arts and Science education and intersectional feminism

Originating from the United States, Liberal Arts Education seeks to foster an environment that allows students to construct knowledge and skills that will meaningfully contribute to society (Barker, 2000). The University of Groningen (2022b) further defines its LAS programs as offering the students a wide-ranging, interdisciplinary education that will draw on practical and theoretical pedagogies and train leadership skills. Interdisciplinarity and intersectionality are closely interwoven concepts that mutually inform and strengthen each other since intersectionality adopts a multidimensional framework that may be used in various circumstances. Therefore, intersectionality becomes a suitable lens for understanding topics with interdisciplinary character (Katrak, 2008). Furthermore, according to Butler (2017), the salient focus of LAS education is to improve life and advocate for democracy by delivering education that promotes social and political participation.

Therefore, a central pillar of LAS is to prepare students in a way that promotes independent and critical reflection and knowledge of societal constructs as well as dynamics and institutions of power to independently uncover systems of inequality and act socially just for the

betterment of all. The emphasis on intersectionality to consider the whole picture, one with diverse and multidimensional experiences and truths resulting from intersections of oppression, makes it well suited for interdisciplinary use as it connects ostensibly disparate disciplines. It also emphasizes the need for classroom transformation from a hierarchical classroom to a non-hierarchical space that allows for mutual exchange. Suppose LAS education aspires to train the next generation of socially engaged graduates. In that case, students have to be educated on the foundation of an intersectional framework, including structures of inequality and justice, power, relationality and the complexity of social identities (Butler, 2017). In order to foster an understanding in students that allows identification of the multidimensional character of social issues, education needs to provide tools that will enable them to uncover these systems independently. This allows the educator to progress past reproducing “the voice of the voiceless” (Isik, 2021, pp.63) and therefore facilitate an environment where students feel free and safe to express and exchange their opinions.

Methodology

This research aims to locate the development of the LAS program GRL at the CF regarding fostering an environment promoting action to social justice, particularly intersectional feminism. It will also shed insights on the challenges students meet when they construct knowledge on feminism and what responsibility and agency lie within the program to foster participation in social justice movements. Therefore, the following study methodology was conducted.

Study design

This qualitative research draws on the data collected from six semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted at CF, a university campus from the University of Groningen (RUG) in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands. A mix of six former and current GRL students was interviewed. The interviews consisted of two parts and a break in between. Overall, the interviews lasted around an hour. The number and selection of questions varied per interview, as the semi-structured design allowed for probing questions and the participants influenced the direction of the interview. The qualitative interview was chosen as a research method as it provides richer insights into participants' personal experiences than a quantitative approach. All except one interview were conducted in person, within the setting of CF. The nature of the interview questions and the answers given by the participants led to adopting a binary approach to gender. It is acknowledged that the binary character of gender has been scientifically refuted in various disciplines (Hyde et al., 2019); however, since a binary categorization emerged from the responses, a binary approach to gender will be adopted.

Study setting

The study is situated at CF, located in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands. It is an interdisciplinary faculty which belongs to the University of Groningen. The Bachelor of Science GRL is a LAS study, which according to the RUG, trains students to participate in “real-world global challenges through local solution” (University of Groningen, 2022a). The program was established in 2018, resulting in one cohort of graduate students. Currently, no courses on gender studies nor feminism have been incorporated into the curriculum.

Participant recruitment

The recruitment of participants followed a criterion sampling approach (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). It was conducted by approaching the GRL students in an online group chat, requesting to contact the researcher if they would be interested in participating. Two students contacted the researcher from this step of the recruitment process, indicating they were interested in participating. After consulting with the responsible supervisor, the researcher reached out to four potential participants, requesting their participation. In order to be eligible for the study, participants needed to be either former or current students of the study Global Responsibility and Leadership. After the recruitment steps were completed, the participants comprised two first year, two second year, one third year and one former student. Although the distribution of age and year of study is relatively even, the participants differ in their educational focus, allowing for a wider range of insights from the courses.

Data collection process

Data was collected during the first week of April 2022. Before the interviews were conducted, participants were requested to sign an Informed Sheet of Consent (Appendix), including the permission to record and transcribe the interview (Fehrmann, 2022). The participants decided to meet either online or in person. The interviews were conducted in two parts, with open-ended questions in each. Questions were oriented on relevant literature, as well as emerging from the input of the participants. The questions emerged from the following topics: feminist identity, development of feminism, perception of feminism and feminist experiences in GRL. A pilot was conducted before the interviews. After collection, the data was anonymized.

Data analysis process

The interviews were transcribed. Data analysis followed the thematic approach to analysis by Braun & Clarke (2016). The adaptive nature of thematic analysis allowed for identifying patterns across the dataset. These patterns emerged inductively, allowing for an exploration of the socially constructed meaning of the data, aligning with the values of thematic constructivist analysis. In the first round, inductive codes were generated by repetitive familiarizing with the data. Afterwards, these codes were constructed into themes that emerged inductively and deductively. Although these themes emerged inductively from the data, they were backed up by relevant literature.

Positionality statement

The researcher is a white German GRL student; she identifies as a feminist. Conducting research in the program where she is a student herself enabled her to take on multiple positions in the study. Firstly, being a GRL student allowed participants to talk to her more trustingly, as most of them interacted with her outside the study at least once. Identifying as a feminist, she finds herself part of the feminist ingroup, making her sympathetic to feminist thought. Being a white, queer woman, she is aware of the privileged yet nuanced position she finds herself in within society, enhancing her motivation to part with the reproduction of white feminist thought.

Ethical considerations

After consultation with the supervisor, it was decided that approval by the ethics committee was not necessary for the study.

Participants were given an informed consent sheet a few days before the interviews, giving them enough time to read the provided information carefully. Consent was obtained by signature. Confidentiality was guaranteed by conducting the interviews in private rooms and removing direct and indirect identifiers from the data.

Results

The findings of this study shed light on the obstacles to knowledge construction on feminism and the role that GRL plays therein. Figure 1 illustrates the demographic information of the participants. All participants were GRL students, ranging from 18 to 23 years old, with half of the interviewees having a European background and the other half growing up outside of Europe. Four female and two male participants were interviewed, of whom two did not identify as feminists. All participants attended at least the foundational Global Health course; two participants attended most of the Global Health courses. It is noted that the participant sample is by no means representative, particularly due to the similar educational content they received during GRL, as well as an overwhelming positive self-identification with feminism.

Participant	Age	Year	Background	Gender identity	Self-subscribed Feminist identity Yes/No	Study content (so far)
Blue	22	3	From outside of Europe	female	Y	Humanities Major
Green	18	2	From Europe	female	Y	Politics Major, Global Health side track
Yellow	23	2	From outside of Europe	male	Y	Planet Major, GH foundation course
Orange	21	former	From Europe	male	N	Planet Major, GH foundation course
Red	18	1	From outside of Europe	female	N	GH foundation course
Pink	19	1	From Europe	female	Y	GH foundation course

Figure 1. Participant demographics: Including age, study year, cultural background, gender identity, self-subscribed feminist identity, and study progress.

To answer the research questions, what obstacles emerge to construct knowledge on feminism and how GRL facilitates a learning environment that contributes to the students' understanding of intersectional feminism, the results include only the most relevant findings. Three challenges to constructing knowledge on feminism and facilitating a learning environment that promotes this understanding emerged from the data: 1) The stigma surrounding feminism, 2) the unsafe character of discourses, and 3) A lack of reflexivity. While these factors inherently challenge a feminist approach to knowledge production, they also mutually reinforce each other. Figure 2a and 2b below present an overview of the emerging themes, including the codes composing the themes, a brief definition to the code and an exemplary quote.

Theme	Code	Definition	Exemplary Quote
Stigma	Negative association with feminism	Stigmatization of feminism that participants have experienced or adopted when constructing their view on feminism	"I don't really think the male gender is considered- like I feel like it's only about bringing women up" (Red)
	Radicalism	Experiences made and attitudes on radical feminism	"Everyone should be radical feminists, because (uhm) that's kind of human dignity, no?" (Yellow)
	Exclusivity	Perception of exclusionary streams within feminism	"Too strong of a feminist view, like to the point where you're bringing men down, that really bothers me and it really just frustrates me" (Red)
	Defining feminism	Perception of what precisely feminism is and what it aims to stand for	"Feminism is equality (uhm) so equal chances for all genders, those who of course, fall outside the binary as well" (Pink)
	Lack of/ low interaction with feminism in the courses	Perception of low exposure to feminism during the GRL courses	"I would have liked to encounter feminism more" (Yellow)
Discourse dynamics	Listening to others	Value subscription to listening to other people and perceived challenges in listening	"It is valuable to... to listen to it and like try to, to see if you can (uhm) comprehend where those ideas come from" (Blue)
	Educating others	Perceived value of and strategies to educate others on feminist issues	"It's a lot of educating each other" (Pink)
	Speaking up	Perceived value of speaking up on feminist issues and its discourse dynamic	"People that can speak from their own experience are per definition (uhm), entitled to an opinion, that is per definition true" (Green)
	Taking up and creating space	Perceived relevance of opening up and stepping into a discourse	"I think it's very brutal to find a good way or a way to hear everyone, I just think there needs to be a way to do that" (Yellow)
	Feminist experiences in courses within student dynamic	Experiences on feminism related to the input of classmates	"I think the moments that came up was mostly from us as students" (Pink)

Figure 2a: Overview of identified themes: Consisting of the theme, the relevant codes, a brief definition of the code and an exemplary quote.

Theme	Code	Definition	Exemplary Quote
	Emotions arising in feminist discourses	Experienced dynamics in feminist discourses due to the emergence of emotions	"Blaming them for things I felt bad because I know there are some guys who were listening to that, who really felt bad" (Red)
	Safe space	Perceiving a safe environment as important for feminist discourses	"You cannot ensure everybody can be safe, but you can make it as safe as possible, so that everybody feels comfortable to engage" (Blue)
Lack of reflexivity	Awareness and reflection as method for development	Experiences in utilizing reflexivity to further develop one's knowledge	"No, constant improvement because even now it's not perfect" (Blue)
	Critical thinking	Perception of critical thinking posing a relevant factor for feminism	"What we instead have is the responsibility to critically evaluate the world around us, and to uncover the stereotypes" (Green)
	Perception of one's own knowledge	Perception of the level of their own knowledge and lacks thereof	"I don't know anything about it because I feel like I do not know enough to even you know represent the definition of feminism" (Yellow)
	Positionality	Perceived relevance of one's own position in society for feminism	"My position, have a big influence on how I understand these topics and how I'm open to see like several sides to it" (Blue)
	Reconstructing knowledge based on experiences and education	Willingness to change and adapt one's knowledge and opinions based on new input	"Even those who define as feminist oftentimes still contribute to those norms- even I do that, I know that" (Pink)
	Personal relevance	Perception of personal experiences creating a more salient relevance for feminist issues	"What's currently holding me back is that I don't feel the urgency of investing time, and maybe money in this problem, since it doesn't affect me personally" (Orange)

Figure 2b: Overview of identified themes: Consisting of the theme, the relevant codes, a brief definition of the code and an exemplary quote.

Stigmatization of feminism

The stigma surrounding feminism describes a disapproving attitude towards feminism based on generalized information provision. The stigmatization of feminism was perceived in differing nuances. There was an indication that some participants were well aware of the social stigma that often impacts someone's view on feminism. Nevertheless, there was also evidence of participants adopting a stigmatized view of feminism. It moreover showed to shape experiences made and attitudes on radical feminism, impacted the perception of exclusionary streams within feminism, as well as the perception of what precisely feminism is and what it aims to stand for. Furthermore, it was indicated that the exposure to feminism during the courses of GRL was perceived as low.

Negative association with feminism

Analysis showed that especially participants who reported low exposure to the global health courses carried to some extent a negative attitude towards feminism or towards forms of feminism. Orange described the tendency of intersectional feminism to adopt an all-encompassing view on society followingly: *“I saw once I saw post on eco feminism will save the situation in Ukraine or something and I did not see the relevance at all, there also was no explanation (uhm)... not everything is a feminist topic, I believe (uhm), so it could also be overkill”*. Two participants, Orange and red, disapprovingly pointed out that especially radical feminism has a bad reputation caused by stigmatization. Moreover, there is a perception that feminism regards women to be *“better than men”*. While Pink pointed out the perceived problematic of feminism to bring women higher while bringing men lower, another participant stated that she does not associate this ideology with feminism: *“that's the whole goal of feminism*

is no one's better than the other, we're equal". Furthermore, this participant assumed that there is a connection between the medial portrayal of feminism and the stigmatization thereof: *"how the media portrays feminism. Its women are better than men"*.

Radicalism

Green and Yellow strongly positioned themselves in favor of radical feminism, perceiving it as a necessary and vital lens of feminism and claiming that *"everyone should be radical feminists, because that's kind of human dignity, no?"*. Two other participants however expressed a negative attitude towards radical feminism. While red pointed out that radical feminists are only concerned *"only about bringing women up"*, Orange noted an *"overkill"* in radical feminism, aiming to connect seemingly unrelated topics to the feminist agenda, which furthermore *"not changed [his opinion] for the best"*.

Exclusivity

Some participants perceived some forms of feminism to purposely exclude certain groups from the movement: *"like T[rans]E[xclusionary]R[adical]F[eminist]S, you know (...), sometimes even exclusivity within the movement of inclusivity, which was so weird to me"*, while others experienced that sometimes discourses are entered in a way that makes people feel excluded from taking part by *"scaring away people from the topic"*, which also results in a feeling of not *"belong[ing] there"*.

Defining feminism

Participants defined the feminist agenda as *"believing in equality of all the sexes and genders"* and *"a general approach to more humane and stronger rights for gender in overall"*.

Some pointed out that this general striving towards equality provides the “*stepping stone*” to deeper issues. Most participants furthermore highlighted that valuing equality (by experiencing inequality or being witness thereof) made them more sympathetic towards the feminist movement, Pink expressed her hope “*that most people go back to being feminist because we are born as equals*”. It was furthermore perceived that there is a special focus on women’s issues within feminism, although they expressed different attitudes towards this. While Green referred to a “*rightful superiority*” of women within feminism, Red expressed concern on this, stating that they “*don't really think the male gender is considered (...) it's only about bringing women up*”.

Lack of interaction with feminism in the courses

The interaction of GRL courses concerning feminism was perceived as low, stating that they “*would have liked to encounter feminism more*”, not remembering “*anything specific*” that was taught in the courses. Participants moreover indicated that they had hoped to encounter more feminism especially in the courses of politics, economics and data science. Pink furthermore pointed out that given the lack of feminist exposure in class, they “*mostly learn from each other, to be honest*”. It is noted that Pink is a first-year student and attended only the foundation course of Global Health. Nevertheless, it was pointed out by multiple participants that mostly they had talked about feminism within the Global Health courses: “*I think probably like global health because I think [the Global Health teacher] really tries to make it intersectional and tries to address certain issues on equity from that point on*”. It therefore has to be acknowledged that participants with a more extensive education in Global Health received more education on feminism.

Discourse character

This study frames the discourse character as the behavior of different actors and their interaction present in feminist discourses. A divergence in the perception of relevance for sub characteristics of discourse was perceived among the participants. These sub characteristics include an indicated value subscription to listen to other people, recognized challenges in listening and the value of and strategies to educate others on feminist issues. Furthermore, the perceived value of speaking up on feminist issues and its impact on discourse dynamics was mentioned as well as identifying the relevance of opening up and stepping into a discourse, creating and taking up space. It moreover included experiences on feminism related to the input of classmates, the perception of the vocabulary used in feminist discourses and the power of using certain language. Finally, experienced dynamics in feminist discourses due to the emergence of emotions and perceiving a safe environment as important for feminist discourses were identified as relevant sub characteristics of discourse dynamics.

Listening to other opinions

Some participants argued in favor of listening to other opinions, placing value on emerging insights from listening: *“it is valuable to...- to listen to it and like try to- to see if you can (uhm) comprehend where those ideas come from”*. It was furthermore stated that conversations on feminist issues often result in parties not listening but reactlessly pointing out arguments to each other without the willingness to understand what the other party is saying, captured by the experience of Red: *“You're not gonna get anywhere by just attacking the other person. Like, the other person is just gonna attack you back with more facts”*. Green pointed out the value of informing and reflecting on one's own behavior, arguing that if these aspects are

missing, these people often “*try to push their own twisted opinions and weird definitions*” onto people instead of listening, which is perceived to be intolerable. Green and Yellow further explained that sometimes content-based critique is perceived in a blaming manner, which further aggravated the willingness to listen. This was explained by one participant as “*really toxic because people refuse to believe that they did something wrong*”. It was also pointed out that discourse on feminism is perceived as a highly difficult process, firstly because it is a very personal topic, secondly because oftentimes people disagree with each other: “*in this world no one will agree with each other, right, at any point, but just accepting things to be as they are is like- that's not going to be easy*”. This fundamental disagreement can further aggravate the reluctance to speak up.

Educating others

Value was placed on educating others as means to spread feminism, particularly if one perceives their own knowledge to be sufficient: “*those who are already feminist trying to educate those who have a lot to learn*”. However, the agency of the individual was also highlighted, emphasizing that everyone is responsible for their own education and therefore carry “*the responsibility to critically evaluate the world around us, and to uncover the- the stereotypes and uncover the- the institutions and the ways of living that oppresses*”. It was also mentioned that training reflection skills is one of the most important types of education to improve the dynamic of feminist discourses, and that if one wants to educate another, they “*should try to turn the tone to that and make it a valid conversation where they can actually realize that critical introspection is so important*”. Furthermore, participants noticed pitfalls in educating others if they are “*educating them about the wrong things*”, giving an example of these wrong things,

Red pointed out the problem of some feminists to *“influence other people to just think that women should be up there and men should just be down there”*. On the other hand, Green recognized the difficulty of educating on introspection: *“You cannot just stand in front of a class and ‘So everybody listen, you're gonna have to critically introspect.’, (...) it doesn't work like that people will not take it seriously. And even if they do, you're forcing them to do- this comes through a dialogue, and it's mutual respect, and it has to come through a discussion of some sorts”*.

Speaking up

Participants noted an importance of speaking up in feminist discourses, recognizing that people often speak up when they are referring to personal experiences. Yellow expressed that discourses on feminism become better the more diverse opinions are represented: *“I think that's a little damaging to the overall consensus because then the consensus remains with those three people instead of remaining with what people actually also have on their mind”*. Green further pointed out that speaking up is something you become entitled for, based on personal experience or extensive knowledge accumulation: *“people that can speak from their own experience are per definition (uhm), entitled to an opinion, that is per definition true and people that are learned, or sort of knowledgeable are also entitled to an opinion”*. However, it was also recognized that in order to speak up, one needs to feel comfortable in the setting, respectively people often do not speak up because they *“don't feel comfortable to speak in class”*. Some participants also considered the particular difficult agency that men meet when speaking up in feminist discourses, particularly encountering comments such as *“‘Why don't you do anything?’, and if*

they speak up, it's 'Well, you're trying to be a hero'.", but also experiencing fear to speak up: "Why am I too scared to do that? But I kind of put up hope other people would have done it".

Taking up and creating space

Pink and Green recognized a need in feminists to take up more space, while outgroups are needed to create this space: *"I'm sorry, but the best thing they can do is take a step back for us to take that spotlight"*. Yellow and Red however emphasized that the feminist discourse should result in creating space for everyone to speak up and be listened to: *"it's very brutal to find a good way or a way to hear everyone, I just think there needs to be a way to do that"*.

Feminist experiences in courses within student dynamic

Most participants stated that often when feminism has been brought up in courses, usually students pointed out the connection to feminism: *"I think the moments that came up was mostly from us as students"*. Furthermore, participants experienced that, especially when parties are not willing to listen to and learn from each other, discourse results in an unproductive, emotional state that causes disagreement and resentment: *"the people that are toxic, do not realize that, they think they're just learning- sometimes they do learn, but not about the toxic behavior, and they think it's fun. And the people that are fighting for their own rights (uhm), go home crying"*. Additionally, some participants highlighted the experienced asymmetric spread of interaction among the students, arguing that people who *"carry themselves the loudest will probably also get their message across to the most people"*. Participants therefore also experienced a withdrawal of interacting in conversations, from themselves as well as from other students: *"I am also often scared to- to sometimes engage in certain discussions (...) But I've heard a lot of people just completely shutting out classes for example"*.

Emotions arising in feminist discourses

Participants point out that pain, often related to personal experiences, leads to resentment that further complicates the dialogue between different parties, as for example Pink describes her interaction with men on feminism: *“So with things like that happening with seeing my... loved ones in pain, because of men makes me quite upset, yes”*. Relating to that, one participant stated that, especially when it comes to dialogues on gender discrimination and violence, it is often perceived in a blaming connotation. Moreover, Yellow argued that, because feminism is such a personally affecting topic, it makes it harder to agree to disagree: *“that makes it a lot harder to then say, ‘Hey, I see it a little differently’, when something that you know, that probably affected the person also”*.

Safe space

Although half of the participants brought up that it is important to engage with feminism, they also pointed out that it is very challenging to establish a safe space in which everyone feels safe: *“you cannot ensure everybody can be safe, but you can make it as safe as possible, so that everybody feels comfortable to engage because it's a topic that does”*.

Lack of reflexivity

A lack of reflexivity causes a low level of reflection on one's seemingly normative assumptions. A lack of reflexivity was identified to impact experiences in utilizing reflexivity to develop one's knowledge, the perception of critical thinking being a relevant factor for feminism and the perception of the level of one's knowledge and the lack thereof. Furthermore, it challenges the perceived relevance of one's position in society for feminism, the willingness to

change and adapt one's knowledge and opinions based on new input, and the perception of personal experiences creating a more salient relevance for feminist issues.

Critical thinking and reflection skills

When reflection was mentioned, participants agreed that it requires a continuous process of critically introspecting, stating that “*constant improvement [is needed] because even now it's not perfect*”. Only two participants, Blue and Green, mentioned critical thinking as relevant for feminism. It is relevant to note, that both attended a number of Global Health courses, either as Major or side courses. This further points out the relevance of Global Health courses for GRL students to incorporate critical thinking and reflection skills into their knowledge construction, which was also captured in the perception of some students: “*I think [the Global Health teacher] definitely does a very good job trying to not make the classroom hierarchical, you know, and allowing everyone to have space*”. Interestingly, although both recognize the importance of critical thinking skills for feminist and other discourses, they perceived the critical thinking skills of their classmates and the university to foster these skills differently. While Blue encountered mostly students who think critically, stating that “*in comparison to other places (...), I think we're doing a good job, mostly because I see this critical thought in most students here*”, Green noted a lack of critical thought in the study: “*that kind of lack of- of evaluation and interaction is completely ingrained into this Campus so much, and I really hate it*”.

Perception of one's own knowledge

When assessing their own level of knowledge on feminism many participants emphasized that one never stops learning new things, perceiving their own knowledge as poor: “*I don't know, I would argue I don't know anything*”. Green and Yellow furthermore mentioned that learning is

always a process, and that no one can claim to know everything: *“You cannot know everything, you know?”*, *“no child wakes up today and is like, oh, yeah, I’m a feminist. You know, it’s- it’s- it’s a learning curve, it’s learning experience”*.

Positionality

Only two out of six participants, Blue and Green, referred to their positionality and its perceived relevance. It has to be recognized that Blue and Green attended a number of Global Health courses and both identify as feminists. Both agreed that positionality is a relevant tool for identifying positions of privilege and disadvantage and that engaging with one’s positionality impacts one’s understanding of different issues as well as the willingness to listen to other opinions. Awareness of one’s positionality is perceived to have a positive impact on open-mindedness: *“like my position, have a big influence on how I understand these topics and how I’m open to see like several sides to it”*, while a lack thereof is associated with a low willingness to be open-minded: *“people that don’t have their positionality that are not entitled to- to an opinion that still have an opinion, force that upon others and get very angry when they get called out for it”*. Furthermore, positionality is perceived as something deeply intertwined with one’s identity, which can also make it a challenging and emotional task to engage with: *“it also affects them on a daily life, so you cannot expect everyone to feel super happy to talk about their own complicated position in society”*.

Reconstructing knowledge based on experiences and education

Participants highlighted that knowledge is not normative despite popular assumption, pointing out that reconstruction is needed to reflect on *“where these concepts came from, and that it’s not necessarily what you’re... told that they are”*. It was further stated that one is

personally responsible for adapting their knowledge and attitude based on new information derived from education as well as critical reflection, by *“continuously look[ing] at themselves like that and and tries to both understand what is going on and change it whenever they can see it”*.

Personal relevance

Participants indicated that a deeper and closer understanding of feminism has been the result of reflecting on personal experiences on feminism and gender discrimination. Yellow voiced that a deeper understanding *“unfortunately for a lot of people, (...) comes with experience, you know- and same for me”*. Some note that hearing personal experiences from other people also had a positive effect on their connection to feminism: *“realizing that it was very relevant to people around me and (...), the community feeling of like women really fighting for someone”*. Orange stated a low connection to feminism due to a lack of personal relevance, however he pointed out that he might want to engage with feminism more if he perceives it as a relevant topic for his female environment: *“I think I- what's currently holding me back is that I don't feel the urgency of investing time, and maybe money in this problem, since it doesn't affect me personally (...) But maybe later, it would affect me, when my girlfriend will be ready with her- will be finished with her study, maybe then for some reason, it would affect me personally”*.

Discussion

This study's goal is to identify 1) the obstacles for GRL students to construct knowledge on feminism and 2) How GRL facilitates a learning environment that contributes to the students understanding of intersectional feminism. The thematic analysis of the interviews highlighted three main categories that can be categorized as obstacles to the knowledge construction on

intersectional feminism. These three challenges, namely the stigmatization of feminism, discourse characteristics, and a lack of reflexivity, are not only impacting knowledge construction but are also related. One's level of reflexivity directly affects how one enters the feminist discourse, which furthermore affects the engagement of others with feminist discourses and might enhance their willingness to reflect on their views. Furthermore, the level of reflexivity impacts the susceptibility to adopting stigmatized information on feminism. Finally, unsafe environments in which feminist discourses are held can lead to parties withdrawing from the discourse and promote the adoption of stigmatized views.

Popular knowledge and stigmatization

The stigmatization of feminism has been linked to a negative attitude toward feminism, with several participants believing that feminism is not for everyone. Therefore, adopting stigmata surrounding feminism impacts students' knowledge construction on feminism. Neglecting to destigmatize feminism aggravates fostering an understanding of intersectional feminism. The input on stigmatization sporadically mentioned an awareness of feminism being stigmatized and identified an abundant number of stigmatized views held amongst the participants. By raising questions like whether feminism is for everyone and what defines a 'good' feminist, negative associations with feminism were identified, specifically addressing radicalism and exclusivity within the movement. Most participants self-identified as feminists; however, some perceived feminism as not being for everyone and excluding men from the agenda. Moreover, it was found that regarding the GRL environment, they have encountered little academic education on feminist issues, especially in courses outside of the Humanities track, resulting in a knowledge exchange mostly between the students. These findings align with

existing literature on the topic. Agreeingly, Koren Dye (2005) highlighted the notion that undergraduate students recognize the stigmatization of feminism due to the media's portrayal. Furthermore, it was shown that the adoption of stigmata is impacted by the level of knowledge received on the topic of feminism (Christiansen & Høyer, 2015). This supports the result that students who have not taken several Global Health courses implied stigmatized attitudes of feminism in their responses. Participants further highlighted the negative impact that media portrayal has on the perception of feminism, which aligns with McRobbie's (2008) findings that media encourages the stigmatization of feminism. Notably, the identification as a feminist is impacted by a stigmatized view of feminism. This is also identified in the results, where it became salient that most participants shared feminist values and ideologies, independent of whether they self-identify as feminists or not. Lazar has explained this gap (2009) as, on the one hand, sharing values of equality and, on the other hand, not wanting to categorize as feminist due to the stigmatization thereof.

Discourse character

The character of feminist discourses impacts to what extent people feel welcomed to interact and engage with and on feminism. It, therefore, addresses a relevant subject for fostering an environment in which intersectional feminist education is promoted. Questions as to what extent participants encountered different feminist perspectives in GRL and what experiences they have made with feminism in the past led participants to identify two different characters that feminist discourse can take on. Firstly, an unsafe character that, in this context, is characterized by a discourse of speaking without listening and listening without speaking, hence not creating but merely reproducing knowledge (hooks, p.22). These discourses are characterized by a lack of

willingness to listen and understand other opinions, which leads to participants sharing their input, but lacking to (re)construct their knowledge based on the input of others. Secondly, a dynamic character emerged, in which parties mutually listen and talk to each other, thereby forming interactions that further construct knowledge. Speaking without listening and listening without speaking also align with previously identified necessary ambitions for feminism to reconstruct knowledge rather than to reproduce it (Carstensen-Egwuom, 2014). Speaking without listening and listening without speaking are often found in discourses together. Participants' perceptions indicated that the discourses are often characterized by a mere battle of statements due to a lack of reflection on the input and a missing reflection on the reaction towards critical input. This further enhances listening without speaking for a wide range of discourse participants, who fear hostile reactions from the other parties or feel there is no space for their contribution. Therefore, the unsafe character of discourse is determined by the level of reflecting skills in both senders and recipients. A lack of reflection in speaking up can result in attacking, patronizing, silencing or excluding other parties from speaking up (Boyd, 2021; Vanner, 2015), which further enhances the adoption of stigmatized views on feminism, again reproducing a pattern of listening and not speaking, or even not engaging at all. This can also result from a lack of reflection in receiving and responding to statements. Experiences with such discourse characteristics do not only negatively impact the discourse of self-identified feminists it also keeps not as strongly opinionated voices out of the discourse. Nevertheless, if done right and discourses of mutually listening and talking to each other can be established, classroom experiences might result in the critical engagement with feminist issues, which, e.g., led bell hooks to write on black feminist thought (hooks, 2000).

A lack of reflexivity

A lack of reflexivity has been identified as a key factor in inhibiting a change from static discourse to a dynamic one, which is shown to impact students' knowledge construction on feminism. This ultimately hinders the development of a learning environment that contributes to understanding intersectional feminism. By raising questions on what topics of feminism are perceived to be important and the ambitions of feminism, it was identified that the perceived value of reflection as a tool for feminist discourses strongly varied amongst the participants. Notably, only students who have attended several Global Health courses explicitly referred to the importance of critical thinking and reflection skills. This suggests that there is naturally more room for reflexivity in social science classes, but also that the content taught in classes is influenced by the teacher's understanding of quality education. However, this finding does not align with the TER set up by CF, which states that the entire program is dedicated to teaching students to reflect critically on their paradigms (Campus Fryslân, 2021). Moreover, it was mentioned that reflection and awareness require a continuous learning process, which aligns with Fraser's (1989) findings that discourse dynamics are learned and are deeply impacted by what one has experienced, learned and seen in other places. Furthermore, the emphasis of Green and Blue on critical thinking skills and intersectional lenses has also been suggested by other researchers, who identified that an active intersectional lens, in which one critically and continuously reminds themselves that dimensions of discrimination are a social construction rather than a predetermined and irrefutable truth, has had a positive effect on the dynamics of feminist discourses (Fraser, 1989).

Looking ahead: A model for educating on intersectional feminism

“We need to be clear that we are all participants in perpetuating sexism until we change our minds and hearts” (hooks, 2000, p.ix).

Education is one of the biggest factors that come into play in the effort to include everyone in feminism. Academic education is a tool to provide alternative knowledge apart from media. It can counter the stigmatization of feminism by enhancing knowledge and pointing out the complex system of thoughts that constitute feminism. This academic education should specifically address adolescents and should be taught in a way inclusive of various knowledge starting points. There is a need to focus on adolescents as a lack of academic work addressing adolescent values and paradigms has been identified (hooks, 2000). It is important to ensure access for every student to this knowledge because feminism is and continues to be a movement that affects everyone. By neglecting to educate the majority of students on the vitality of feminism, universities allow media to take their place in educating, further reproducing stigmatized information (hooks, 2000). Additionally, students must be trained for respectful and constructive discourse dynamics, in which they respectfully listen to each other, creating a safe environment to speak up and share their thoughts. This also implies nurturing reflection and introspection skills within the students, as reflection skills have, on the one hand, been linked to improved discourse dynamics (Boyd, 2021; Vanner, 2015); on the other hand, does critical thinking counter the adoption of stigmatized views (Christiansen & Høyer, 2015).

Ultimately, this study advocates for two mechanisms that could elevate students' understanding of feminism. Firstly, a model for existing courses is presented that highlights educational elements particularly helpful for promoting feminist knowledge construction.

Secondly, it is proposed to establish another foundational course in GRL that provides students with the academic knowledge on feminism to navigate societal issues with a feminist lens.

The Model

The developed model below illustrates three main pillars that existing courses could implement to further promote a feminist view and therefore strengthen social engagement.

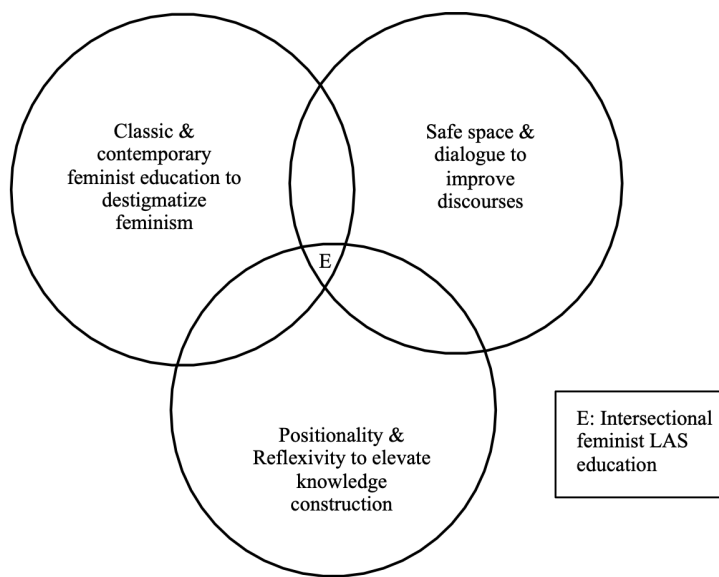


Figure 4. Model for intersectional feminist LAS education: Shows educational mechanisms that can promote knowledge construction on intersectional feminism.

The model consists of three main mechanisms: training students in applying positionality and reflexivity for understanding their position within discourses, delivering classic and contemporary feminist thought on different topics and providing a safe space in which feminist discourse can be turned into a dialogue between opposing views.

Positionality and reflexivity should be integral to every course, as it allows students and teachers to uncover biases within their own and others' thinking. Classic and contemporary feminist thought must be incorporated to show the connection between feminism, social justice and democracy. A feminist lens can uncover socially unjust structures in topics that might seem unrelated to social justice at first. Moreover, a safe space has to be provided to include everyone in feminist discourse and give them a space to exchange knowledge without fearing to interact. This could eventually transform the discourse into dialogues of mutual respect and understanding.

The foundation course

In addition to strengthening the feminist lens in all courses, it is also proposed to develop a mandatory foundation course on feminism in GRL. The findings suggested an uneven distribution of feminist knowledge amongst different study foci, with students attending the Global Health courses acquiring more extensive knowledge on feminism and therefore having a stronger knowledge foundation on social justice than students from other majors might have. However, since feminism is crucial to establishing social engagement and fostering social action (Butler, 2017; hooks, 2000; Miller, Armstrong, Valocchi, 1999), feminist education is needed for every LAS student. Providing academic knowledge on feminism could promote engagement with feminist thought and the identification as feminist (Helsdingen, 2016; Bargard & Hyde, 1991). By creating a safe environment, this course could also facilitate a discourse environment that gives students a feeling of being listened to and comfortable speaking up. It should make reflexivity one of its central pillars, stressing the importance of reflexivity in feminist thought and pointing out that it can be applied in all disciplines. This way, everyone receives access to

knowledge that provides necessary skills and knowledge for future graduates who should promote social and political participation. LAS programs must provide their students with a gentle and patient education, recognizing the different levels of skills (including reflecting and critical thinking skills) and knowledge. It needs to be emphasized that learning is always progressing; as for knowledge changes, so are the people embodying this knowledge, and everyone is capable of changing and developing. Feminist education is relevant for everyone.

In order to promote the knowledge construction of intersectional feminism amongst students, it is essential to provide feminist education that progresses past theorizing and conceptualizing. Students should be trained in the practical application of a feminist lens in all topics, from economics to politics to environmental sciences. Therefore, future research has to investigate methodologies to practically apply feminist thought to existing and new courses in the GRL curriculum.

Limitations to the research

The qualitative nature, in which participants revealed their personal experiences as LAS students in feminist discourses, was a particular strength of the study. Participants had much control throughout the interview because all questions were asked in a semi-structured format. In addition, the participants were able to discuss any topics that they thought were important to discuss. A factor impacting the representativeness of the study was that it concentrated on a single faculty (CF), as well as participants of varied cultural backgrounds, ages, and study focus. The study is also limited in its representativeness due to a relatively small number of participants and an uneven distribution of these participants throughout the course options at GRL. Thus, the interpreted outcomes are not representative of the wider student body of CF, nor that of LAS

programs in general. Furthermore, the method applied for participant recruitment, namely requesting to contact the researcher, naturally attracted more students who would already self-identify as feminists and perceive their knowledge of feminism to be sufficient to participate in an interview thereon. Moreover, the identified challenges have been limited to the three topics that emerged from the data, which should not be evaluated as a sign of completeness, but rather as a starting point to identify all the underlying causes that hinder the knowledge construction of intersectional feminism.

Conclusion

This qualitative study conducted six in-depth interviews to investigate the knowledge construction of GRL students on intersectional feminism and how GRL facilitates a learning environment that contributes to the students' understanding of intersectional feminism. Three emerging challenges to independent knowledge construction were identified: the stigmatization of feminism, a lack of reflexivity and static feminist discourses. It was shown that a lack of intersectional feminist education is at the root of these challenges, which consequently led this study to advocate for establishing a feminist foundation course within GRL. The findings contribute to research on the importance of intersectionality and reflexivity not only for feminist education but for the development of active citizens across various disciplines, confirming the significance of intersectionality and reflexivity for LAS education. The study could also contribute to the improvement of the GRL program by highlighting the need for academic knowledge provision on feminism and the need to incorporate methodologies of intersectionality and reflexivity in all courses. This research proposed a suitable model for educating on intersectional feminism within existing courses and advocacy for adding a feminist foundation

course to GRL. To adopt and implement the findings of this study into the GRL program, further research needs to address questions of practical implementation and course design, e.g., how to integrate the findings into syllabi, how these topics should be taught, who creates the learning material, how the content is decided on and more. Nevertheless, the individuality of learning should be emphasized as there will never be an educational model that can provide an optimal approach for every student.

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Appendix

Interview transcripts and Informed Sheet of Consent:

For the sake of clarity, the interview transcripts as well as a copy of the Informed Sheet of Consent have been stored in the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/dashboard>). To request access to this framework please follow this link:

https://osf.io/ydje8/?view_only=98976e81d78846d7ae7a2ec4e896f7e2. The Authorization for data usage will be given by the author.

References made to the transcripts will be cited after this.