

THE ADULT LEARNER/TEACHER RELATIONSHIP AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT: DE-MEANING TRADITIONS

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Abstract

The adult learner/teacher relationship is consistently portrayed in our literature as one which has both positive processes and outcomes. When this relationship is examined as a gendered one, however, there is ample evidence to illustrate that such is not always the case. Insights into the negative aspects of the relationship are revealed by an empirical and theoretical examination of sexual harassment in a particular setting in which the education of adults occurs—the higher education setting. This examination also highlights the ways in which we can re-theorize, research and re-practice the adult learner/teacher relationship.

Résumé

La relation étudiant-e/professeur est toujours présentée dans notre littérature comme le lieu d'interactions et de résultats positifs. Lorsque nous examinons cette relation sous l'angle des relations de genres toutefois, force est de constater que ce n'est pas toujours le cas. Une étude empirique et une analyse théorique du harcèlement sexuel dans un des secteurs de l'éducation des adultes, celui des études avancées, rélèvent les aspects négatifs de cette relation. Une telle recherche nous éclaire également sur des possibilités de re-théoriser, de re-chercher et de ré-expérimenter en ce qui concerne la relation entre l'étudiant-e adulte et l'enseignant-e.

There is a dominant tradition in the adult education literature which presents the adult learner/teacher relationship as a positive interaction which is gender neutral. There is general agreement that the relationship has positive processes and is correlated with positive outcomes. Essentially, this view of the relationship has escaped being problematized or deconstructed in general ways. Further, despite the preponderance of women learners involved in adult education, it has not been subjected to a specifically feminist critique. The lack of such critical analyses inhibits our full understanding of these relationships. This, in turn, limits our ability to develop functional and effective models for adult education activities.

Given the above, the purpose of this article is to argue that the field's dominant view of the adult learner/teacher relationship as a positive, gender neutral interaction is overly simplistic and idealized. In order to accomplish this aim, the article first identifies the traditional view of the adult learner/teacher relationship. Second, it examines the female learner/male teacher relationship within one specific context within which the education of adults occurs—a higher education setting. The literature notes the complexities of the adult learner/teacher relationship and deals specifically with the occurrence of sexual harassment. Both empirical data and theoretical discourses from that literature are used to inform the dominant view

promulgated within the field of adult education. Finally, this article concludes with a discussion of the implications of this critique for theory, research and practice.

The Traditional View of the Adult Learner/Teacher Relationship

Fundamentally, the adult learner/teacher relationship is portrayed as a connectedness between the adult learner and the adult teacher within the context of a learning situation. In the adult education literature the relationship is treated most frequently as a 'warm fuzzy.' The positive view of the relationship is reified through three processes. First, the terms used to describe the relationship or the interactions that accrue to it are loaded with positive connotations, regardless of the setting. Second, the processes of the relationship are portrayed in positive ways. Third, the outcomes of the relationship are represented positively.

Positive Connotations

As noted above, the terms used to describe the adult learner/teacher relationship or the interactions that accrue to it are loaded with positive connotations. The literature consistently portrays the adult learner/teacher relationship as a constructive one in which teachers are "helping" (Brookfield, 1983, p. 152), "consultants" (Knowles, 1990, p. 292) and "guide[s]" (Galbraith, 1990, p. 3).

This affirmative view of the adult learner/teacher relationship is sustained across a variety of settings. In the area of distance education, for example, the adult learner/teacher relationship is identified frequently as a key part of the support system for distance learners (Kaye & Rumble, 1981; Hodgson, Mann & Snell, 1987). As well, the literature notes that independent adult learners express a consistent desire to enter into such relationships to gain assistance in their learning (Tough, 1979). Similarly, in reference to self-directed learners, Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) label the relationship as "special", and "most often rewarding for both learner and facilitator" (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991, p. 14). This positive view of the adult learner/teacher relationship is further reinforced in the literature through its positive portrayal of the processes and outcomes of the relationship.

Positive Processes

The processes of the ideal adult learner/teacher relationship are seen as both harmonious and spirited. In the first instance, the adult learner is in harmonious "partnership" (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982, p. 57) with the adult teacher. The emphasis is on equality and mutuality. The relationship is "a collaborative adventure" (Galbraith, 1990, p. 16) in which the learner and teacher roles are interchangeable, in which "each participant may play both roles of teacher and learner" (Jarvis, 1987, p. 12), and in which teaching-learning transactions "become the mutual responsibilities of learners and teachers" (Brookfield, 1983, p. 151). It requires the teacher's abdication of authority and a de-emphasis on our controlling, structured behaviours. The vision is one in which learners and teachers harmoniously "negotiate" (Todd, 1990, p. 68), merging our agreements and disagreements to create an adult education activity acceptable to both.

In the second instance, the notion of harmonious partnerships is extended to the view that ideal adult learner/teacher relationships include learners who are active participants in constructing the processes, goals and evaluation methods of the adult education activity. The emphasis is on concepts of involvement, industriousness, energy and action. Learners are portrayed as "users not recipients" (Knox, 1986, p. 35) who have the right to "a degree of self-diagnosis with regard to learning needs" and to "partial responsibility for the evaluative procedures and criteria to judge successful performance" (Brookfield, 1983, p. 151). Some of the field's classic pieces of literature promulgate this view of the learner (Bergevin, 1967; Freire, 1970; Houle, 1972; Kidd, 1976; Knowles, 1978; Lindeman, 1961). As Long says, "the desirability of including learners in planning and management of education programmes for adults is one of the pervasive characteristics as reflected by the literature" (1983, p. 167).

Positive Outcomes

This positive view of the adult learner/teacher relationship is embedded not only within these ways in which the literature portrays the processes, but also within the ways in which it portrays the outcomes of the relationship. Several favourable outcomes are implied: increase in participation, facilitation of learning, and development of personal and professional competencies. As the following discussion illustrates, discussions of outcomes focus primarily on individualized outcomes.

For many decades, adult educators have linked the adult learner/teacher relationship with adult learners' continuing participation, that is, persistence, in adult education activities. Boshier (1973) suggested that the congruency of the learners' self-concepts with their concepts of professors (and also of other students) was closely associated with their decisions to drop-out or persist. This finding was supported by Davis (in Long, 1983) and extended by Lam and Wong (1974). This latter study established that the "approachability" of the instructor by the student was positively correlated to learners' attendance. Similar kinds of research projects substantiated this view of the adult learner/teacher relationship as an integral element in retaining adult learners' in adult education activities (see Long, 1983 for a comprehensive survey of this research).

Another positive view which adult educators hold about the adult learner/teacher relationship is that it is a fundamental part of the learning process which facilitates learning. Regardless of our philosophical preferences for behaviourist, cognitivist or humanist approaches, researchers consistently relate teacher-learner interactions to learning outcomes. The behaviourist may emphasize the teacher's relationship to the learner as an organizer of their learning, while the humanist may emphasize the importance of the empathetic relationship but both share the view that the relationship is an integral part of learning. Similarly, whether the teaching approach is didactic, socratic or facilitative, the teachers' relationship to learners is still related to their learning (Jarvis, 1983).

While some may envisage a learning outcome of academic achievement (Conti, 1985) and others aim for creativity (Dubin & Okum, 1973), adult educators consistently retain the view that the nature of the adult learner/teacher relationship influences the

learning outcome. Others extend the notion and argue that even the motivation to learn (Knowles, 1984; Knox, 1986; Wlodkowski, 1985) is related to the adult learner/teacher relationship.

The third and final desirable outcome attributed to the ideal adult learner/teacher relationship is the learner's development of personal and professional attributes. In the first instance, some argue that the relationship develops healthy self-awareness, self-confidence, and fosters personal growth and development (see for example, Goldberg, 1980). In the second instance, some suggest that the adult learner/teacher relationship, in the form of a mentor relationship, is basic and necessary for career development and professional success (Bolton, 1980; Merriam, 1983). According to this view, such a relationship provides role modelling, professional advice and the social skills which are necessary for career advancement.

Although it is clear that the field of adult education consistently has conceptualized the adult learner/teacher relationship in positive ways and related it to positive outcomes, there are a few adult educators who have hinted that the relationship cannot be so simplistically defined. Some researchers in critiques of self-direction and autonomy, for example, imply an indirect critique of the adult learner/teacher relationship (Brookfield, 1983; Candy, 1991; Chene, 1983). Others acknowledge the role of teachers as those who have more control, power and authority relative to students (e.g., Colin III & Preciphs, 1991, Garrison, 1992; Jarvis, 1983, 1987; Knowles, 1990; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991; Tennant, 1991).

There are two basic weaknesses with existing critiques, however. First, many of the critiques have been tangential rather than focused upon the adult learner/teacher relationship. For the most part, passing comments have sufficed to acknowledge the negative processes and outcomes of the relationship.

Second, critiques of the relationship have not addressed either the nature or problematics of learner/teacher relationships in terms of gender. The gender neutral nature of the relationship is reified throughout the literature primarily by the absence of discussion on the issue. Although particular studies may treat gender as a variable in relation to learners' or teachers' specific behaviours, learner/teacher interactions are not explored in terms of the same or cross-gendered nature of the relationship. Participation or non-participation, for example, may be discussed in relation to the learner's gender, but not in relation to the learner's gender relative to the teacher's gender. This gender insensitivity is implicit, rather than explicit in the literature. Gender is not presented as an issue of concern; it is regarded as too unimportant to mention.

Together, these two weaknesses inhibit the field's conceptualization of the adult learner/teacher relationship and the research, theories and practices based on that conceptualization. Thus, the following section highlights the negative aspects of the adult learner/teacher relationship and focuses in particular on women learners in cross-gendered relationships, that is, female learner/male teacher relationships. This article focuses on women learners in recognition of their high participation levels in adult and continuing education activities. As the following discussion will demonstrate,

an analysis of the female learner/male teacher relationship, although useful in and of itself, also broadens and deepens the field's conceptualization of the general adult learner/teacher relationship.

A Re-view of the Female Learner/Male Teacher Relationship

In order to examine the negative aspects of the female learner/male teacher relationship, it is essential to locate a comprehensive literature base which provides an in-depth critique of that relationship. One such literature base is located in higher education settings. That literature identifies sexual harassment as a characteristic of the female learner/male teacher relationship. Some might argue that the formal higher education setting creates a different context to the non-formal adult and continuing education contexts, and that one cannot relate harassment issues in the former setting to the latter. Although it is beyond the scope of this article to enter into this discussion fully, two points must be made. First, it is important to acknowledge that this kind of disagreement is based on the assumption that the adult learner/teacher relationship in adult and continuing education is different from other settings in terms of its more positive processes and outcomes. Given the purpose of this article to problematize those very assumptions, it is appropriate to draw parallels with a higher education setting. This is particularly apt since there is no empirical evidence which substantiates the assumption that these different settings can be equated to different adult learner/teacher relationships.

Second, this article is based on the similarities rather than differences between the higher education setting and the adult and continuing education settings. It rejects the dated, falsely tidy categories of formal and non-formal educational settings in favour of a more contemporary notion of seamless education. This notion acknowledges the simultaneous and multiple locations of adult learners within an educational framework which is interactive and interdependent.

The following discussion of the negative aspects of the female learner/male teacher relationship begins by presenting first, the processes and prevalence of sexual harassment; second, the empirical data which establish the outcomes of sexual harassment; and third, the theoretical interpretations which explicate its processes and outcomes. Each section highlights insights gained from the literature into adult learner/teacher relationships in general and the female learner/male teacher relationship in particular.

Processes and Prevalence of Sexual Harassment

Understanding the processes of sexual harassment is not easy. Definitions of sexual harassment range from the superficial to the restrictive and technical (Crocker, 1983; Fitzgerald, 1990). This lack of clarity is to be expected since the term which is both descriptive of behaviour and normative in nature has been interpreted in different ways in different settings and at different times. Methodological inconsistencies among research studies have not helped the situation. Such variables as the gender and age of those who define the term also influence the ways in which the processes are delineated (Reilly, Carpenter, Dull, & Bartlett, 1982).

The working definition of sexual harassment used in this article includes three elements that describe a range of behaviours which are generally understood to be basic to the term. First, sexual harassment has to do with behaviours which include "ogling and staring, comments and jokes about women's body or appearance, physical contact (punches and touches), passes and casual sexual remarks, explicit sexual propositions" (Schneider, 1987, p. 51). It is this level of sexual harassment which is the most problematic to identify since the line between acceptable and unacceptable comments and behaviours is a fine one. None the less, behaviours are normally judged to constitute sexual harassment if they create an atmosphere or environment which has sexual overtones and innuendo.

Second, sexual harassment has to do with coercive requests for dates and sex. In this instance, a social relationship is imposed onto an academic one. Although it is possible to label these behaviours as consensual rather than coercive, such re-labelling may be naive and disguise the severity of the problem. Schneider (1987) found that 13% of graduate women in a major eastern University dated a faculty member at least once during their graduate academic careers. However, of the graduate women reporting such experiences, 30 percent felt pressured to date and 30 percent felt pressured to be sexual with the man. In other words, acceding to a request may not indicate a choice based on one's own free will and preferences.

The third element which describes the most extreme range of the sexual harassment behaviours concerns demands for dates and sex which are linked with overt threats and/or promises. In some instances, these behaviours may also involve physical force such as grabbing, slapping or restraining.

These elements form the basis of the definition of sexual harassment. At first glance, they appear to represent a continuum of behaviours. More accurately, however, they form an interactive spiral. Thus, although adult learners may not experience coercive requests or demands for dates and sex *directly*, they may be aware that they are within an environment where it is occurring. To the extent that the environment is loaded with sexual overtones and innuendo, these learners experience sexual harassment of the first type. In this respect, those of us as learners and teachers who view ourselves as involved in consensual sexual relationships are responsible for creating an environment of sexual harassment. These interacting layers within layers of the sexual harassment processes emphasize the complexity of a gendered adult learner/teacher relationship.

It is important to note here that although the research literature focuses on the harassment of female learners by male teachers, alternate situations can occur. Male learners can be harassed by women teachers, learners of any gender can harass teachers and same gender sexual harassment can take place. What is important about these latter situations is what Hoffman refers to as their uniqueness as "isolated incident[s] at odds with conventional norms" (1986, p. 110). Since these kinds of incidents are both less likely to occur and are of a special nature, they will not be considered here.

An examination of the sexual harassment processes defined above gives insights into the adult learner/teacher relationship in general and the female learner/male teacher relationship in particular. In the first instance, an examination of these processes depicts the complexities of adult learner/teacher relationships in a more general way. First, and most importantly, it is clear that there is a strong theme which underlies the definitions. The notion of unequal power of the people involved is basic to it. Sexual harassment is about unwanted, inappropriate and unwelcome sexual attentions *within the context of an unequal power relationship*. Unlike our adult education literature, the sexual harassment literature works from the basic assumption that the adult learner/teacher relationship is inculcated with unequal power, authority and control statuses. As much of the sexual harassment literature emphasizes, it is "the difference in authority, not the intentions of the people involved" (Wilson & Kraus, 1983, p. 219) which defines the relationship. Further, the sexual harassment literature notes that the "sexualizing of situations" (Skeggs, 1991, p. 127) combined with status inequities ensures that learners' power, authority and control are diminished and maintained at a lower level than that of the teacher.

Second, the sexual harassment literature also highlights the subtle, interacting aspects of the adult learner/teacher relationship. It demonstrates the usefulness of a model which incorporates a *range* of processes and thus gives depth to our understanding of the relationship. Finally, it introduces the notion of a collectively created relationship in which adult learners form relationships with adult teachers in an environment which is influenced by the relationships of others.

In the second instance, an examination of the processes of sexual harassment highlights the unique nature of women learners' experiences and potential experiences. It is clear that women learners may undertake their studies within a context which is loaded with subtle and/or overt unwanted sexual attentions. They may experience gender harassment taken one step further—from differential treatment based on gender to differential treatment laden with sexual attention.

These insights into the adult learner/teacher relationship might be dismissed if there was no evidence to substantiate the existence of sexual harassment. This is not the case. Studies have established this clearly and consistently across time and geographic location (see Somers, 1982) despite variations in definitions and methodology.

Numerous research studies show that sexual harassment occurs in many different settings. Some of the most comprehensive and widely published studies have been conducted in the United States and focus on the higher education setting. The following studies are just a few of those which could be selected from a number of different countries to illustrate the extent of the situation:

- In 1978, at Berkley, 20% of the graduate students had been the recipients of unwanted sexual remarks, touching or propositions from their professors (in Wilson & Kraus, 1983).
- In 1982, Benson and Thomson found that 30% of women received unwanted sexual attention from at least one male instructor during their four years at college.

- In 1983, at East Carolina University, 33% of undergraduate and graduate female students reported being sexually harassed by one or more male teachers (Wilson & Kraus, 1983); at Iowa State University, 17% of female graduates and undergraduates reported that they had experienced verbal sexual advances while 2% had experienced direct sexual bribery (Adams, Kottke & Padgitt, 1983).
- In 1987, 15% of graduate women at Harvard avoided a faculty member at least once during their graduate training because of that individual's harassing behaviour (in Schneider, 1987).
- In 1990, a report by Gabriel and Smithson revealed that 60% of the women students at Cornell University reporting having been sexually harassed at the institution.

Once again, an examination of these data gives insights into the adult learner/teacher relationship in general and the female learner/male teacher relationship in particular. At the general level, these data imply that adult learner/teacher relationships are located within a wider context than its traditional individualistic, one-to-one representation. In the face of empirical data collected over decades, sexual harassment has persisted. This consistency suggests that institutional and societal norms and values foster, or at a minimum tolerate, certain kinds of unhealthy adult learner/teacher relationships.

At the more particular level of the female learner/male teacher relationship, these data emphasize the possibility for undesirable learner/teacher interactions for women learners in adult learning situations. They highlight the inconsistency between women's experiences in higher education settings and the positive representation of those relationships in the adult education literature.

Outcomes of Sexual Harassment

As noted above, sexual harassment is a tangible and continuing phenomenon in the education of adults in higher education institutions. There are those who argue that it is not an issue of consequence and that it is merely the price women must pay for equality (Paul, 1991). Many others, however, have emphasized that the price is too high, that the outcomes of such adult learner/teacher relationships are profoundly negative and far-reaching.

The outcomes of adult learner/teacher relationships are particularly problematic since, as one might predict from the discussion above, they are interwoven with issues of unequal power, authority and control. These ensure, to varying degrees, a dependent relationship of the adult student on the adult teacher for both overt and covert outcomes. In the first instance, the student is dependent upon the teacher for direct academic and economic benefits. As faculty members, teachers control to varying degrees the admission, grades, financial and research opportunities of our students. A more covert, but equally important, kind of control is exerted over recommendations, references and the mentoring process.

Embedded within these dependent relationships are the concepts of reward and punishment. Outcomes allocated by those with power can be, after all, both desirable

and "unfortunate" (Jensen & Gutek, 1982, p. 125). Indeed, this distinction between the allocation of desirable outcomes and the allocation of damaging and harmful outcomes plays an important role in reinforcing the unequal power relationships within adult learner/teacher relationships. It is the notion of selective reward or punishment which clarifies the appropriateness of these allocations. It is in the context of "credit for potential sexual exchange" (Benson & Thomson, 1982, p. 243) that, for example, offers of extra help/refusal to help or flexibility/rigidity in deadlines, become the currency of sexual harassment.

It is within the boundaries of dependent relationships that the personal implications of sexual harassment are realized. Research has shown that although the outcomes of sexual harassment may vary among women most women experience generalized negative responses.

Paludi and Barickman identify five negative stress responses as "sexual harassment trauma syndrome" (1991, p. 29). Their work usefully classifies studies done earlier (Adams, Kottke & Padgitt, 1983; Benson & Thomson, 1982; Koss, 1990; Reilly, Carpenter, Dull & Bartlett, 1982). The responses they identify include emotional reactions of anxiety, denial, embarrassment, confusion and guilt. Physical reactions include headaches, lethargy, weight fluctuations, nightmares, panic reactions and gastrointestinal distress. Changes in self-perception include negative self-concept, lack of competency, isolation and hopelessness. Social, interpersonal relatedness and sexual effects include withdrawal, fear of new people, lack of trust, changes in social network patterns, and negative attitudes and behaviour in sexual relationships. Career effects include changes in study and work habits, loss of job or promotion, drop in academic performance, absenteeism, withdrawal from school, and change in career goals. According to Quina (1990), outcomes which result from sexual harassment surface in the longer term as well as the shorter term.

Once again, the sexual harassment literature provides us with a good model for critiquing the adult learner/teacher relationship as it is depicted in the literature. Unlike much of the adult education literature, the higher education literature explores at depth the potential for exploitation and abuse embedded within adult learner/teacher relationships. Indeed, it emphasizes the *lack* of mutuality and reciprocity in these relationships. It notes the subtle, complex interplay amongst reward, punishment, and relationship.

The sexual harassment literature also provides a variety of ways of examining the outcomes of the adult learner/teacher relationship. It illustrates the usefulness of exploring the relationship in terms of its emotional, physical, personal, interpersonal, and sexual outcomes. As well, it suggests the importance of investigating the relationship in temporal terms. Both the long and short term effects of the relationship could be usefully explored.

Finally, the literature not only provides us with a good model for critiquing the adult learner/teacher relationship as it is depicted in the literature. It also emphasizes the importance of exploring the relationship in terms of gender related issues. Sexual

harassment and its subsequent negative outcomes may be only one of a plethora of issues which affect female learners more acutely than male learners.

As we have seen, the notion of differential power is interwoven into the processes and outcomes of sexual harassment. To this point, this has been explored primarily as a descriptive concept. In the discussion which follows, the concept of power will be explored theoretically. This will continue to give insights into the ways in which the adult learner/teacher relationship might be approached more critically by adult educators as a gendered rather than neutral interaction.

Theoretical Interpretations of Sexual Harassment

In terms of sexual harassment, power relations are acted out in three dimensions: sexual objectification, gender stratification and organizational structures. These three dimensions when applied to the adult learner/teacher relationship give insights into the nature of gendered learner/teacher relationships.

Sexual objectification.

Sexual objectification has a biodeterministic base, that is, there is said to be a 'natural' sexuality which identifies men and which is different to that which identifies women. On the one hand, men are portrayed as aggressors and conquerors with biologically insatiable sexual appetites. Dworkin (1981) extends this notion to make an innate link between male sexuality and violence. On the other hand, women are portrayed, for the most part as passive, detached recipients of sexual attentions. For non-white women sexual objectification may create a different kind of labelling, in which they are viewed as foreign, exotic, erotic and sexually adventurous (DeFour, 1990). In all instances, these portrayals are seen as the base of the 'natural order' of sexual relations between men and women.

This perspective on power directly addresses the gendered nature of the adult learner/teacher relationship. It has several implications. First, it supports the view that men are entitled to engage in sexual flirtation. Even if that behaviour is identified as symbolic violence against women, it is seen to be consistent with the 'natural order' of sexual relations. Second, sexual objectification suggests that women would normally be complimented by such evidence of male sexual arousal. Third, it portrays the sexual objectification of women as a basic, underlying assumption of male/female interactions within our culture. This portrayal, some argue, explains why there is a reluctance to prosecute sexual harassers. It is, after all, the natural order of male/female relations.

Finally, this perspective reinforces the idea that women differ from men in capabilities, interests, and abilities. In the educational setting, this may be interpreted to mean that some educational offerings are more suited to women than to men. This segregation by sex converges with the second dimension of power relationships, gender stratification.

Gender stratification.

Gender stratification is based on the definitions of women and men socially constructed over time. It is about sexual inequalities embedded within a patriarchal

culture which perpetuates and reinforces men as privileged and women as disadvantaged. Gender stratification ensures that women's access to resources, power, and authority is less, relative to men's access. Further, it defines what is acceptable masculinity and femininity. It places women in a 'private' sphere of familial, domestic and apolitical concerns and men in a more highly valued 'public' sphere of patriarchy, politics and full-time paid work (Collard & Stalker, 1991). Within the woman's sphere fall the nurturing and caring roles; roles which Frye (1983) identifies as the servicing of men. These roles include personal, sexual and ego service. In the first instance, women provide the clerical and secretarial support to men as the men perform their masculine roles. In the second instance, women not only provide for men's sexual needs, but also strive to be "nice" and attractive for them. In the final instance, women encourage, support, praise and give attention to the male.

These gender stratified roles are problematic for adult learner/teacher relationships in two ways. First, like sexual objectification, they foster acceptance of sexual relationships as part of the natural and normal order of relationships between the male and female spheres. Thus, the woman student who provides personal and ego service may be viewed as willing to provide sexual service as well. Second, the more strongly delineated these roles, the more possibility there is for misinterpretation if a woman student does not conform to the definitions of her sphere. Thus, the friendliness and academic enthusiasm of a woman student may be misinterpreted as an invitation for sexual advances (Benson & Thomson, 1982). This may be particularly problematic for women of different class, colour or ethnicity who do not live according to the roles of the dominant culture within which they live.

Clearly, sexual objectification and gender stratification foster sexual harassment of the adult learner. For the adult learner and teacher, however, these elements occur within organizational structures which mirror and reproduce the patriarchal society. The cultural interpretations given to private and public spheres are intertwined with asymmetrical organizational activities which reinforce gender asymmetry.

Organizational structures.

Organizational structures foster asymmetrical relationships of power, control and authority through their administrative and academic practices. These organizational structures provide asymmetrical relationships of power. Administrative decisions are made along lines which indicate the importance of vertical stratification and hierarchical power. As well, it is clear that men make most of those decisions. They dominate the organizational world, its ownership and control, its positions of status and authority and its cultural values (Burrell & Hearn, 1989). Most men thus have authority and opportunities to use it which most women do not.

Academic processes also reflect this asymmetry. Curricula and discourses, based within patriarchal patterns of non-participatory, non-democratic and hierarchical power, emphasize the place of male knowledge and ways of knowing over those of women (Lewis & Simon, 1986). Together administrative and academic processes within educational organizations create an asymmetry which ensures that the adult teacher negotiates from a position of more power and the adult learner from a position of less.

This means that sexual relationships within such structures are *always* open to prosecutions as sexual harassment and are *never* truly consensual.

It is important to note that women are not necessarily passive victims to these three inter-related expressions of power. Indeed, in the past some of women's responses to harassment have been notable for their creativity. For example, women at the University of British Columbia created a ledger of the names and departmental affiliations of campus harassers in the women's washroom in the main library. Increasingly, these kinds of covert, individualized responses to sexual harassment may be becoming outdated as explicit institutional and legal strategies counter sexual harassment. To the extent that these new strategies ensure effective policies and procedures for prosecution they will encourage women to express their resistance and seek redress in open forums.

Summary

It should be clear that a theoretical approach to power relations, such as that used in the sexual harassment literature, gives us a potentially rich tool with which to study adult learner/teacher relationships in general and female learner/male teacher relationships in particular. First, it suggests that there are negative elements within an adult learner/teacher relationship which are so culturally based that they are embedded in every adult learner/teacher relationship within that culture. Those culturally accepted behaviours and norms may in fact play a major role in oppressing the adult learner, particularly if that learner is a woman.

This re-view of the learner/teacher relationship bears little resemblance to its representation in the adult education literature. In that literature, positive links are made between the adult learner/teacher relationship and the professional, personal and intellectual development of the learner.

Second, a theoretical examination of sexual harassment demonstrates that destructive elements are possible, perhaps inevitable, in relationships within asymmetrically organized educational organizations. This literature thus critiques the notion of harmonious and spirited relationships presumed in much of the adult learner/teacher literature. It treats as problematic, rather than ignores, the complexities of female learner/male teacher relationships within the context of asymmetrical power relations.

Implications for Theory, Research and Practice

The above critique has attempted to demonstrate that the adult learner/teacher relationship is not likely to be as positive and gender neutral an interaction as it is portrayed by the adult education literature. This critique has implications for theory, research and practice in the field of adult education.

In relation to theorizing, this critique suggests several new directions. First, it should be clear to the reader that the discussion of the learner/teacher relationship would be well informed by specific theories such as the feminist theories. Although this study has hinted at the richness of those theories, much in-depth work which focuses specifically and exclusively on gender in relation to learner/teacher interactions

remains to be done. Such work could examine the relationship in terms of issues such as patriarchy, misogyny and marginality. It could detail the ways in which women learners form unique partnerships in the learner/teacher relationship. It could explore the limitations and potentials of learner/teacher relationships in new ways and thus enrich the development of relevant models and theories in this area.

Second, and similarly, theorists who address the specific experiences of class, colour, ethnicity and sexual orientation would provide new insights into the interactions. Bourdieu (1988), for example, has detailed the theoretical and empirical complexity of learner/teacher relationships cross cut by class within higher education institutions. His work thus provides a useful starting place for theorizing the adult learner/teacher relationship in terms of class concerns. The relationship could be explored and developed at the theoretical level by locating it within a socio-cultural milieu. Such a study could situate the norms and values which guide the learner/teacher interaction within a wider context. The interaction could be re-viewed as a responsive activity which is played out between individuals as they respond to institutional, economic, political and societal structures. The link between macro and micro forces could be explored.

Finally, it is clear that the learner/teacher relationship could be more fully theorized by incorporating negative perspectives on the interaction. An exploration of the destructive elements of the relationship could restructure our understandings of the positive elements of the relationship. These perspectives could be explored by a sociological analysis of issues of power, authority and control, cross-cut by concerns for gender, class, colour, ethnicity and sexual orientation. This analysis would more accurately represent the complexity of the relationship.

This study also suggests new directions for research. First, it seems likely that women learners in adult and continuing education settings experience sexual harassment. Indeed, given the prevalence and intensity of sexual harassment in higher education settings, it would be astonishing if sexual harassment did not occur within adult and continuing education settings. It would be easy to assume that learners in those settings experience less sexual harassment than in higher education settings where power differentials are more clearly articulated. This would be congruent with the dominant view of the positive processes of the adult learner/teacher relationship. The point for researchers is, however, that we do not know if this is so. Nor do we know if there are some settings in which such negative interactions are most likely to occur. We have no data about harassment in residential, school-based, university continuing education, workers' education, staff development and training or community development locations. Until such data are collected, our expectations for the female learner/male teacher relationship are based on naive assumptions about the sanctity of adult and continuing education settings.

It is also evident that the field of adult education has dismissed and ignored negative kinds of experiences and their consequences when researching the general adult learner/teacher relationship. At both the theoretical and empirical levels, the negative processes and outcomes have not been explored. In the process, the field has created a tradition which demeans the experience of many learners. As long as the

nature and intensity of those negative experiences remain invisible, our understanding of the relationship is restricted.

Finally, this study suggests new practices. Clearly, adult educators must acknowledge the power differentials between ourselves and learners. The dominant view that adult and continuing education is based in processes of harmonious partnerships must be more thoroughly problematized and examined. We must take the responsibility for monitoring our own and our peer's behaviour within learner/teacher relationships. We must act collectively to change individuals' behaviours, and organizational and societal structures in order to remediate negative elements within learner/teacher relationships.

The new directions for research, theory and practice noted above challenge the field of adult education at a very fundamental level. They question our longstanding acceptance of the tenets of andragogy. The notion that the learner is in a gender neutral partnership with the teacher corresponds with the tenet that adults have a reservoir of knowledge which is a resource in the harmonious learning situation. Similarly, the view of the learner as an active, involved, industrious participant fits with the premise that adults move toward self-direction in the learning situation. Since these views dovetail neatly into the pedagogy-andragogy debate (see Beder & Darkenwald, 1982; Gorham, 1985; Rosenblum & Darkenwald, 1983; Yonge, 1985), they help to substantiate the argument that the education of adults is somehow different to the education of children. They support the unique nature of adult education as a field of study and research. A serious critique and examination of these issues thus poses a threat to the field. It is an interesting dilemma for us.

Conclusion

This article argued that the field's traditional view of the adult learner/teacher relationship as a positive interaction which is gender neutral is overly simplistic. It suggested that the view currently held may demean the experiences of many adult learners and in particular, women learners. This possibility requires that we extend the current research, theorizing and practice in new directions. We must go beyond acknowledging the complexities of the relationship and explore in-depth its dark side. At both the empirical and theoretical levels, such investigations may force the rethinking of some dearly held traditions. This is both a challenge and an opportunity for the future of the field.

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