Articles

WHAT COUNTS? EXAMINING ACADEMIC VALUES AND WOMEN'S LIFE EXPERIENCES FROM A CRITICAL FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Women comprise the majority of students in adult education, but the experiences of women continue to be marginalized and devalued in the academic sphere. This article provides an exploration of the current critical analysis of the marketplace influence on adult education, and a comparative feminist analysis with a critical perspective. I argue for the development of a critical feminist approach to adult education that acknowledges the importance of women's life experiences and connections to the homeplace. Various research studies are correlated with my own experience to provide an alternative value set from which to challenge existing marketplace influences within academia, and redefine the way society assesses "what counts" as important work and learning experiences. The critical discourse I advocate supports the work that women do in the homeplace, as students and as academics; the process can lead to a more holistic and inclusive approach to adult education.

Résumé

Bien que les femmes représentent la majeure partie de l'effectif étudiant dans les programmes de formation pour adultes, leurs expériences continuent à être marginalisées et dévalorisées dans les milieux universitaires. Cet article explore l'analyse critique actuelle portant sur l'influence du marché dans le domaine de la formation pour adultes et offre une analyse féministe comparative fondée sur une perspective critique. J'y prône le développement d'une approche féministe critique en matière de formation pour adultes, qui tienne compte de l'importance des expériences vécues par les femmes et des liens qu'elles entretiennent avec la maison. L'article présente diverses études qui corroborent mon expérience et mettent de l'avant un nouvel ensemble de valeurs. Ces valeurs contribuent à remettre en question l'influence du marché dans les milieux universitaires et à redéfinir la manière par laquelle on évalue "ce qui compte" vraiment sur les plans du travail et des expériences

d'apprentissage. Par ce discours critique, j'entends appuyer le travail que font les femmes à la maison, en tant qu'étudiantes et en tant que chercheurs; ce processus est susceptible de mener à une approche en matière de formation pour adultes qui soit plus globale et respectueuse des différences.

Critical theory has had a strong impact upon a number of theorists working within adult education (e.g., Collins, 1998; Mezirow, 1991; Welton, 1995); it has been useful for critiquing the increasing emphasis of the marketplace and questioning issues of power, equity, and justice in a number of areas in adult education. However, this emphasis on the marketplace has reinforced a value set within the academic sphere that has served to undermine and to devalue women's experiences and perspectives, thus stunting the development of feminist scholarship. Whereas masculine viewpoints are supported and validated, women's experiences continue to be marginalized and suppressed. Feminist academics note the limited inroads that feminism has made within the field of adult education and the pervasiveness of a masculine viewpoint that fails to acknowledge fundamental inequalities within academia (e.g., Burstow, 1994; Stalker, 1998). Women who are "successful" often achieve their goals at great personal cost, while structural forms of discrimination continue to flourish. To understand why these gendered differences in experience exist, researchers need to look beyond individual circumstances to the systemic structures and underlying value system that privilege predominantly masculine values and a marketplace agenda.

In this article I argue for the need to develop a critical feminist perspective that challenges the narrow, competitive values which have dominated both academia and the field of adult education. This perspective should value women's contributions and should support a more holistic and comprehensive approach to adult education, leading to a more equitable teaching and learning environment for both educators and students. I begin by examining the influence of the marketplace on education and how this has been analyzed by critical adult educators. I then use a feminist critique of this analysis to reveal the underlying masculine orientation of the Frankfurt critical school and to tease apart some of the troubling aspects of barriers and difficulties that women continue to face in education, which are often unacknowledged and inadequately theorized by a critical perspective. Drawing upon research studies on adult women learners and my own experiences, I challenge adult educators in academia to interrogate their own

role in promulgating practices in academia that serve to neglect or undermine adult education. By examining the way in which women are treated in higher education settings, questions are raised that adult educators in other settings may also ask themselves. In the final section I argue that we adult educators need to broaden our understanding of the issues from a critical feminist perspective, to go beyond the marketplace, and to acknowledge how women's educational experiences are often linked to the homeplace.

Marketplace Influences and Critical Analysis in Adult Education

Recent government educational initiatives indicate support for the notion of lifelong learning and a resurgence of interest in adult education (Hake, 1999; Shipley, 1997). Critical theorists, however, have noted that this support is given to a particular type of education linked with the interests of the marketplace (M. Collins, 1998; Hart, 1992; Mayo, 2000). Increasingly, adult education and academic discourses are sprinkled with terms that draw parallels between students as "customers" or "clients" (Barrett, 1996; Cooper, Velde & Gerber, 1995), whereby academic institutions and adult education programs become viewed as products that need to be effectively marketed. The criteria for academic excellence are driven by terms such as *accountability* and the *bottom line*. Universities are urged to focus on their economic contribution to society as closer linkages are forged between the industrial, corporate, and academic sectors. Some educators and administrators enthusiastically embrace this focus, arguing that there will be financial benefits, monetary spin-offs, and societal satisfaction with education that is sensitive to marketplace concerns. With diminishing government funding, greater attention to alternative sources of funding is perceived as a practical necessity (Downey, 1996). Government support for lifelong education programs is often linked to potential employment and economic benefits, while the concept of adult education is linked with ongoing employment training programs (Shipley, 1997; Mayo 2000).

A Critical Perspective on This Influence

Critical educators challenge this approach to education as being too narrow. The potential for education to develop individuals as citizens and to enhance their individual quality of life is often overlooked in marketplace discourses. Democratic values, and issues of inclusion and equality, are generally not taken up when the curriculum focuses primarily on employment concerns (Barrett, 1996). A recent United Nations report (Delors, 1996) notes that rather than being used cooperatively to improve

social conditions and assist developing nations, education is increasingly creating a wider gap between the "haves" and "have-nots" in the world. Higher levels of education help to secure the advantageous position of privileged nations in the global marketplace. Education becomes another commodity, whereby those with purchasing power are able to situate themselves advantageously to compete against others. This competitive marketplace approach to education is one that demands losers in order to establish winners.

Habermasian Analysis

Critical theory provides a useful framework to begin an analysis of the consequences of this narrow, individualistic approach to adult education. An increasing number of adult education scholars are using the theories of Jurgen Habermas to provide insights into developing more democratic and dialogical opportunities for adult educators (see Connelly, 1996). For example, drawing upon Habermas's theory of communicative action, Welton (1995) argues that the *system* (the economic/political structure) is threatening to undermine the *lifeworld* (the communicatively shaped sphere of community, church and family). This can be seen in the professionalization influence in education (M. Collins, 1991); the unwillingness of some educators to assess different moral values and consequences (Hart, 1992); and in the breakdown of communicative discourse (Welton).

According to Habermas (1987), a *worldview* is developed and widely accepted within each society that delineates the values and goals for that culture. The increasing influence of the system means that narrow technical–rational values that affirm system needs rather than reflecting lifeworld beliefs has gained ascendancy in modern, Western culture. As system structures have broadened in size and influence within modern society, communicative linkages between the system and lifeworld have diminished in strength (Giddens, 1985). Increasingly, the dictates of the system permeate the lifeworld, which in turn create pathological tendencies. Pathologies can be seen in the breakdown of institutions such as the family, religion, and education that have traditionally provided a sense of social cohesion, as the lifeworld is increasingly dictated by system imperatives. Decisions are based upon a very narrow, instrumental form of reasoning, unlike a communicative approach to reasoning that incorporates broader moral and ethical concerns. In explaining how the system infringes upon the lifeworld, Habermas argues that "legitimations and motivations important for maintaining institutional orders are secured, at the expense of, and through the ruthless exploitation of, other resources" (p. 386).

Critical adult educators argue that the influence of the marketplace on determining academic agendas to correspond with labour market "needs" and employer concerns—which replace a more liberal and comprehensive approach to education—can be seen as a pathological impact of the system on the lifeworld. M. Collins (1991) discusses how what he terms "the cult of efficiency" leads to a trend towards professionalization in the field of adult education, and an increasing emphasis on the perceived needs and demands of the marketplace. Collins believes that the influence of technical-rationality (a narrow, means/ends approach to understanding learning) is responsible for the widespread support for competency-based learning. He argues that "adult education curriculum is being increasingly defined by the discourse of skills acquisition" (p. 66). Broader, more holistic and emancipatory educational goals are being abandoned, as educators increasingly are encouraged to move towards teaching competency-based programs that serve industrial and corporate needs.

As a consequence, the strength of the lifeworld in framing notions of citizenship has been undermined. Increasingly, the educational agenda is determined by system imperatives which define goals that support the system. Critical educators often argue that the only way to reclaim this space is to work towards strengthening the lifeworld (e.g., Welton, 1995). This objective requires communicative action, a form of discourse in which all are free to participate, and people are socialized to be open to alternative perspectives. To challenge the marketplace influence in education, critical educators suggest that adult educators work to develop communicative spaces wherein education can assume its transformative potential (e.g., Mezirow, 1991).

A Feminist Response to This Analysis

Like their critical counterparts, feminist theorists challenge the marketplace agenda in education. Their interpretation differs, however, in that they link masculinity with the pervasive influence of the marketplace. Moreover, some feminists suggest that one of the weaknesses of the critical theorists of the Frankfurt school is that they do not recognize that their critique of society is, in fact, a critique of a society largely determined by male values (Luke & Gore, 1992). For example, Fraser (1995) notes that the system structures that Habermas is so critical of are dominated by men, and that the system/lifeworld divide is a faithfully patterned reproduction of the public/private divide that feminists have consistently questioned.

Using a feminist viewpoint, we adult educators can challenge whether the lifeworld has embodied the ideal value structure from which we should be trying to model system structures. It is true that the lifeworld is an important forum for human interaction and communication, and it is a sphere where values, ideals, and societal goals can be questioned, discussed, and reinterpreted. However, within the lifeworld there exist inequalities in power, often linked to sexism and racism. I argue that many of the "pathologies" of the lifeworld that Habermas (1987) blames on detrimental influences (colonization) from the system have emerged from the lifeworld and have been reinforced by system structures. Laws such as the "rule of thumb" that used to exist (where men were allowed to beat their wives provided the stick that they used was no wider than the circumference of their thumb) can be seen as forms of system structures that emerge from a lifeworld already tainted with sexist assumptions and inequalities in power. These problems have been reinforced (rather than initially created) within the system.

Habermas's (1987) theory of communicative action presupposes that all participants should be free to enter into discourse, whereby decisions will be made according to the "forceless force" of the best argument. However, as Benhabib (1996) posits, "there are voices that are mute in this discussion" (p. 175). Habermas has consistently been challenged for inadequately addressing gender differences in experience and outlook (Fleming, 1997; Meehan, 1995). As Fraser (1995) notes in her analysis of the lifeworld and system, in both spheres women (as well as other minorities) have traditionally occupied an inferior position of power and prestige—a point that Habermas has overlooked in his analysis. Similarly, Cohen and Arato (1992) advocate that Habermas's analysis of bureaucratic power needs to be extended to include an analysis of patriarchy. A feminist perspective challenges critical theorists to seriously interrogate other forms of power and privilege, such as gender and race (Ellsworth, 1992; Hart, 1992). As critical theorists we need to be conscious of the often subtle yet destructive forms of discrimination and dominance that serve to silence or co-opt alternative perspectives that are determined within the realm of the lifeworld. Rather than "defending" the lifeworld (Welton, 1995), a feminist perspective would inspire adult educators to work toward its restructuring.

Women in the Margins

Women continue to be marginalized within the field of adult education and to experience discrimination in university settings. Feminist researchers argue that women's perspectives in adult education have been inadequately addressed (Burstow, 1994), and their historical contributions to the discipline

have been overlooked or undervalued (Butterwick, 1998; Hugo, 1990). Discrimination and male violence have served as deterrents to women in their quest to participate in adult education (Campbell, 1993; Stalker, 1998), and the construction of knowledge has been primarily controlled by men (Blundell, 1992; Smith, 1990). Women are less likely to complete a doctorate (Vezina, 1998); less likely to be published and to have their work cited by other authors (Hayes & Smith, 1994); and less likely to be promoted to higher ranks in universities (Caplan, 1994). Although the majority of students in adult education programs are women, leadership in the field remains predominantly male (Burstow, 1994). Women faculty are often located in untenured, part-time or contract positions (Dagg, 1998). Women in academia are often excluded from informal networking opportunities and "have little access to female models or mentors" (Bagilhole, 1993, p. 437). What structural barriers exist that serve to keep women from "succeeding" at the same level as their male colleagues?

Acknowledging the Homeplace

Although the Habermasian critique challenges the limits of the emphasis on the marketplace in education, it fails to explain comprehensively why women and other minority groups are still grappling with issues of discrimination and alienation in adult education and academia. To explore this issue, I argue that we adult educators must recognize that the focus on the marketplace represents a privileging of masculine values. If we examine women's lived experiences, we can see that for many women, linkages to the homeplace are of equal if not greater importance.

The homeplace is an important site of living and learning that has often been overlooked or devalued in assessing educational experiences. By drawing connections to the homeplace, one can begin to see some of the important issues in women's lives that are often ignored or glossed over as insignificant or irrelevant. The homeplace is linked to the individual's sense of identity, forms a centre for interpersonal relationships, and is also a site of both paid and unpaid labour (Gouthro, 1999). The homeplace is a central component of the lifeworld and may be a site where women derive comfort and support, raise children, nurture partners, and connect to the community. At the same time, however, the homeplace may also be a site where women's labour is exploited, where they are victims of violence and domination, and where they are endangered by external hazards such as contaminated drinking water (Luxton, Rosenberg & Arat-Koc, 1990).

Critical Feminist Analysis of Academia

Both critical and feminist theoretical frameworks can provide adult educators with insights into the current trends in adult education within academia, trends that may be mirrored in other adult education settings. By taking a critical feminist approach, we can examine gendered differences in experience in academia by examining linkages to the homeplace. To begin this analysis, I examine what our institutions legitimize as adult education practice, and where we stand in supporting or challenging these practices. I question how we and our institutions recognize the challenges and the dilemmas of students, especially women students, trying to juggle academic "commitment" with their family priorities. In doing so, I challenge the current assessment of "good work" in academia, which prizes a singular focus on one's academic work at the expense of other commitments in the individual's life; I argue that the words *commitment* and *productivity* are generally defined within a masculine, marketplace framework. The marketplace influence in education can be seen not only as an example of technical-rational thinking, but also as an indicator of how masculine experience and viewpoints are often privileged within academic culture. The academic workplace values competitive, individualistic achievements, is hierarchical and status oriented, and has narrowly defined educational goals and objectives. Within this context, unpaid subsistence work and caring forms of labour—such as motherwork—are perceived as negligible, unimportant distractions rather than as primary work and learning experiences (Hart, 1997). Connections to the homeplace are neglected or undermined within academic discourses (Gouthro, 1999).

Assessing Commitment in Academia

I first encountered the academic definition of commitment when I looked into applying for admission to a doctoral program on a part-time basis when my children were still in the infant and toddler stages. I was discouraged by the departmental chair, who told me that the university was *reluctant to* accept women doctoral students on a part-time basis as they had found that they were generally less "committed" than other students. I had trouble understanding this concept, because I was driving almost 2 hours to get to the university, after a semi-sleepless night attending to my children. How could this be less committed than when I lived in residence and had nothing better to do than party and go to classes?

Eventually I came to realize that women who have family obligations while attending school are not following the socially prescribed script of a

traditional graduate student. Just as the committed employee is one who follows the capitalist agenda for a worker in prioritizing company goals over personal life responsibilities, a committed academic is one who focuses almost all of his or her time on academic work. For this reason, people who attend school part-time, who take time out of their academic career to focus on family, or who give priority to the needs of their children are not defined as being as committed as other academics. Despite research (Campbell, 1993; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996; Pascall & Cox, 1993) that reveals the dedication of mature women students as they overcome numerous obstacles while juggling the demands of family, paid work, and schooling, their inability to fit the traditional student mold is often taken as an indicator of their lack of academic commitment.

Edwards (1993) finds from her study on the experiences of university women students in Britain that "conventional student lives can be encompassed totally within the institutional set-up" whereas mature women students must meet the demands of two "greedy institutions"—their families and academic institutions (p. 63). Greedy institutions is a concept she borrows from sociologist Louis Coser; they are institutions that demand complete loyalty and allegiance. The women she interviewed were well aware of the incongruity of the demands placed upon their time and labour from these competing spheres. One woman who was interviewed said, "You have your work to do, but the time you spend with him [your son]... is just as important...Because they are two very important things to me...I don't want to drop one and concentrate on the other" (p. 67). These women continually struggled with guilt and exhaustion as they attempted to meet the demands of each institution, without letting their work in either sphere suffer because of the demands from the other.

I have listened to women with successful academic careers who said that they felt they had to decide between prioritizing their children or their work, so they chose the latter option. One mother said, "My son basically grew up on his own—he had no choice, because I couldn't be around." A mother of children ages 1 and 2 once said to me, "Between finishing my Ph.D. and teaching full-time, I've resigned myself to the fact that I won't see my kids for another two years." Another time I watched a female graduate student receive a smiling nod of approval from her female supervisor as she said, "My daughter can walk the streets if she wants while I'm writing those exams. I just won't be able to do anything except concentrate on my work then."

The consequences of this are troubling. Why is it that these women, joking or serious, feel that to define their commitment to work, they have to reject the importance of their children's lives and concerns? What kind of values do people instill in an academic milieu that gives primacy to corporate values and belittles the significance of caring forms of labour? How empathic will educators be to understanding the importance of women's lived and learned experiences within the homeplace if in their own lives they have decided to prioritize paid work over all other commitments?

Analyzing "Productive" Work

A couple of years ago, I was sitting in a faculty meeting in which a female faculty's file was being reviewed as she was up for promotion. During the ensuing discussion, the improvement in her teaching scores was noted, her involvement in community organizations praised, her willingness to serve on committees commended, and the number of academic articles she had written in the last couple of years applauded as an indication of her productivity. Throughout it all, there was no mention of what I thought of as one of her biggest accomplishments—she had given birth to a beautiful baby boy, whom she was caring for while doing all of this other work. During the entire meeting, as everyone—male and female alike—discussed her accomplishments, I felt like pointing out this obvious yet deliberately excluded point of discussion. At the time I was a part-time faculty member, admitted to the meeting as a representative observer but not as a voting member. I felt silenced—by my lower, marginalized status in the department, and by the clearly defined way in which the conversation was organized, to delineate what kinds of work should count and be considered. Yet as a woman who had chosen to stay at home and organize my paid career around the lives of my children, I found it inconceivable that an important life event which requires a huge amount of time and labour could be willfully overlooked. It was only after the meeting, talking in the corridor, that a couple of other female faculty mentioned how difficult it had been for this woman to satisfy all the academic criteria needed for promotion while dealing with pregnancy, childbirth, and the demands of a newborn infant. They knew how hard she had worked and struggled, yet there was never any mention of this fact in the formal meeting space. In retrospect, I realized that they too must have felt it was inappropriate to mention this in the meeting. Within academia, raising children and attending to family needs are concerns that are treated as incidental and inconsequential (rather than as primary *productive* work). These goals are often perceived to be detrimental because they divert one's focus from traditional academic work. Because this work is

so devalued in the academic sphere, women are often reluctant to raise it as an issue (Caplan, 1994).

What does this reveal about women's experiences within academia? If women are silenced so that they do not—or feel that they cannot—speak about the incredible amount of labour, time, and commitment involved in activities such as motherwork, then this labour becomes invisible within the academy. It means that men and women will continue to be judged according to the same criteria, although quite often their life's circumstances are different. Women traditionally hold the main responsibility for work done in the homeplace, whereas men often have women who assume this responsibility for them. This means that women will only be considered "equal" to men if they do all of the work that men do plus all of the work that women do.   And they must do it in silence, without complaint, without visibility or acknowledgment or recognition.

It means that the bulk of caring work in society that has traditionally been done by women will continue to be diminished in value. Diamond (1986) notes in his award-winning study on the labour of nursing care providers how shocked people were that he, a white educated man (and therefore possessing higher status) chose to work in a nursing home. Caring, nurturing labour was seen to be work that women (often minority women) should be responsible for. The commonly held assumption, even by other caregivers, was that he should be able to find better, more important work. This attitude means that women (or men) who devote time and energy to homeplace responsibilities will always be perceived as less committed and less productive than their peers who maintain a linear focus on paid work and the demands of the academy. In the same way that "productive" employees are those who are most effective at creating a profit for their workplace, productive academics are those who establish a high profile as researchers for their institutions. Productivity becomes narrowly defined by the publication of academic articles in refereed journals and the capacity to obtain research grants. In academia, teaching releases are often granted so that people can concentrate on research. This same flexibility is rarely shown, however, if a person wants time off to nurse an elderly parent, to raise his or her children, or to provide care for a disabled relative.

For women to succeed in academe, they often feel that they must adopt this same set of values (Bagilhole, 1993). Some female faculty become unsympathetic to other women, taking the attitude that if they could do what it takes to succeed, other women can too. They assume the mindset of some of their male peers, questioning whether they should hire young women as

they may take maternity leaves (Bagilhole), and being critical of mothers who take time off to tend to their sick children (Fisher-Lavell, 1998). It is no wonder, then, that students report the lack of empathy and consideration demonstrated by some female faculty when they are faced with juggling concerns of the homeplace with education (Fisher-Lavell). This disjunction between the lifeworld and system is mirrored in the marketplace orientation that segregates life-affirming work from paid labour. Thus, one can see the pathologies reflected in academic values, where life-affirming labour is consistently depreciated, even by other women.

At the same time, women are often expected to be more nurturing within academic environments, and they may be expected to serve as mentors and role models for younger women students (Jackson, 1990). One of the reasons that women may publish less than men is that they may prioritize attending to students' needs. For instance, as a part-time faculty member, I was often approached by students to write reference letters that should have been the responsibility of full-time (often male) faculty. Students would ask me, however, because—like many women faculty—I was the only instructor who took the time to learn even their names (Fassinger, 1995). Every year I find myself counseling pregnant students by discussing how to work their course load around having their babies. These types of concerns are less likely to be discussed with male faculty. When the majority of students are women—the current trend in adult education—then it is not surprising that the small number of women faculty in the discipline often have greater demands placed on their time by students. Yet teaching, mentoring, and counseling students are not given sufficient recognition in academia as productive labour (Litner, Rossiter & Taylor, 1992). In addition, although community work is nominally recognized, faculty who devote a great deal of time and energy to community issues find that this work is not acknowledged or rewarded in the same way as research. Feminists who choose to spend time working with activist groups, or minority women who commit many hours to assisting immigrant women's groups, do not receive the same acknowledgment for the value of this work as they do for research.

A narrow definition of productive work is further reinforced within an educational environment that is determined primarily by marketplace demands. Henkel (1997) notes that some universities are moving towards rewarding "star performers" who bring in large research grants and gain recognition through their research. By giving greater rewards to these individuals, the value of research over the quality of teaching is emphasized. Downey (1996) argues that, given the current political and economic

climate, it is inevitable that "in Canada at least, universities will participate in a process of corporate restructuring similar to that which has characterized business and, more recently, government" (p. 81). Fostering a corporate agenda encourages an individualistic and competitive approach to education, which discourages educators from spending time on teaching, mentoring, and counseling students. It devalues the lived experience women as students and educators bring to adult education from the homeplace. The pervasive worldview of the system that focuses on corporate needs and the demands of the globalized marketplace takes precedence. Ethical questions, justice and equity issues, and cooperative ventures to assist developing nations are swept aside when this type of educational agenda is allowed to prevail.

In this context, important learning that occurs in the homeplace is neglected or devalued. For instance, even when studies in adult education focus on women's experiences, women students are often treated as being somehow "deficient" because most of their labour has been centred in the homeplace (Blundell, 1992; Hayes & Smith, 1994). Many adult education courses designed for women are set up as remedial programs that teach employment skills for women who have been outside the paid workforce. Within these programs, the labour that women do in the home is only acknowledged to have value if it can somehow be converted to marketplace assets, such as time management or family budgeting (Kelly, 1988). The experiential learning of being a mother, the caring forms of subsistence work that can never be adequately quantified, and a different worldview that gives primacy to learning for life rather than profit is overlooked within current educational discourses (Hart, 1997).

Validating Women's Lived Experience

In reframing the notion of "good work," as adult educators we must consider gendered differences in experience. In examining connections to the homeplace, we can see that for many women there is a need to widen our understanding of how education impacts on and connects to people's lives. By examining feminist as well as critical analysis, we may be able to develop an alternative approach to education that is more holistic and life-centred (see Hart, 1992).

Furthermore we must recognize that gender is a complex variable that intersects with other factors such as race, ability, sexual orientation, class and age. For instance, P. H. Collins (2000) points out that feminist analysis has often had a white, middle-class orientation that presents a skewed depiction of home and family that is often inconsistent with the experiences of black women in the United States. A large percentage of black women have had to

work for low wages in white women's homes, raising their children and cleaning their houses in addition to handling responsibilities in their own homeplace. The division of homeplace and workplace as separate spheres has not reflected their lived experiences. The challenges that women encounter in continuing their education are multiplied by women who belong to other minority groups, creating what Carasco (1992) calls a case of "double jeopardy." The black women in Johnson-Bailey and Cervero's (1996) study report that in addition to dealing with the challenges that many women confront in having to juggle home, family, work, and community responsibilities they also had the additional burden of coping with subtle and not-so-subtle forms of racism. As we adult educators examine discourses of power in academe, we need to be conscious of the "positionality (gender, race, class, etc.) of all participants" (Tisdell, 1998, p. 139).

Acknowledging and validating the struggles that women engage in as they pursue their learning goals affirms the genuine work that occurs but which falls outside the narrower definition of paid labour within the marketplace. It also opens up the possibility of learning occurring in a variety of circumstances. For instance, the experience of mothering is a topic that a number of feminist scholars are beginning to explore. Abbey and O'Reilly (1998) argue that "the critical task of feminism is to examine the social, economic and political structures of women's inequality and systemic oppression while also reclaiming and identifying the positive aspects of women's experiences" (p. 19). An examination of the importance of mothering is a means to validate some women's experiences and highlights different possible value structures.

Where Do We Go From Here as Adult Educators

Hart's (1997) critical feminist perspective utilizes both Habermasian theory and feminist theory to assess, critique, and develop an argument for an alternative worldview that values the contribution of women and subsistence labour such as motherwork. Hart argues that if society were to place motherwork as a central focus in education and work, it would lead adult educators to make a radical critique of a framework that is designed to segregate mind and body—one which privileges abstract and technical work while devaluing nurturing and caring work. She claims motherwork is a form of labour that fosters a "holistic mindset and a holistic practical approach" (p. 133) to education. Her observation has helped me conclude from my research that adult educators need to develop a better feminist perspective and to continually ask: What really counts?

Developing a Critical Feminist Perspective

For a critical feminist perspective to emerge, both men and women have to make a commitment to openness and the possibility of change. It raises questions around how people recognize and value (or devalue) caring forms of unpaid labour that tend to be done primarily by women. As Miles (1998) argues, "life-centred feminist visions are thus grounded in alternative values whose very enunciation requires the re-definition of key concepts such as work, value, wealth, development and humanity" (p. 256). Litner et al. (1992) argue that educators need to develop a more inclusive teaching practice, whereby women are encouraged to speak of their experiences and to develop analysis by comparing what they know in their daily lives and what they are taught in the academic setting. Adult educators have a long history of advocating the importance of recognizing that learners are able to bring a great deal to the classroom from their personal lived experiences. We need to acknowledge the strengths that women bring to academia in terms of relational qualities, life experiences, and different feminine viewpoints.

In order to develop a more balanced, holistic approach to adult education, men and women need to be open to learning about different perspectives and willing to take a broader and more inclusive approach to understanding the nature of adult learning. Critical theorists talk about the importance of being open to learning about other viewpoints (M. Collins, 1991; Welton, 1995). Both feminist and critical theorists have validated notions of dialogue and discourse. This entails developing a critically reflective approach to one's own teaching practices, developing a more holistic understanding of education, and challenging existing presumptions and traditions in order to see how they embody exclusionary and discriminatory practices. It means that as adult educators we will have to assess our own underlying assumptions that guide our pedagogical practice, and will have to develop an openness to different viewpoints that may challenge the way we have traditionally approached our practice. We will have to reassess the types of academic labour that are valued—such as teaching, mentoring, and informal types of "mothering" activities for students and colleagues. We will have to question how our institutions accommodate and support women (and men) faculty who are engaged in unpaid labour such as raising children or caring for the elderly. This can raise some challenging questions. For instance, if an academic takes time out of her career to focus on motherwork, does that mean she is less committed or capable than a male colleague? When hiring a new faculty member for a department, should decision-makers look primarily at the number of

published refereed articles produced, or should other factors, such as the individual's willingness to spend time mentoring students and volunteering in grass roots activist groups be considered as characteristics to be valued and supported? Are we willing to restructure our academic institutions to allow for more flexibility so that individuals can create balance between their workplace and homeplace, or will we continue to demand that loyalty be demonstrated by a linear focus on paid work?

Developing a Discourse of Challenge about What Really Matters

I believe that as adult educators we have an obligation to think about what really matters. Brookfield (1995) claims that "we teach to change the world" (p. 1). If that is the case, how do we want to change it? Do we want to affirm only a narrow approach to education that validates a markeplace agenda and devalues the caring forms of work traditionally upheld by women? Or do we develop education that emphasizes values such as equity and justice and affirms the importance of women's lived experiences?

Before we venture forth to change the world we need to assess what is happening in our own workspaces. By examining how women's experiences are linked to the homeplace we can begin to reassess the current curriculum, the adult education literature, and the way we assess academic and work performance. Linking adult education directly to paid employment creates a narrow focus for learning, limits the types of education that will be supported, and offsets possibilities for critical engagement and social change. As Habermasian theorists such as Welton (1995) have noted, this reifies a worldview based upon competition and consumption within the framework of globalized capitalism. It also reinforces masculine perceptions of work and devalues the contributions that women make through subsistence labour and the practice of mothering (Hart, 1997). Instead of questioning the current educational framework for economic development, it entrenches it further.

As adult educators, we need to develop an understanding of the powerful social structures that limit the potential for adult learning experiences and to be conscious of the underlying implications of government and industrial mandates in education that serve a marketplace agenda. We need to be open to different viewpoints, willing to dialogue with other educators, and able to learn from different theoretical perspectives. Then, as we work to change the world, we will have a clearer vision of what changes we want to make through our own teaching practices.

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