

Teaching Feminist Logic vs. Feminist Teaching of Logic

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Plan for the talk

- Feminist logic
- Teaching logic
- Feminist teaching of logic

Feminist logic

- What it is.
- Why it matters.

Feminist logic: What is it? (1)

Does feminist logic even exist?

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Does feminist logic even exist?

- One cannot be a feminist and a logician (Nye 1990).
- “By most accounts the answer would be no” (Hass 1999, p. 190).
- For “feminist theorists that are wary of or outright reject formal reasoning. . . logic, so understood [as inherently formal], must be mistrusted and ultimately rejected. . . the formal characteristic of logic itself renders it a tool of the patriarchy” (Eckert & Donahue 2020, pp. 426–427, on Nye and Lorde).
- The ‘feminist critique of reason’ (cf. Fairbank forthcoming, §1).
- If certain types of exceptionalism about logic are true, probably not (Russell 2024, p. 81).
 - ▶ Exceptionalism about method: Deductive proof isn’t susceptible to gender bias.
 - ▶ Exceptionalism about content: If logic has no subject matter, gender can’t be its subject matter.
- No, because there aren’t enough women in the field (Longino, quoted in Barceló Aspeitia 2024, p. 59).

BREAKING NEWS!!

Franci Mangraviti (*Synthese*, 2025):

I argue that the continued focus on the possibility question—whether feminist logic can exist as a respectable practice—has several harmful consequences. . . I propose a very broad characterization of feminist logic as a kind of practice which addresses some harmful aspect of dominant practices by focusing on their interaction with logical practices. This characterization trivializes the possibility question.

Feminist logic: What is it? (3)

If it does exist, what does it look like?

- Feminist logic must reject classical binary negation (Plumwood 1993).
- There are formal features that *some* but not all logics possess which “enhance the methodologies of feminist theorizing” (Eckert & Donahue 2020, p. 428, on Plumwood).
- Logic is *one* avenue to truth, not an *exclusive* avenue (Ayim 1995).
- Logic being feminist involves “some appropriate special relationship between it and the movement for gender equality” (Russell 2024, p. 80).
- “Feminist logic, then, is a theory of logical consequence that is grounded in feminist philosophy of logic” (Fairbank forthcoming), where feminist philosophy is “a discipline that is singled out by its interests and methodology: it is philosophy of logic that answers and is answerable to feminist philosophy” (Fairbank forthcoming).

Feminist logic: What is it? (3)

A (not-exhaustive!) classification of “the collection of projects known as ‘feminist logic’ or, a bit more carefully, feminist approaches to logic (and its philosophy)” (Saint-Croix & Cook 2024, pp. 21–22):

- 1 Projects in philosophical logic, attempting to formalize notions used in the positions, arguments, and disputes of feminist philosophy (what Restović (2023) calls “logic for feminist ends” (p. 321).)
- 2 Debates in philosophy of logic, about which logics are correct or useful, when evaluated from a feminist perspective.
- 3 Pedagogical projects, re-examining classroom practices; cf. intervention and access projects (Eckert & Donahue 2020).

To this we can also add:

- Feminist history of logic/recovery projects (Eckert & Donahue 2020).

Feminist logic: Why it matters

- New tools, new topics—new insights? (Mangraviti 2023).
- An increasingly important part of the history of logic (see bibliography!).
- Some logicians might want to be feminists; some feminists might want to be logicians (Uckelman 2025a).
- Ways to counter biases (Russell 2024).
- Inclusion vs. exclusion (Uckelman 2025a).

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- Inclusion vs. exclusion (Uckelman 2025a).

Since it matters, maybe we should teach it more systematically.

Teaching logic

Metacognition/metacognitive reflection: How much do we actually think about what we are doing when we are teaching logic, and why we are doing it?

Our teaching needs theory, analysis, and our best, most careful and philosophical selves (Meskhidze et al., 2019, p. 170).

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Two things to think about:

- Content (what we teach)
- Method (why we teach it)

Content vs. Method

- Arguments for teaching feminist logic are aimed at getting us to think about the *content* of what we teach in logic classes.
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Think back to the “why it matters”: Is teaching feminist logic the only way to address these things? No!

Feminist teaching of logic

Saint-Croix and Cook 2024, pp. 21–22, identify three activities that fall within the “pedagogical project”:

- 1 Investigating the role that gender plays in logic instruction and learning, and in the models of argument analysis taught in logic courses
- 2 Exploring ways to teach (classical/traditional) logic in the face of feminist criticisms
- 3 Assessing the prevalence and perniciousness of the ‘adversarial method’ of argument evaluation in logic texts

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Unfeminist or non-feminist logic can be taught in a feminist way!

Feminist teaching of logic (1)

- What it is.
- Why it matters.

Feminist teaching of logic (2)

Feminist pedagogy begins with a vision of what education might be like but frequently is not. This is a vision of the classroom as a liberatory environment in which we, teacher-student and student-teacher, act as subjects, not objects. Feminist pedagogy is engaged teaching/learning—engaged with self in a continuing reflective process; engaged actively with the material being studied; engaged with others in a struggle to get beyond our sexism and racism and classism and homophobia and other destructive hatreds and to work together to enhance our knowledge; engaged with the community, with traditional organizations, and with movements for social change (Shrewsbury 1987, p. 6).

Feminist teaching of logic (3)

Feminist pedagogy:

- is a liberatory process
- focuses on creating spaces of emancipation and transformation
- cares about inclusion and exclusion
- is about “making space for collective care in the classroom”, where this care is a collective responsibility of all members in the classroom (Wilkinson 2025, p. 8)
- highlights the importance of autoethnography (Wilkinson 2025, pp. 2–3; Coia and Taylor 2013, p. 10).

How does this apply to teaching logic?

Some autoethnography: How I teach logic (1)

(Uckelman 2025b)

- Goals:
 - ▶ How to follow directions
 - ▶ How to reason from a definition

- Barriers:

Some autoethnography: How I teach logic (1)

(Uckelman 2025b)

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 - ▶ **Not** (necessarily): “for them to learn logic”!
 - ▶ How to fail in front of their peers
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 - ▶ How to follow directions
 - ▶ How to reason from a definition
 - ▶ **Not** (necessarily): “for them to learn logic”!
 - ▶ How to fail in front of their peers
- Barriers:
 - ▶ Lack of application (laziness?)
 - ▶ Fear

How I teach logic (2)

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 - ▶ Elicit volunteers.
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I'd been teaching like this for many years before someone informed me that this is actually a recognized method!

Trauma-informed pedagogy (1)

To be trauma-informed, in any context, is to understand how violence, victimization, and other traumatic experiences may have figured in the lives of the individuals involved and to apply that understanding to the provision of services and the design of systems so that they accommodate the needs and vulnerabilities of trauma survivors. A central tenet of this view is that individual safety must be ensured through efforts to minimize the possibilities for inadvertent retraumatization, secondary traumatization, or wholly new traumatizations in the delivery of services (Carello & Butler 2014, p. 156).

Trauma-informed pedagogy (2)

Three questions to ask:

- What kind of trauma do students bring to (symbolic) logic classes?
- How can we design our classes to minimise the impact of this trauma?
- Is trauma-informed pedagogy feminist?

Why it matters

- If we care about logic, we should care about making logic accessible.
- If we want our classes to be accessible, we should be think carefully about our teaching methods.
- If we want our classes to be accessible, we should aim for inclusive, rather than exclusive, pedagogy.
- Feminist/trauma-informed pedagogy seeks to create spaces for this type of inclusion, whatever the content being taught.
- Feminist teaching of logic matters because it is a way to ensure our discipline remains as robust and as strong and as future-proof as it can be—recruiting the next generation of logicians widely.

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