

# Coming to Age as a Feminist Scientist: Ethnographic Readings of Life History Writing

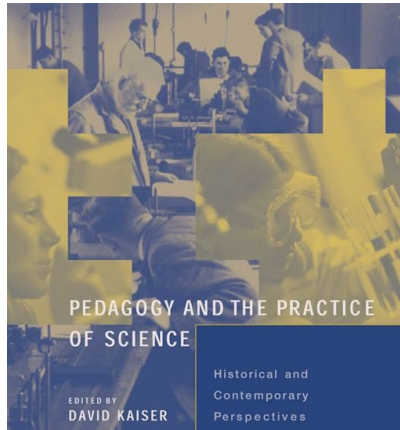
Perna Srigyan

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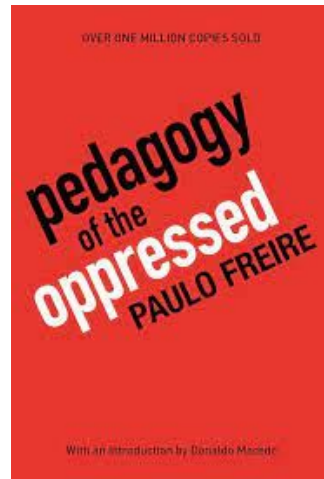
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# Initial influences



David Kaiser  
(ed) (2005).  
*Pedagogy &  
The Practice of  
Science*



Paulo Freire.  
(1968).  
*Pedagogy of the  
Oppressed*

MRS. KLEIN AND PAULO FREIRE: CODA FOR THE PAIN OF  
SYMBOLIZATION IN THE LIFEWORLD OF THE MIND

Deborah P. Britzman

Faculty of Education  
York University

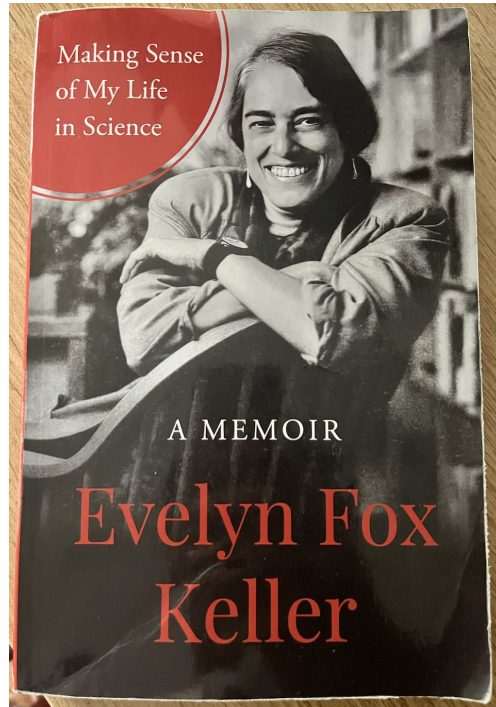
Britzman, 2017

This is a parallel issue to comparison. Life histories need not only to be situated, but, vice versa, they need to be played interrogatively so as to open up the aporias, critical debates, contradictory pressures, and changes in which they participate. Again, the example is my draft paper on biographical writing, "Torn Religions" (1988). Each of the major life histories is selected and analyzed as a critical point of change/contrast. These are figures who articulate epochal change, and critique their own traditions. The former is often dramatically enacted, requiring attention to psychology, transference, acting out, repetitions, displacements, etc.; the latter is articulated through argumentation, deconstruction of metaphors, introduction of new interpretations, etc., and provides the analyst with a set of critical grounds, perspectives, and

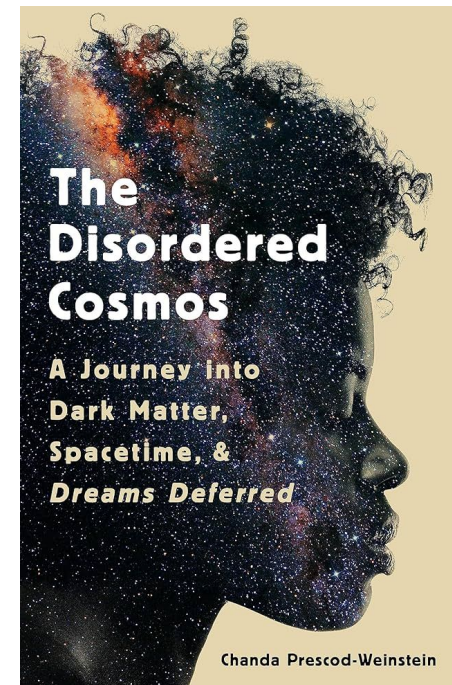
Mike Fisher (1995),  
"The Uses of Life  
Histories"

# Some biographical similarities... and differences

Evelyn Fox-Keller. (2023). *Making Sense of My Life in Science*. Modern Memoirs, Inc.



Chanda Prescod-Weinstein. (2021). *The Disordered Cosmos: A Journey Into Dark Matter, Spacetime, & Dreams Deferred*. Bold Type Books.



# Love and Loss in Science Worlds

**Fox-Keller, p. 44-45**

*“I’ve sometimes referred to this view of physics as falling in love with physics, or just simply as, “doing physics”. It became something of a foundation for intellectual life, the meat and potatoes of my intellectual diet, a baseline for measuring cognitive satisfaction. And it was something I was apparently good at...Indeed, I was now totally absorbed in a subject that I had somehow fallen into”*

**Prescod-Weinstein, p. 35**

“The way I have inhaled particle physics enmeshes me with this historical trajectory. But I am still also one natural conclusion of a Black child dreaming of quarks—not because quarks could serve state interests, but because quarks nourished the soul. *The Standard Model? It is how I fell in love for the first time.*”

# Theorizing in the heartbreak of science

Relevant excerpts. Deborah Britzman. (2003). *After-Education: Anna Freud, Melanie Klein, & Psychoanalytic Theories of Learning*. SUNY Press.

“The *pain of integration also makes one lonely, for in accepting the good and the bad, omnipotence must be given up*. And without the illusion of omnipotence, a certain sense of hope also is lost. What makes the work of integration so difficult, Klein suggests, is that it is also, paradoxically, a work of mourning. And yet, there will still be enjoyment.” p. 148

“Perhaps one of the most difficult questions, then, is how one can think about *responding to expressions of loneliness and containing the transition from emptiness to thinking*. After all, so much of this drama is internal, and its symptoms are congealed.” p.162

# Pain of Symbolization

**Fox-Keller, p. 143**

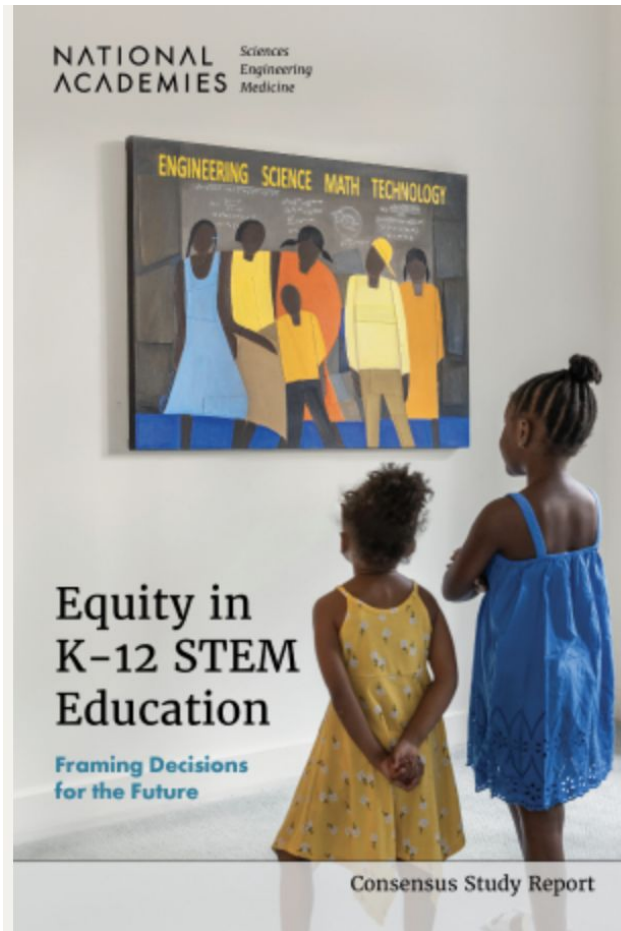
“Who were “they” who were going to kill me? Certainly not my friends in feminist theory, many of whom had already seen the early drafts of chapters. I suppose it was the scientific establishment that I feared. Or maybe the *ghosts of all the great men looking over my shoulder?*.. How had I ever imagined that I could break so many rules and just walk away, scot-free?”

**Prescod-Weinstein, p. 206**

“As I stood there looking at more white dots than I could count and the white haze that inspired the Milky Way’s name—a combination of stars that are too small for our eyes to resolve and illuminated gases—*I felt filled with wonder, but also intense grief*... In that moment at the Magellan Telescopes, I knew my ancestors in a way I had never known them before, and I realized that many Black children were being denied a birthright, a human right, to know the night sky.”



“She blinded me with science”, Lyrics by Thomas Dolby, 1982



National Academics. (2024). *Equity in K-12 STEM Education*.

“This seems like an obvious statement, but something I often hear is that “we” have a real problem getting Black people interested in science. *There’s something deeply insidious about the inability to recognize Black people as an audience. The Black community is owed better information and education around science and our historical relationship to it.*”

Prescod-Weinstein, p. 130

# Coming to Suspicion

**Fox-Keller, p. 74**

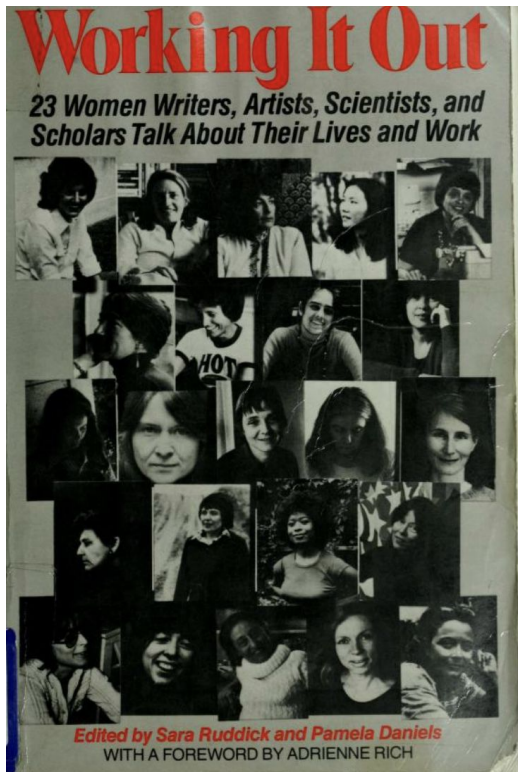
“staying home meant that I didn’t get to bask in the enthusiasm of colleagues. Lee would return from these trips with ever-growing excitement, while I wondered why I was losing interest; why, for me, science was turning into a plate of cold rice. It didn’t occur to me for years to connect these two facts—*I couldn’t see what was under my nose.*”

**Prescod-Weinstein, p. 224**

“When I’m not feeling cynical, I smile when *I recall how adorably naive I was.* I thought I was working to change the world, when instead I had consumed incredibly effective intellectual propaganda.”



# Between Suspicion & Repair



Sara Ruddick & Pamela Daniels.(eds) (1977). *Working it Out*.

Fox-Keller, p. 144

“I’m not sure to what extent I felt the presence of a movement with me; indeed, much of the time, *I really did feel as if I was flying solo*. I say this *despite my dependence on the support and interaction provided by a circle of very good friends*... Friends coming from literature and psychoanalytic theory were great interlocutors, but they tended to have little appreciation of the particular challenges I faced in trying to talk to working scientists.”

# Between Suspicion & Repair



Sculpture of William Herschel and Caroline Herschel. Built in 1988 by Vivien Mousdell.

Prescod-Weinstein, p. 144

“In this context, I am able to understand my defense of Caroline Herschel as necessary solidarity. *Much as I think she would not have defended me, I believe it is important to hold fast to her place in history as an astronomer.* The erasure of her role in history is a threat to all of us, and we must hold the line against it.”

# Concluding Questions

- How could these affective alloys—of love and loss, of suspicion and repair, of dis-identification and solidarity—constitute ethics in feminist science studies?
- Who is a feminist scientific subject, and how do they come to envision a relationship between feminist consciousness and scientific epistemology?
- How can psychoanalysis, or other affect theories, be re-envisioned and leveraged for science so that they do not reproduce normative unconscious processes?