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Gender Mainstreaming, Women, and Politics:
A Case for Feminist Adult Education

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GENDER MAINSTREAMING, WOMEN, AND POLITICS: A CASE FOR FEMINIST ADULT EDUCATION

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Abstract

Gender mainstreaming emerged in the 1990s to challenge normative social and political structures and practices by integrating gender into all levels of thinking and decision making. Training is central to processes of gender mainstreaming because it aims to provide the knowledge, awareness, resources, and skills needed to transform hegemonic discourses and empower women to participate more fully in leadership and governance roles. In this article I apply discourses of gender mainstreaming and training to a study of the non-formal education and informal learning of women politicians and aspiring politicians in British Columbia. Findings show current non-partisan, integrative training processes have value for women as good, liberal adult education and training. However, learning and training both frequently consciously and unconsciously essentialize and re-enforce the status quo, which makes them inadequate to reach the transformative aspirations of gender mainstreaming. Required are practices based in the principles of feminist adult education that challenge the limitations of discourses of equality and meritocracy, render visible biases and stereotyping, destabilize normative political insider identities, and tap into the radical activism so many women bring to the political table.

Résumé

Le gender mainstreaming, *né dans les années 1990, remet en question les structures et les pratiques normatives d'ordre social et politique par l'intégration de la dimension de genre dans tous les niveaux de la réflexion et de la prise de décision. La formation joue un rôle essentiel dans le processus du* gender mainstreaming, *car elle vise à fournir les connaissances, la conscience, les ressources et le savoir-faire nécessaires pour transformer les discours hégémoniques et pour permettre aux femmes de mieux assumer les rôles de leadership et d'autorité. Dans cet article, j'applique les discours du gender mainstreaming et ceux de la formation à une étude de l'éducation non-formelle et de l'apprentissage informel des politiciennes et des politiciennes potentielles en Colombie-Britannique. Les résultats des recherches montrent que le processus de la*

> *formation intégrative impartiale en cours sert aux femmes d'une forme d'éducation et de formation libérale bénéfique. Cependant, de manière consciente ou inconsciente, l'apprentissage et la formation ont souvent tendance à essentialiser et à renforcer le statu quo, ce qui les empêche d'atteindre les aspirations transformatrices du gender mainstreaming. Il faut des pratiques fondées sur les principes de l'éducation féministe des adultes qui visent à remettre en cause les limites des discours d'égalité et de méritocratie, à rendre visibles les préjugés et les stéréotypes, à déstabiliser les identités normatives des initiés politiques et à mobiliser l'activisme radical que tant de femmes apportent à la table politique.*

Introduction

In *The Future of Feminism*, Sylvia Walby (2011) drew attention to the concept of gender mainstreaming, a transformative process that "involves the reinvention, restructuring and re-branding of key aspects of feminism in the contemporary era" (p. 80). Formally adopted at the United Nations (UN's) Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, gender mainstreaming was positioned as a challenge to normative social structures and practices by integrating gender perspectives—both male and female—into all levels and facets of thinking, policy making, governance, and decision making. However, Walby also recognized that the concept and practice of gender mainstreaming are now contested, as feminists call into question its ability to disrupt current maps of knowledge and power and bring about the egalitarian and inclusive society many believe "is essential for the future of humanity" (Batliwala, 2013, p. xv).

In this article, I stretch and bend the discourse of gender mainstreaming by applying it to the findings of a previous study of two non-formal training programs and the informal learning of women municipal politicians in British Columbia. Education, training, and learning are important to gender mainstreaming because they aim to provide the knowledge, awareness, and skills needed to transform gendered discourses and practices and to empower women to participate more fully in leadership and governance roles in the mainstream (e.g., Benjamin & Walters, 1994; Pant & Farrell, 2007). Yet despite gender mainstreaming's emphasis on leadership and governance, the formal political sphere receives little attention, even though the political sphere is extremely important as a space where decisions have major consequences for the well-being of all citizens, particularly women. According to the UN, the minimum proportion of women required for government to reflect women's concerns is 30%. The Women in Local Government website (Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2015) notes that

> women represent 16 per cent of mayors and 26 per cent of councillors in Canada, for an average of 24 per cent. In absolute terms, of 24,113 elected officials, 5,826 are women. Based on current statistics, Canada would need 1,408 more women in elected office today to reach the 30 per cent target. That means increasing the number of women in municipal government by roughly 100 every year for the next 14 years. (p. 1)

Erickson's (1997) arguments, however, remind us that to change Canada's politics may not be simply a matter of the number of elected women. A case in point is one of the

first acts performed by the newly elected majority Conservative (Tory) government in 2011. This government cut the funding to Status of Women Canada significantly, which forced the closure of grassroots agencies across the country. The discontinuation of these voices may have contributed to what Michaëlle Jean, Canada's former Governor General, recently characterized as a "culture of rape," an unprecedented backlash against women and feminism across this country, visible in actions such as the offensive and hateful social media messages posted by a group of male Dalhousie dentistry students about their female peers. Yet these same Tories boast one of the highest numbers of women representatives in their party, begging the questions: Where were these women when the Status of Women decision was taken, and where are they now in the current escalation of misogyny, sexism, and chauvinism?

My aim in this article is to illustrate what the non-formal training and the informal learning of women who have taken up, or want to take up, formal political life in British Columbia tell us about the future of feminism in the hands of the gender-mainstreaming practice. How is this idea being implemented? How does it understand and work toward equality, transformation, gender, and political change? I respond to these questions by applying a gender-mainstreaming lens to the data from a study I undertook with a colleague from 2007 to 2010 of women municipal politicians in British Columbia (Clover & McGregor, 2010, 2011). Applying a gender-mainstreaming lens to that data shows these current non-partisan, gender-neutral, integrative political non-formal training processes have great instrumental value to women and aim for the greater political good, understood as cohesion, sameness, and equal procurement of knowledge and skills. But current political education is inadequate in terms of the empowering and transformative aspirations of gender mainstreaming. The messages that educational processes send, both consciously and unconsciously, frequently re-enforce the status quo, not least through narrow and problematic constructions of what constitutes equality and what characteristics of political identity are valued. I argue that a stronger feminist framework is required, along with new, critical practices based on the principles of feminist adult education that can challenge the limitations of discourses of equality and meritocracy, render visible biases and stereotyping, destabilize normative political insider identities, and tap into the activist imaginations so many women bring to the political table.

Gender Mainstreaming

Although conceived at the UN's Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985, gender mainstreaming was fully embraced and adopted by governments, civil society, and non-governmental organizations at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 as a preferred strategy to advance equality between women and men. In part, this discourse emerged "from a discontent with feminist strategies that aimed for women's equality with men while holding in place existing gendered structures and in part from a realization that many aspects of the patriarchal state remained immune to feminist critique" (Prügl, 2009, p. 175). Gender mainstreaming was heralded as a critical approach to "making visible the gendered nature of assumptions, processes and outcomes" and to integrating gender into all policies and practices (Walby, 2011, p. 80). Equally important, and what made it more far-reaching than feminism and, I would argue, palatable for governments and intergovernmental agencies such as the UN, was that it was not confined to women, but

included men, as this definition by the Economic and Social Council of the UN indicates: "Making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of politics and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated" (in True, 2008, p. 92).

The aim of this more inclusive gendered approach was to stop the endless tinkering around the edges of inequality—individual efforts that, although powerful, would not "overpower the empire" (Jain, 2004, p. 64)—and create new institutions free from the ideologies that construct or define, and are defined by, gender relations (Prügl, 2009). Further, this richer, more transformative, revolutionary, visionary, and holistic strategy could shift gendered power relations by enlarging, for example, the local spaces women have occupied to encompass the formal political sphere and thereby change the deep structural and systemic gendered inequalities perpetuated by the state (Jain, 2004; van Eerdewijk & Davids, 2013). In other words, gender mainstreaming was seen as a panacea, a "mythical beast invested with powers to effect social change, and the underlying and implicit assumptions (and models) of institutional and social change associated with that" (Subrahmanian, 2004, p. 92). However, early into the twenty-first century, disillusionment set in with the lack of change, rekindling processes of disaggregation in terms of what gender mainstreaming actually entailed and where the problems lay.

One trend of critique pertinent to this study is what some feminists see as the capacity of gender mainstreaming to neutralize and domesticate. Mukhopadhyay (2013) unpacked how demands for gender knowledge sparked by gender mainstreaming—packaged resources and training models are examples, and I shall return to these—resulted in the manufacturing of acceptable and standardized messages that ultimately parted company with the actual daily lived experiences of women. Further, generic and cohering messages and concepts such as "new partnerships between women and men," "democracy," "opportunity," and "merit" began systematically to undermine and discredit divisive feminist discourses of patriarchy, which in turn inhibited collaborations between feminist organizations and those who had been mainstreamed (Meier & Lombardo, 2013). In essence, the language and practice of gender mainstreaming began to insulate those within the power stream of the mainstream from those on the outside—the women and groups calling for a change in relations of power (e.g., Daly, 2005; Stratigati, 2005).

Building on this are critiques of the mainstream itself. Every society defines and shapes its own normality—the mainstream—and its own abnormality—the outside or alternative—according to dominant narratives and seeks either to make people comply or exclude them if they do not. Underestimated in gender-mainstreaming debates were the entrenched rationales and regimes in governance and administration—what Mukhopadhyay (2013) called "governmentalities." These conscious and unconscious mechanisms of power and disciplinary and normalization tactics ensure that the institutionalization of anything results in homogeneity, cohesion, and acceptance. In other words, mainstream institutions become mainstream because they share common if unwritten dominant norms and assumptions that produce and reinforce certain ideologies, understandings, and inequalities (Mukhopadhyay, 2013; Prügl, 2009). Although feminists recognize the limitations of being on the outside, many question entering mainstream spaces—the risk of maintaining the status quo is immense—and argue for legislation that raises the number of women in power to a critical mass (Dhanda, 2008; Pant & Farrell, 2007). However, Erickson's (1997) research

suggested that it is the ideological make-up of those in political power that matters most to social and/or electoral change, not sheer volume of women, and Batliwala (2013) reminded us that legislation is not enough.

This brings us to another trend in feminist critique of gender mainstreaming: the concept of equality. Rees (1998) reminded us that gender equality means the *equal* participation of both men and women "in all spheres . . . of public life" (p. 7). Yet feminists have long noted androcentric biases in these spheres that dichotomize and privilege. One example is the over-valuing of rationality, a characteristic attributed to men, over passion and emotion— the clearly irrational—characteristics of women and community organizations. Operating within an equal-opportunity framework has a tendency to treat "masculine structures as the norm" (True, 2008, p. 92), and equality becomes women being and acting like men (Walby, 2011). Woven into these equality debates are issues of difference and sameness. Theoretically, the notion of a uniformed category of "woman" was abandoned in gender mainstreaming as "problematically essentialising and homogenising" (Walby, 2011, p. 91). But how present and diverse forms of identity are to be taken up and dealt with is what Walby (2011) saw as contested. Some feminists have raised concerns that attention to other inequalities and identities "may dilute the effort spent on gender mainstreaming . . . if there is a loss of focus . . . if there is competition over the priority accorded to different forms of inequalities" (p. 90). Others caution, however, that ignoring difference in favour of sameness will ultimately weaken the transformative potential of gender mainstreaming by oversimplifying realities and experiences of women and thereby silencing vital discussions that render visible unequal power relations among and within groups (Benjamin & Walters, 1994; Pant & Farrell, 2007).

Gender Training

Viewed as an essential element to operationalize gender mainstreaming, gender training is defined as a practice aimed at unearthing deeply entrenched attitudes and stereotypes about gender differences by exploring how they are enacted through normative daily practices (e.g., Lyle-Gonga, 2013). Some studies illustrate the effectiveness of training in terms of sensitization, consciousness, empowerment, and a sharpening of more holistic strategies for transformation and effective organizing (Cornwall & Coelho, 2006; Pant & Farrell, 2007). However, feminist adult educators such as Benjamin and Walters (1994) challenged certain common understandings. One is the assumption that trainers are empowered with full comprehension of the subversive nature of gendered interests and the socio-cultural discourses and narratives surrounding "the unequal power relations they are attempting to change" (p. 87). Studies suggest, however, that many trainers are chosen for their situational expertise and are therefore often ill-equipped to deal with problematic pervasive, often subversive narratives of gender (e.g., Lyle-Gonga). A second common understanding, according to Lyle-Gonga, is about what constitutes empowerment. Many trainers understand power as "a possession which can be given, controlled, [or] held" (p. 87), and this one-dimensional approach fails to see how power operates at multiple levels both within society as well as in the workshop or training space. A third challenge is what counts as knowledge. There is an overemphasis on the provision of information as the means toward empowerment and equalization (e.g., Matlanyane Sexwale, 1994). Cornwall and Coelho (2006) and Mathur and Rajan (1997) linked this back to the "acceptable messages" noted

above. They saw as problematic this rise of techno-rationality, of standardized, prescribed approaches assumed to be applicable to any situation or transferable to any context. We know as adult educators that knowledge is always shaped within existing relations of power, and an overreliance on standardized methods decontextualizes and depoliticizes training, making it difficult to meet the transformative and empowering potential promised by gender mainstreaming or to create the change agents needed to transform embedded androcentric institutional and social practice (e.g., Manicom & Walters, 2013).

With these gender-mainstreaming and training hopes and critiques in mind, I turn to our study of the non-formal training and informal learning of over 100 women politicians and aspiring politicians in British Columbia. In particular, I explore the knowledge and skills understood to be required, the complexities and challenges of visions and practices of equality, and issues of sameness, merit, bias, essentialism, and the marginalization of voices, passion, and activism.

Research Design

Before I move to how I analyzed the data for this particular paper, it is important to understand the previous study. From 2007 to 2010, my colleague Catherine McGregor and I undertook a feminist study of the education and learning of 133 women politicians in British Columbia—primarily municipal politicians, because this is a non-partisan grouping and is the area in which the most women in politics are found, as noted in the Introduction. The study consisted of two sites. The first was a yearly women-only school that aims to provide women with the skills and knowledge they require to run for political office. We participated in two of these schools and interviewed face-to-face or by telephone 21 women participants and two trainers. We also sent a survey to women who had taken part in the school since 2005. A total of 69 women responded to the survey, and we conducted follow-up interviews with 10 from this group who indicated they would be available for an interview. An article on this aspect of the study was published in 2010 (Clover & McGregor, 2010). A second site of study was an academy that provides training for newly elected municipal politicians, both male and female. We took part in the academy and interviewed 18 women. We also interviewed four trainers, two from each educational process, and conducted individual interviews and two focus groups with 25 elected politicians to talk about how they had learned to be politicians and about any training they had received. The findings were published in 2011 and 2012 (Clover & McGregor, 2011, 2012).

For this article, I took those findings and applied key ideas from gender mainstreaming, developing six overarching questions: How is equality understood, framed, or taught? What knowledge(s) and skills are seen to be important and empowering? What identities are required for success (and what is success)? Does education transform or does it neutralize and domesticate? What forms of consciousness does the training, and women's informal political learning, promote and what are the implications for gender and political change in British Columbia? How are the activist skills of women being used in their political work? With the ideas from gender mainstreaming outlined above and these questions in mind, I return to the data.

Are We Equal Now? Practical Knowledge

"The guy with the most information wins; the one who knows the procedures rules. That is not going away anytime soon." With this comment, Lynette set the stage for the type of knowledge and learning seen by 90% of study participants to be the most relevant to being or becoming a successful politician. Participants spoke of spending many hours reading the bylaws, perusing procedural manuals and processes, and, in general, as Carolyn articulated, "cramming in as much information and as many facts" as possible. The value of this practical, pragmatic, or instrumental knowledge and its power to "demystify politics" and make things equal were reflected in the school and the academy in sessions with titles like the "ABCs of Government." Jane, a past mayor and now a trainer, described the underlying education philosophy like this:

> The key goals are real foundational learning—the basics, the law, the procedures, how to function in the meeting, Robert's Rules of Order. We want to communicate information. Sometimes politicians want to talk and talk about these. But really, you cannot generate "knowledge" about these or charters, you need to absorb [them].

Throughout the data, in a variety of ways, fact-based education was understood as something that would give women the power through knowledge they would need to be equal to men in the political process. On one hand, the rules and regulations were seen as politically neutral values that could be unquestionably absorbed. None of the sessions we attended, nor any that the interviewees could remember, invited women (or men, in the academy) to question the normative order of political rules and laws. On the other hand, the school, which as noted focused solely on women, positioned the teaching of the minutiae of government as critical to building women's confidence because, as Jill noted, "if you don't know the rules you cannot feel confident to speak, and if you don't speak out, well, you are not seen as confident." And it was true that almost all interviewees in varying ways expressed doubts about their abilities—a leitmotif in the lives of women, as feminist adult educators continue to remind us (e.g., Manicom & Walters, 2013). Therefore, equipping them with information to build their self-assurance is valid for their empowerment. However, we need to be cautious of narratives of confidence building that are synonymous with equality, which is synonymous with sameness—in this case, the confidence to aspire to act like men, as was often the case. For example, the school provided what Maria described as "effective assertiveness training." In the name of equality, sessions taught women how to stand, dress, and act "to give us the same power and authority our male counterparts have. They communicate in assertive ways that get them taken seriously. I need to learn to do that" (Maria). Even more problematic, the session included techniques to control what the motivational speaker—one of the few trainers who was not a politician—called "unseemly passionate outbursts of female hysteria" as she mimicked a recent emotional incident by a woman politician, calling for "dignity, professionalism, and calm." These are the characteristics in political leadership discourse associated with men. We watched as these characteristics were reinforced through both humour and careful, considered instruction and how the women responded. Findings of the survey and our follow-up interviews showed this was the most highly ranked activity due to its practical value and perceptions of it as a proper initiation into the club of politics.

The Art of Avoidance: Belonging and Cohesion

When probed as to whether anything was missing from the assertiveness session, two interviewees acknowledged that "learning to listen" would have been helpful. Nancy, for example, prioritized listening as a means to "empower my constituents [rather than] just myself . . . and showed you are really taking them seriously." Although this synchronizes with feminist adult education and training approaches that advocate listening (e.g., Butterwick & Selman, 2000), we witnessed a troubling opposite strategy during the academy.

A panel presentation by past and serving mayors—all male—was devoted to sharing strategies to avoid what was characterized as a "needy" and "grasping" public. The derogatory use of the term "special interest group" positioned community groups as self-serving, and newly elected politicians were regaled with anecdotes that were, again, clearly intended to be (and that many in the room seemed to have found) humorous of confrontations and strategies of avoidance, such as refusing to allow councillors to have e-mail addresses because "it would mean the public could easily contact you" (Hilda). Although there are many things about this that are appalling in terms of how politicians think about the public as well as the credibility of this practice of training, it problematically flies in the face of the fact that the majority of the women came to formal politics as activists. I will return to this shortly, but for now, the training was in fact insulating the women from their activist past as outsiders and initiating them into their new club of allegiance—the mainstream of politics where everyone is a politician first. And feeling like and being a full-fledged member of this club is important, as this comment by Jane illustrates:

> I came to know when I was elected (as mayor) that [male] mayors would meet for lunch, and they had talked about whether or not they should invite me. To their credit, I did get asked to lunch, and it was fascinating to become part of the club. They were cautious at first, but by the end of the three years, they were talking about the waitresses' bottoms and it was like I did not exist. So I guess I am one of the boys now!

We can condemn Jane for choosing to accept this sexism in favour of fitting into the club, but we must be mindful of the lack of choice involved here and what exclusion and marginalization would mean in terms of her political capital and ability to act or manoeuvre within the system.

The Art of Separation

If gender mainstreaming is about action, then where is the women's activist nature? Without exception, the women we interviewed and surveyed had come to politics as activists, and comments such as this one from Elena were commonplace and reflective of the data:

> I have an activist background that grew from the community issues I was involved in. I started right with my neighbourhood. The issues were the environment, housing, and women—those were the three vectors that drew me into politics . . . I was always seeing and speaking with women I felt had something to say but . . . they were not being heard.

This means, in stark contrast to the panel I just discussed above, that listening and connecting to constituents and actually giving them a voice on the inside were important to the women,

and in fact were why they had come to politics in the first place. While we sensed deep pride in their activism skills and values, there were also numerous suggestions, best reflected in this comment by Hilda, that "activism was not enough. I have been on the outside shouting for change. But nothing will change if you do not decide to do the dirty work, and by that I mean to get into the political arena where the power is." The women's movement and women's issues were often mentioned as past platforms of struggle. The fundamental belief, therefore, was that being inside mainstream politics would have a much greater impact on the lives of women. And yet there was a notable schism between the women's past activism and the present. Not once in either the school or the academy, although it would be less expected in the latter, were activist skills ever acknowledged, leading Mary, for example, to suggest that "these skills must be irrelevant to politics." Moreover, time and again in interviews, the women's body language of fists in the air or words such as "taking them on" would disappear into bowed heads and platitudes about servitude when we switched our questioning from the world of activism to the world of "how you learn to play the [political] game" (Winona). And, of course, the game is fixed in favour of men and tradition, bringing us to questions of bias and meritocracy.

Bias and Meritocracy

When we asked Jane if there were any provisions in the academy for women politicians as a separate group, she noted, "We have never focused on [women] . . . I would have a level of discomfort at doing that . . . I would probably not initiate that. I think it would cause tension and a separation between the women and men politicians." Benjamin and Walters (1994) reminded us how gendering—treating women differently in this case—can be problematic because it can disrupt the complex systems women have created to enable them to survive and belong, as noted above. Yet despite a fairly equal number of male and female participants at the academy, men overwhelmingly dominated the discussions in both the large and small groups and comfortably took the stage as experts. When we mentioned this in our later interviews, it had gone totally unnoticed by the women participants and the trainers.

A different illustration of bias emerged when we asked the interviewees about positive discrimination measures. The majority of the women interviewed had, to differing degrees, an awareness of gender bias in politics. Many shared stories about subtle and not-so-subtle forms of stereotyping, harassment, and marginalization they had experienced within what interviewee Mandakani defined as "the toxic, hierarchical, male underground culture [of politics]." When we asked what they had learned about how to deal with the problem, Nancy voiced the most consistent advice: "People say just to ignore it, no one calls him on [his sexually inappropriate groping], and it's been going on for 30 years." Ophelia, a trainer, talked about giving women the skills "to manoeuvre in this sexist world." And yet the data reflected moments when interviewees seemed to recognize that an increase in the number of women in politics would transform the atmosphere, and this was of course the presumption behind the school. But when we discussed the implementation of legislated quotas or reservation systems adopted in countries such as Norway and India (e.g., Dhanda, 2008; Pant & Farrell, 2007), the majority of the 133 participants shunned these positive discrimination measures.

Sheila, for example, emphatically argued, "I don't agree with quotas. You should elect the best person for the job." Hanna wrote on the survey, "I would *hate* to be favoured just because

I am a woman. I want to be seen for my abilities." Wanting to be chosen for one's capacities is understandable and fair, and providing equal skills and knowledge, as noted above, is seen as key in the school and the academy. But if merit levels the playing field, why did so many participants in this study share stories of being passed over when they clearly had the same credentials, experience, and knowledge of their male counterparts? Why did so many speak of needing to actually know more, hence the hours of cramming noted above? Why did they tell us about conversations ceasing when they entered a room, decisions taken as a group being ignored in favour of "maverick actions," and their ideas ignored until, for example, "he re-stated what I had said and then of course everyone thought it was a great idea" (Elena)? This is what feminists call "political capital," the underlying although often hidden androcentric power that gives men the upper hand in a world, and within rules, of their own creation (e.g., Dhanda, 2008; Meier & Lombardo, 2013).

Differentiated Universalisms

Some participants and trainers recognized that women needed a space of their own and that partnership building was important. Jane, for example, suggested the academy create

> a partnership with the school . . . When I was talking to a mayor this week, I thought it would be really great to create a network of the female mayors—for the support, but it could also be like a training time, an information-sharing time of experiences and what should/could be done about the problems we all face.

At first blush, this suggestion seemed like an excellent idea. True (2008) reminded us that "one of the most effective ways feminists have learnt to prevent the marginalisation of women's concerns and gender issues is to build alliances between insiders . . . and outsiders" (p. 99). However, the school illustrates common biases and notions of equality that may not be that helpful.

For example, like the academy, the school prides itself on being a non-partisan, integrating space, although it encourages women to enter mainstream politics in whatever party or at whatever level. The trainers, although some identified in interviews as feminists, therefore avoid applying a feminist framework so as not to "upset women who did not share those types of views or values" (Pat). And, in fact, interviewees such as Lorna emphatically stated, "I would refuse to be a part of any group who thinks it [patriarchy] is the problem." Most interviewees in some way distanced themselves from feminism, reiterating the tired clichés that reduce it to a parody of "women who hate men" (Belinda). Young (2000) importantly reminded us that "not all women are feminists and many women involved in . . . politics . . . object to the idea that their political involvement is best understood or related to feminist efforts" (p. 24). But these abysmal misunderstandings should not go unchallenged, and I return to this in my final discussion.

The school did address women's issues, albeit more often in ways that Walby (2011) might describe as essentialist and universalist. The training-for-equality framework was punctuated with instances aimed to differentiate women from men or cohere women as women. We noted how often children were used as common ground to connect the women participants. Key assumptions were that all women would have children and, therefore, their top concerns would be child care and schooling. One trainer characterized these as

"appealing to the universal sense of motherhood we all share" (emphasis added). Feminist adult educators such as Gouthro (2005) would support this type of discourse, arguing the need to help women take back motherhood and realize a renewed sense of the power in the role of compassionate caregiver. And the school did often position women's caregiving as their political capital. But they did so without the critical lens Gouthro brought to uncover how care discourses can inadvertently maintain women's subjugation and domestication. In addition, the school re-enforced heteronormative cultural trends in its assumptions that all the women in the room would be married to men. These stereotypical obfuscations were so successful that, when questioned, none of the participants noticed their application, and the trainers seemed equally impervious.

Changing the Mood Music: Toward Feminism and Feminist Adult Education

As feminists, we understand that "gendered interests are socially constructed in complex ways rather than essentially related to simple conceptions" (Walby, 2011, p. 100). As such, Walby suggested we think about how success in terms of gender mainstreaming might be defined. Although I have painted a somewhat bleak picture, let me be clear that the training and learning of women and politics in British Columbia are not merely stories of failure. Canada is better off having the school; its efforts to raise the number of women in politics are very important, as there are no other spaces that do this and, as noted above, we need women in power. The academy is equally an important space for women to learn about the complex world of politics they have chosen. Moreover, there are a number of reasons we can see these two educational spaces as offering good, liberal women's adult education and gender-mainstream training. The school and the academy use experiential approaches, and large- and small-group discussion forums allow opportunities to ask questions in a world "where asking questions is a sign of weakness" (Jill). Both pedagogical institutions provide exposure to the insights of long-serving expert politicians, use humour, share stories, and demystify the political process. Both employ a framework of equality and integration, a belief in the equal participation of women in the project called politics. They support the values of meritocracy and provide the pragmatic, useable information as power within the system. In addition, they avoid dualisms and tensions and work toward cohesion and a sense of sameness and belonging.

But this is not what Walby (2011) envisioned as "the future of feminism"; it is not the promise of gender mainstreaming. Its pedagogical potential to maintain the status quo is, as I noted above, great. The results of the survey of women who had taken part in the school since 2005 in fact showed that only one had actually decided to seek a nomination. I recognize that not all women participants responded to the survey and that training/education is not entirely responsible for either their decisions or Canada's political and gender deficiencies. But training is positioned as part of the solution to gender mainstreaming (Benjamin & Walters, 1994; True, 2008); therefore, it must be held accountable for the messages it sends and its failings, and it is to these I now turn.

As it stands, the primary messages the women politicians and aspiring politicians—and the men in the case of the academy—are receiving is that equality means learning and being taught to be and act like men, that mechanisms of politics are essentially neutral and unbiased, that practical information democratizes knowledge and equalizes power, that merit is equivalent to equal opportunity, that uncomfortable behaviours and power-over

situations should be ignored or managed, that essentialism and impartiality build group identity, and, by extension, that the public are the enemy and activist skills have no place in the formal political arena. This is not the promise of gender mainstreaming, but rather, a reflection of its critiques.

Training is, consciously and unconsciously, a conduit of Mukhopadhyay's (2013) governmentalities, mechanisms of power that homogenize and domesticate for cohesion at the expense of difference. They seem to aim to create a world of experts who lack the critical consciousness required to see beyond stereotypes and a discourse of what True (2008) called "equal rights and equal opportunity . . . that treat masculine structures as the norm and represent women's interests through essentialist framings, if at all" (p. 92). The pedagogical processes fail to see gendered power differentials within and often beyond the workshop space, a critique Lyle-Gonga (2013) made about gender-mainstreaming training. The training is more often about assimilation and integration and not the agenda setting and transformation called for by Walby (2011). It is a world where politics is seen as a game—a game in which women are taught the rules but not empowered to "believe they have any power to change the rules . . . [and therefore] they can only hope to be successful players" (Rinehart, 2002, p. 27). But they themselves often admit they are rather unsuccessful players in the game of politics because they lack political capital in a biased system of naturalized androcentrism that for the most part remains invisible.

It does not have to be like this, although the alternatives will not happen by accident. To my mind, the alternative for the future is a return to feminism, because as Adeleye-Fayemi (2004) reminded us, "gender can be accommodated and tolerated by the status quo. Feminism challenges the status quo" (p. 112). It is feminism that has done what gender mainstreaming, as manifest in our study, cannot seem to do. Feminists have unearthed and denounced standard epistemological assumptions about governance as inherently masculinist and have advanced an alternative vision that "redefines power as 'mutual enablement' rather than domination, and offers normative values of cooperation, care giving, and compromise in place of patriarchal norms of competition, exploitation, and self-aggrandizement" (Jones, 1996, p. 405). Returning to feminism would mean drawing on processes and principles of feminist adult education, because these operationalize feminism to both contest and exercise power.

We need to emphasize empowerment and not equality. By "empowerment," I do not imply either power in absolute terms or as all things to all people, something Batliwala (2013) reminded us that gender mainstreaming has become through its equality lens. Instead, I refer to how feminist adult educators such as Batliwala and Manicom and Walters (2013) defined it in clear, conceptual terms as learning to see beyond the ideological obfuscations that maintain the status quo and transform inequitable power relations. Power lies in and is exercised through knowing. Yet the practical political knowledge being taught to women is merely useful knowledge. What we need is what Thompson (1997) called "really useful knowledge" (p. 145). Really useful knowledge is knowledge of "the nature of their [women's] present condition and [how to] get out of it . . . the political knowledge which [can] be used to challenge the relations of oppression and inequality from which they suffer" (p. 145). This calls for a release of what Haiven and Khasnabish (2014) called "the radical imagination." The radical imagination

> is the ability to imagine the world, life and . . . institutions not as they are
> but as they might otherwise be. It is the courage and the intelligence to
> recognize the world can and should be changed . . . it is not just about
> dreaming of different futures. It's about bringing those possible futures
> "back" to work on the present, to inspire action and new forms of
> solidarity today. (p. 3)

This requires political pedagogical processes that respect and tap into women's knowledges and narratives (Manicom & Walters, 2012), in this case, the oppositional and counter-narratives—visions of a more just, healthy, and sustainable world for all—they brought to the training from their years as passionate activists, which the training discounted in many ways. Further, and to borrow from Jain (2004), we need training processes that connect women politicians to feminists and other voluntary organizations and networks in order to bring a "collective strength together to bear on society and the state" (p. 64). As it stands, politicians are being set apart with the authority to make decisions on others' behalf (Phillips, 1998). For Pant and Farrell (2007), the value of linking community with women politicians is to enable the latter "to work more confidently . . . and to deal with issues of women's empowerment . . . and generate unity amongst people" (pp. 130–131). These reconnections create a new culture of shared risk and responsibility for change that can pervade the political and public spheres and break down barriers between those on the inside with those on the outside. It would also bring a measure of passionate defiance back into a pedagogical world governed by pragmatism. This brings us to the issue of emotion and passion and the need to re-focus on a critical role for them in politics. As Mansbridge (1998) reminded us, "Emotions help tell us who we want to be. Good deliberation is not fostered by 'keeping emotion out of it'" (p. 151). Teaching the creative and racial uses of emotion, reigniting that fire of activism that would include the power and potential of listening, would be far more empowering to training than enunciation, calm, and rules.

Building on this, not all woman politicians need to identify as feminists, but I argue that they do need to be engaged in processes and conversations that challenge the negative myths and stereotypes of feminism "clinging like a leech in public consciousness, sucking away their ability to see beyond [them]" (Batliwala, 2013, p. 16). What needs to be made visible is how many take "for granted and [exercise] all the options and freedoms that exist for women only because feminism fought for and continues to battle for them every day, everywhere in the world" (Batliwala, p. 16). Further, Mansbridge (2005) found that the number of women in politics "improves substantive outcomes for women in every polity for which we have a measure" (p. 622.) This calls for conversations to re-position positive discrimination measures by troubling existing notions of bias and meritocracy, which characterize these measures as problematic and leave untouched their androcentric nature. But this also returns us to feminism, as its belief in justice for all matters the most to social and/or electoral change (Erickson, 1997).

The political sphere remains, for better or worse, the most powerful decision-making space in Canada, and we must put gender issues and women onto its map. But these women must carry the values that purposely and consciously address problematic gender relations and existing political norms and assumptions. I do not pretend this will be easy, but it is imperative if we want a future that is feminist.

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