

## **Not Str8: the Construction of Queer Male Identity in Sydney, Australia**

John P. Egan

University of New South Wales

**Abstract:** This study examines the experiences of 14 queer young men in Sydney Australia. Using ethnographic methods, their stories are analyzed to delineate how their experiences “coming out” and coming into a queer male identity represents the acquisition and meaning-making of genuinely local, transgressive knowledges.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Sydney has one of the world largest queer communities, with a great deal of political clout. The annual Lesbian & Gay Mardi Gras parade attracts several hundred thousand spectators each March, and has frequently been televised live on national television. Among numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are various HIV/AIDS and health-focused community based services, including programmes for queer youth as young as age 13—the breadth and depth of services available to queer youth across metropolitan Sydney is unlike any other in the world. And while nearly every major anglophone city in the world, including New York, London, Toronto, San Francisco and Vancouver have seen increases in HIV rates among young queer (gay, bisexual or queer-identified) men over the last five years, Sydney have remained stable (UNAIDS, 2002). For many queer men, “coming out” as queer coincides with becoming an adult. Thus the experiences of younger queer men fomenting queer selves reflects a particular construction of adulthood—one that is local, transgressive and revolutionary.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study examines the period of “becoming” queer not in terms of any individualized, wholly psychologically-informed process of identity development—though such approaches are of value. Rather becoming queer is viewed here as both the acquisition of knowledges, and the integration and meaning-making between different, often contradictory sets of knowledges. Thus my analysis is informed by post-structural theory, specifically Michel Foucault’s work on knowledge and power (1980), and sexuality (1990). Local knowledges are often “subjugated knowledges” (Foucault, 1980, p. 81), valued only by those excluded or marginalized by society—and often constructed in resistance to mainstream society’s biases. Coming to embrace one’s self as queer often results in encountering (seemingly) contradictory ideas about gender roles, family, safety, sex and community—along with a host of other topics. How do today’s young queer manage experience—and navigate—these differing knowledges? Foucault’s rejection of dichotomous (or linear) notions of how power is exerted in society allows for a complex analysis of how transgressive, often covert paths of resistance are formed by those excluded from mainstream privilege and authority, in this instance young queer men.

### **Literature review**

Research shows that young queer men—particularly under age 26—experience distinct vulnerabilities to HIV infection. Blake et al’s (2001) survey of high school age lesbian/gay/bisexual youth in the US found those whose schools offered safer sex education targeting queer issues were significantly less likely to engage in high risk activities like unprotected anal intercourse (UAI). Seal et al’s (2000) ethnography of 16-25 year-old gay and bisexual men found that HIV prevention programs didn’t reflect their lived experiences as queer youth. In both studies, 30 to 50% of the participants had recently engaged in UAI, despite knowledge of its high risk for HIV transmission and the efficacy of condoms to reduce this risk. Both studies also demonstrate how critical a context-specific understanding of younger

gay/bi/queer-identified men's lives is needed to foment effective and relevant prevention strategies.

### **Research Design**

This study will use ethnographic methods, including participant observation and semi-structured interviews (Bernard, 2000). Men aged 17-24, self-identifying as gay/bi/queer, who are a resident of metropolitan Sydney and who have entered the local gay Scene in the last 24 months were eligible to participate. Detailed field notes were kept during three months of observational field work on Oxford Street, the centre of (visible) queer Sydney Life.

On-the-street observations were conducted in late afternoon (after school hours), early evening and late evening/early morning hours, to identify patterns of visibility of queer youth. Observations were also done in gay bars and nightclubs, at queer youth drop-in and support programs (with both staff and participant approval), at beaches, on university campuses (UNSW, Sydney University and UTS) and in parks/reserves. Fourteen informants were enrolled in the study. Each participated in semi-structured 1-2 hour interviews, using a quasi-life history format. Areas covered included family life, schooling, becoming aware of sexuality issues, questioning one's own sexuality, seeking community, sex-love-dating, and knowledge about HIV/AIDS. Recruitment was through queer youth services and drop-ins, university queer groups and contacts made through an interview I gave to the *Sydney Star Observer* (Sydney's gay news weekly). Interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed verbatim (via a contracted transcriber who was not attached to the queer community) and analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) via Atlas/ti software. Consent procedures for UNSW were followed and ethics forms signed by each participant. Participants were given interview transcripts and encouraged to add to, amend or delete any of their responses.

### **Findings**

Participants ranged in age from 19 to 24. Two were early high school leavers, one has his HSC (grade 12) and worked full-time, 9 were undergraduate university students, and two were graduate students. Ethnic origins included Asian/Middle Eastern (5), Latino (2), and European (7). Two were refugee migrants to Australia as children, one migrated under a general migration scheme, and another had arrived in Australia 2 months prior on a student visa; the remaining nine are Australian born. Twelve had lived in greater Sydney for all or most (more than two-thirds) of their lives. Half still lived with their families of origin; two were in medium term crisis housing, and the rest lived independently, with flat mates in rental housing. Thirteen knew themselves to be HIV negative; one had avoided HIV testing (in fear of a positive result) at the time of interview; he subsequently tested HIV negative. One man identified as queer, with the rest describing themselves as gay. Three areas of knowledge emerged as critical to how they constructed themselves as queer young men: HIV/AIDS, K 12 school experiences, and "the Scene."

### **HIV/AIDS**

The archetype of young men—queer and not—as being foolhardy risk-takers is clearly refuted by these young men with respect to HIV knowledge and sexual risk-taking. Perhaps their positions as *queer young men* accounts for this. Every participant was cognizant of HIV/AIDS, and consistently practiced harm minimization by using condoms for anal intercourse with casual partners, eschewing anal sex, or only engaging in condomless anal intercourse with a committed monogamous partner, where both were known to be HIV negative.

Four participants acknowledged having ever not used condoms for anal intercourse. Two engaged in anal sex for the first time (their débuts) with another anal sex virgin with whom he

had an established friendship: thus, their risk for HIV infection was effectively zero. Another, Jim, “wasn’t really prepared to have [anal] sex with” a guy he met off a phone line, but found it difficult to assert this. Condom use had been discussed prior to meeting in-person, but “in the heat of the moment, things didn’t go to plan.” Afterwards Jim went on Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP), a month-long course of anti-retrovirals, to prevent HIV infection. While this encounter was high risk for HIV, he also took the experiences—particularly the discomforts of PEP and the months of waiting until his HIV tests came back definitively negative—and learned from them. For Jim “from that time on, things have altered slightly. I sort of have been giving myself more time for what I want now. I was too worried about what other people were doing, trying to please people.” Jim’s experiences have made him resolute about using condoms for anal intercourse. Finally one man frequently engaged in unprotected anal intercourse during beat (public park or washroom) sex in his early teens, including some sex trade work. He had avoided testing because of fears of a positive result. He has recently tested HIV negative, having found the courage to be tested after entering a relationship with someone. Like his peers in the cohort, he has “for a long time” always used condoms during anal intercourse regardless of the risks he took more than five years ago. Each of these 4 men found their early experiences with unprotected anal intercourse served to reinforce for them the need to use condoms during anal sex. None of the participants routinely engaged in high-risk sexual activity; in fact, most participants had rather idealized notions about sex and love. Half the sample viewed anal intercourse as an activity only to be done within a relationship, not during casual sex or “hook-ups.” For Terry, anal sex meant “you trust this guy and you’ve been with them for a long time,” not something that happened casually or routinely. For these men, anal sex was most frequently a powerful and meaning-laden activity

### **School**

All 14 men had schooling experiences that ranged from “fairly negative” (Bruce) to “feeling alone” (Eric) to “intimidation” (Tom), due to an oppressively homophobic environment. Antagonistic, bullying behaviour was common, ranging from epithets (name-calling), to destruction of property, to threats of—and actual—physical assault. Ten participants recounted experiences of harassment or violence directed towards them during their primary or secondary schooling. Two of these left school before graduating in year 12 (“getting your HSC” or Higher School Certificate, awarded after writing state-wide exams) significantly due to a lack of safety and the complicity of school staff in perpetuating the hostile environment. Participant believed it necessary to deny or hide their sexuality while in school, though four eventually came out to some extent while in school. For Al “there was a lot of bullying going along early on, and when I was in high school—I got picked on a lot.” “When I was younger,” Walter said “it wasn’t serious, just faggot or whatever.” But his experiences in early adolescence taught him to avoid being perceived as gay—even if there was a price to be paid for his secrecy: loneliness, isolation and depression, even though his parents were supportive of his sexuality. “It’s pretty discouraging,” he said “thinking you’ve reached 18 years without anyone knowing exactly who you are.” Jim, however, wasn’t able to avoid this perception—though he didn’t seriously consider himself as being even possibly queer until he finished his HSC. Jim was full-on bullied for the better part of two years of high school:

Mostly it was just verbal, all sorts of [name-]calling—fag, poof, whatever. But it tended to get more physical as it went on. So on the way home from school people would throw things. I’ve been sort of punched and knocked over, ambushed by guys. Out to have a bit

of fun and making me feel a bit weak. But yeah, I've sort of been through that, even at school sometimes.

Many bullied students seek support from family, particularly parents. But with queer youth, bringing these incidents their parents' attention can be treacherous. In Jim's case, his parents were supportive—to the point of advocating on his behalf with school officials and being willing to pursue matters with the police after a physical assault. But Jim's sense was that to do so would only cause things to escalate; he didn't want to "make the situation any more volatile than what it was." So he wouldn't go to the police. Eventually, as his tormentors either left school early or graduated ahead of him, the assaults stopped and the harassment also dropped precipitously. In high school, bashings—physical assaults—were a common experience for Karl. Guys would ask him "if I was [gay] or not. And the answer I used to give them was 'if I said I was, I'd still be bashed, but if I say I'm not I'll be bashed anyway.'" So it was a lose/lose situation for me in high school." When Karl eventually fought back, he was expelled for being violent. He started coming out to friends and family two weeks later.

### **The Scene**

The Scene"—the clubs and bars that are the transparent and visible representation of queer Sydney—runs along Oxford Street between Hyde Park and Taylor Square, and borders the inner city suburbs (neighbourhoods) of Darlinghurst and Surry Hills. The Scene, at least initially, was iconic for these men: more than half first became aware queer life via television images of the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras parade along Oxford Street. These men's experiences with Oxford Street have been complex and often quite powerful: all have sought "community" there (to varying degrees), experiences that were confusing for most, and frustrating and disappointing for several. Ten found the Scene's emphasis on muscles, dancing and partying (including alcohol and other drugs) alienating. Four men "dabbled" in the Scene for several months, only to withdraw when they "couldn't keep up" physically or financially. Larry's university studies were derailed by Scene-related drug taking; he took time off from university to "get things sorted," And is now back studying full-time. Tom first spent time exploring Oxford Street as a high school student, when he "just hang out in the streets . . . like in café's and stuff." Once in university (and of legal age to enter clubs) he rapidly became enmeshed in the Scene, but an negative experience after taking ecstasy ("I got off that after I woke up one morning, 'what the fuck, I'm in Watson's Bay, how the fuck did I get here?"), causing him to take a step back from the Scene. More recently he has gone clubbing on occasion, but is "more inclined just to sit in a café having a coffee, having cigarette, things like that." Just over half the sample (8) continued to attend the Scene on occasion (weekly or monthly or thereabouts). Cory finds the Scene is "huge on body image and drugs and I just found all these people, all they glorify is abs and six packs . . . and I felt like there's also a lot of racism on the Scene," as someone whose background is Middle Eastern. All the participants at some time participated in university queer social groups or other support groups for young queer men, where they learned about "how to be gay" (as one participant described it) through discussions and guest speakers. But as they begin to establish friendships and romantic relationships with other gay men, the Scene became less important to most, and was no longer synonymous with their conceptions of "the community." However, Darlinghurst, the suburb in which most of the Oxford Street Scene is located, remains a geographic locus of community, both symbolically and substantively. For Martin "growing up in the Western suburbs, I feel safer and completely myself. I can be myself, or attempt to be truly myself, when I'm in Darlinghurst."

## Implications

As diverse as these men's experiences were, so too were their families' reactions to their coming out. Bruce had a gay uncle whose partner was welcomed into Bruce's extended family. Walter's parents were transparently accepting of him as a gay teen (including purchasing a gay-themed magazine for him, at his request, at age eight) before he actually came out to them. Others experienced violence from family members when their sexuality became known. Al had to leave home as a teen, because of their families' homophobia. Terry's mother threw him out when he was 17. But regardless of familial reactions—and regardless of age, ethnocultural identity, or level of education—every man in this study found the knowledges with which they grew up to be inadequate, as they came to terms with themselves being queer. And each sought new knowledges, in the Scene and in queer youth programmes, when mainstream knowledge failed them. The negative impact of K-12 schooling—of spending much of their adolescence in schools rife with homophobia, perhaps the least challenged “ism” in schools today—cannot be over-estimated, based on these men's accounts. Several left school battle-weary and anxious. Getting more anti-homophobia and gay-affirming curriculums in schooling needs to be a priority.

Thus, they reconstructed themselves based on integration of a newly found, queer local knowledge. None accepted this knowledge uncritically or wholeheartedly: each man examined, tested, and rejected or accepted different aspects of queer knowledge. Their consistent understanding of how HIV infection occurs during sex between men came from participating in queer youth programmes, but also from accessing queer social networks. From the idealized notions of sex, romance, love and dating espoused by several of the most newly out men (and more liberatory views espoused by others), it is clear that archetypes that conflates being queer with promiscuity were rejected by most of the participants.

Yet their knowledges are revolutionary and transgressive, though their revolutionary acts occur at what is perhaps the next sphere of queer social justice activism: the realm of, and notions of, family. These men all have a sense of entitlement (nascent or strong) with regards to themselves as queer men. Most are engaging with their families to assert a place for themselves as queer men. If the last 30 years of queer activism have focused on individual rights, perhaps the next will be about queers asserting their “place at the (familial) table.”

These men understand and manage their vulnerability for HIV infection based on a local knowledge of that risk. Their school experiences demonstrate their understanding that being openly queer can be dangerous. Their experiences on the Scene, and in seeking other queer-specific support services or social groups to facilitate their learning about becoming queer, show how these men have sought out queer-specific, subjugated knowledges to construct positive, affirming identities as queer men. While the acquisition of legal entitlements are of undoubted value, young queer men nonetheless must seek queer and queer-affirming spaces to acquire relevant, affirming knowledges, resulting in a unique and particular construction of the (queer) adult. In homophobic, heterocentric society, the onus remains on these men to find such spaces for themselves—so long as mainstream society remains hostile. To those how are not str8.

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## Notes from a Cuban Diary: Forty Women Speak on Forty Years

Joanne Elvy

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

**Abstract:** Many consider the 1961 Literacy Campaign—*Campaña de Alfabetización*—to be the backdrop for social, economic, cultural and ethical transformations that occurred in Cuba following 1959. The *Campaña* marked a definitive moment of liberation for Cuban women, as more than half of the volunteers were those who left their family homes to live and work with the illiterate in the countryside. This research features photographic portraits of women who participated as literacy teachers, together with a series of reflective testimonies as textural components.

*Eneida, Santiago de Cuba*



*Osmara, Viñales*



According to UNESCO, the illiteracy rate in Cuba before 1959 was almost 24%—one in four adults—with figures in rural areas estimated at 41%, compared to 11% in the urban centers (Jefferies, 1967). With educational reform a high priority in the early years of the Revolution, the year 1961 was designated the ‘Year of Education’ in Cuba; with over 250,000 citizens responding to a call to join massive literacy brigades as part of a movement to eradicate illiteracy in the country within one year. Fueled by an “ethical exhilaration” in the growing awareness of the social inequities in Cuba and the promise of a better life for all, those participating in the *Campaña de Alfabetización* were part of an event that would transform the way they viewed their world (Kozol, 1978, p. 344).

More than half of those who came forth to volunteer in this *Campaña* were women.

To take on the challenge,  
to achieve a proper ‘cultural’ Revolution,  
to raise the cultural awareness of our people,  
this *Campaña de Alfabetización* was a necessity.

Libraries were built;  
classrooms, in out-of-the way places, high in the mountainous regions.  
Museums were opened, as venues to invite culture.

And with an illiterate people,  
it is not possible to realize these kinds of social transformations.

Indeed, the *Campaña* was a necessity.

**Involvis, 62 years old, Baracoa**

What separated the Cuban *Campaña* from literacy movements occurring elsewhere before and after 1961, was its inclusion of young people between the ages of ten and nineteen, who came forth to join in the spirit of social justice. To be part of this popular movement as literacy *brigadistas* was a coming-of-age event for many young Cubans, as they would have otherwise never conceived the disparity between the lives they had led in the city, and the extreme poverty they would soon encounter in the countryside.

Children, young people, mothers, adults,  
the elderly, workers, students, *campesinos* ...

Everyone who knew how to read, participated in this *Campaña*.

It was the first major task of the Revolution,  
one that invited the people to become involved, en masse,  
to resolve whatever challenges the country faced.

And for this reason, the *Campaña* held great value:  
social value, economic value, political value ...

This was the broader formation of our consciousness as a people.

The participation of the women was tremendous, magnificent.

**Romalinda, 71 years old, La Habana**

Beyond the mechanics of reading and writing, it was the development of consciousness in all who participated—*campesino* and *brigadista*—which provided a vision for the Cuban people in respect to health care, education, and the conception of family and community, so they might break free from the repetition of poverty and ignorance.

As part of the process of mobilization for the battle against illiteracy, the Ministry of Education closed down city schools so that young people who met the minimum age and 6<sup>th</sup> grade requirement could participate in the *Campaña* as this exercise of citizenship building. Over 95,000 middle-class urban youth journeyed from their familial homes to live with *campesino* families in the Cuban countryside; to share in the labor by day, and to then hold classes for their new ‘students’ at night. Their ‘students’ numbered almost one million Cubans, those previously denied access to a formal education due to race, social class, gender, economic disparity and/or geographical isolation. These young teachers, *brigadistas*, became part of the *Brigadas Conrado Benítez*, in memory of a young black teacher who had been killed by counter-revolutionaries earlier that year.



**Melva Camguy**



**Moriana Ciego de Avila**

Many *campesinos* had not yet received the bread of knowledge.  
These young *brigadistas* were brave,

traveling to far-off places  
to teach reading and writing  
to those who needed it.

With their workbooks, pencils, and manuals in hand,  
these were the only arms that they would carry.

**Luris, 74 years old, Baracoa**

As the story of the Revolution became popularized into the language of everyday life, the heroes of the Revolution have been typically mythologized as male. The sexes in Cuba may be officially equal, but the ever-present man on the streets keeps his stories 'public' while hers remain private; history reminding us that the wife/mother forever negotiates between her public responsibilities and the ones in the home. As the cultural and social of pre-revolutionary Cuba provided little opportunity for women to take on active professional lives beyond an expected familial role, parents often made decisions on behalf of their unmarried daughters, who were rarely allowed to leave the house unescorted. For the young woman as *brigadista* out on her own for the first time, the *Campaña* marked a definitive change on how she would begin to view her life choices.

***Humbelina, Pinar del Rio***



***Involvis, Baracoa***



For Cuban women, the *Campaña de Alfabetización* was one grand life lesson.

In the case of those who were the only girls in their family,  
some mothers also donned a uniform to join in the battle against illiteracy.

For me, though, as a young woman I became more independent.

Becoming a *brigadista*,  
this was the moment I took charge of my life.  
I became outgoing ... I became conscientious.

I wasn't going to be tied down again!

**Dora, 56 years old, Santiago de Cuba**

We *brigadistas* took on the biggest, most difficult task  
that our country faced at that time.

For us, this *Campaña* was the first significant Revolutionary event  
to occur for those of my age.

Myself, I was only 13 years old at the time.  
To participate in such a massive undertaking,  
well, it was a point of departure for me,  
in respect to my personal independence and identity,  
and the responsibilities that I took on as a young woman,

At that time, to see the conditions in which other women lived;  
those my age or younger, who were already married with children,  
when my friends and I still enjoyed the life of a student.  
Living and working with the *campesinos*, then teaching them!  
Everything about life in the countryside was so hard!  
Carrying water up from the rivers, cooking over open fires;  
We learned so much from these women.

**Rosa, 54 years old, La Habana**



**Rosa, La Habana**



**Isabel, La Habana**

With Cuban people coming together with a common goal in the battle against illiteracy, the *Campaña* became a vehicle for social change, a collective event that became monumental, larger than life. Solidarity amongst Cubans evolved as young and old from different social classes and backgrounds exchanged knowledge and experiences to unite the country. For many, this *obra* holds great sentimental value, the jewel of the Revolution, its ideals and principles from forty years ago continuing on into the present. Each recounting a memory unique to her body of experience, the stories of the women who volunteered are very different conceptually and personally from the male participants. Reflecting back to name the limited possibilities available to them before the *Campaña*—their own desires once contained and repressed—they take steps not to forget, in how they practice their convictions as citizens in the Cuba of today.

As a Revolutionary event, the *Campaña de Alfabetización*  
sparked the consciousness in the Cuban people  
to then help others.

Those who became literate went on  
to become teachers themselves,  
or doctors, qualified technicians, skilled workers.  
Certainly, as we became educated as a people,  
we came to realize what we had *achieved* as a people.

**Alida, 57 years old, Ciego de Avila**

*Postscript:* As an outsider to the Cuban experience, I am honored to have been invited into the homes of those who agreed to be part of this project. With my doctoral research visual in nature, I believe the language of photography can validate women's voices, for its intimate, poetic reading of lives lived transcending linear thought; to reveal the unspoken, when words alone fall short.

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## **Feminine/Feminist: A Poststructural Reading of Relational Learning in Women's Social Action Organizations**

Leona M. English

St. Francis Xavier University

**Abstract:** This paper reports on research with 8 board members and 8 directors of women's social action organizations. A poststructural reading of the data gives voice to an under theorized aspect of humanist relational learning in women's organizations and makes visible the power-relationships. It explores women's learned practices of resistance, and offers a paradoxical view of relational learning on social action that attends to the ethic of care as well as to power relations.

The intersection of the feminine/feminist signifier in women's social action organizations risks reifying stereotypic feminine learning traits: relational (Fletcher, 1998), caring and connected (Belenky et al., 1986), and inclusive (MacKeracher, 1996). These signifiers of women's learning and organization have been valorized in internal discourse, public perception, and some adult education and feminist theory, leading to an almost simplified portrayal of women's learning as homogenous, uncomplicated, and harmonious (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). They reinforce the classical organizational distinction of either collectivist (female) or bureaucratic (male) institutions (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979), resulting in a portrait of women's learning in these organizations as removed from disputation, division, and discord. To relieve it of some of its burden of harmony, this study brings a Foucauldian (1977, 1980) poststructural approach to women's relational learning in social action organizations, by focusing on women in women's organizations rather than women in men's organizations.

The organisations in this study are nonprofits, which are often caricatured as less organizationally strong, yet friendly alternatives to profit-making organizations. The somewhat scant attention to women in nonprofit organizations, with some exceptions (Bordt, 1997; Ferree & Martin, 1995), exacerbates the knowledge vacuum and further marginalizes and essentializes the learning relationships of women who work and volunteer in them. Given that such organizations are the sites of activism and adult education, as well as home to varied social movements, both historically (Hull House) and at present (DAWN), adult educators can benefit from a closer look at their practice.

### **Method/Methodological Underpinnings**

This study focussed on women's social action organizations in eastern Canada, interviewing 8 directors and assistant directors (minimally paid) and 8 board members (volunteers) to explore the complicated and often contradictory ways in which they govern and learn, as well as negotiate the structure and culture of their own organizations, which include members and funding bodies. The organizations are feminist in orientation and range from women's centers, anti-violence agencies, transition houses for victims of violence, to women's counseling services. The women interviewed range in age from 25-60 and have been involved from a minimum of 1 year to a maximum of 25 years (the median length of involvement was 5 years). Four of the board members are no longer serving on the board but are still attached to the organization. Of the 16 interviews, 4 were done by email, 4 in person, and 8 by telephone. The research asks if the feminine signifiers are relevant and if the internal learning and leading strategies are predominantly collectivist (feminist) or bureaucratic (masculinist) (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979). The researcher explicates the complex and often ambiguous nature of the relating and learning of women in social-action organizations.

### **Theoretical Framing**

The theoretical framing of this inquiry occurs at the intersection of two frames of thought, the first of which is a feminist reading of the literature on nonprofit organizations and learning, which is generally masculinist (Block & Rosenberg, 2002), funding-focused and governance-driven. The feminist reading suggests that leadership by males and females differs and yet, gender stereotypes do not apply. The second theoretical underpinning is poststructuralism, with its emphasis on the nexus of knowledge, discourse and power. Poststructuralism positions the study as a challenge to everyday readings of women's nonprofit organizations as united in voice and cause, as charity driven, and uncritically caring. Rather than focus on a list of gender differences, poststructuralism "informs an analysis of how women experience and express shifting identities that reflect multiple social influences" (Hayes & Flannery, 2000; Ryan, 2001).

Although it is not intended to speak for all women, the dominant humanistic relational learning theory in adult education (Gilligan, 1982; MacKeracher, 1996) stands as an alternative to the masculine bias in many theories of growth and intellect. Yet, much of relational theory is premised on the notion that women grow and develop best in connection and that this will foster empathy, vulnerability, and participation. Guided by these frameworks, the researcher attempts to complicate the learning relationships of women in nonprofit social action situations by focusing on the practices and actions of the women in these organizations that precede and determine the printed texts.

### **Reading the Data Socio-Economic Context**

The geographic location on the east coast of Canada, a region known for chronic unemployment, factored into the projects the women's organizations in this study choose to pursue, often issues of housing, poverty and under funding by government. Lobbying for a piece of the pie is a particular challenge for these women's organizations causing major impediments to long-term planning. One board member commented on the culture of the women's organization that she was involved in, noting that with regard to funding there was:

not a lot of room for overtime pay, a lot of restrictions because women put in too much and sometimes don't get paid money. This causes some friction in that they expect others to do the same thing. Then you're accused of being less. There is an underlying belief among male-dominated government funders that women's organizations need less money because women will pick up the slack. This overwork and underpay can cause jealousy, feeling unequal, and that you are being treated differently. Our experience at the [women's organization] was that we left exhausted. Even the staff were jaded, beaten down by the system. Some women guilt others into taking on things that they cannot handle nor do they want to handle. They can 'guilt' women into volunteering, even to self-detriment-financial and stress-wise," said another board member. Yet, there is a consistent note of optimism in the women's voices, affected to a strong degree by their commitment to the organization, which in some cases has been for more than 25 years. Power, exercised here in the form of guilt, produced a desire in this board member to directly acknowledge the guilt trips and to actively resist them by saying no. The resistance in this female board member was formed precisely at the point where power was exercised by another (Brookfield, 2001).

### **Women's Causes and Feminist Leanings**

All the women's organizations supposedly had feminist leanings including justice and structural change, as well as the building of supportive networks of women. Yet, the degree of commitment was sometimes hard to read. There is a reality, as one director pointed out, that if "work comes up at a women's center [in this rural area], what will happen is that many women (feminist or not) will apply which has implications for who is involved in the center." Since as one director said, "We're the only game in town," there are conflicting understandings of the organization even among members.

One participant who had few feminist leanings talked about how she felt about the political focus of the board: "Because feminism is to the heart of many women's lives of those who are involved in this association, many of the women who are involved are so heavy— they don't have simple discussions—these women are so heavy. Their talk polarized us versus them. Anyone who doesn't agree with them is the wrong person." She perceived feminist issues to be "heavy." Consequently, in one of the feminist organizations, the board did not broach reproductive rights since this was a sensitive subject locally, in effect diminishing the feminist orientation of the organization. Yet, as a board member put it, she had "learned to choose your battles," something that her own role models in larger centers rarely had to do. Her capacity to stand back and to see that the power exercised by other women in the organization served to support the status quo, was an exercise of her own power, and a strategic way of using silence to dilute theirs. In a Foucauldian sense, she was able to negotiate the conflicted terrain by illuminating, if only for herself, the hidden ways that the others (in some cases, nonfeminists) resisted change.

Another board member observed that she had a "conflicted attitude to feminism. I read a lot about feminism and often appreciate feminist theory; I do not see it in practice by self-identified feminists. I have been in some situations where well known feminists treat new people to the field, other researchers on women's issues, in very uncollegial, unsupportive ways." Her ability to resist the binary of feminists and nonfeminists, and to break down the walls that separate them, is poststructuralism in action (Ryan, 2001).

### **Resolution and Conflict**

Of note is how the various women perceived the atmosphere of the organization, especially when it came to resolution of conflict. The directors, by and large, saw themselves as problem solvers who describe the resolution of conflict in a relational way—"we talk it out and we discuss issues when they come up." That sometimes makes women's organizations challenging places because there is an upfrontness about problems and a seemingly endless willingness to talk things through. The production of this regime of truth about women as relational learners is producing two connected yet contradictory effects: on the one hand, it reinforces the power of feminism and of women having voice, yet on the other hand it produces a truth effect that women are essentially relational. The latter universalizes the experience of women and learning, and further contributes to women's isolation and separateness. Yet, not all board members share the view that conflict is negotiated and decisions are consensual. Most would say there is consensus or as one woman put it, we "agree to disagree sometimes." On occasion women's organizations choose not to make a policy since it will be too divisive, "such as whether men can participate or not."

It is around issues of conflict and discussion that relational learning as an identity for women's organizations is challenged most. The universal notion of women agreeing to disagree is in contrast with the resistances that some members name. One board member, for instance, has

decided not to participate in board meetings any longer because the organization has “become top down.” Her resistance took the form of leaving –silencing herself. Another woman remembered a director saying, “You the board are my boss,” which was seen by the board member as “disingenuous.” While she “admired the work the staff does,” she is under no illusion that the board had any great influence: “We, as a board, support, not direct, staff.” With the use of the dominant discourse of consensus, sharing, and collegiality, a regime of truth was produced that served to further structures of power, albeit in this case a power that produced services (potentially not the most effective services) for community women.

There is a contradiction built into feminist organizations. Whereas relational learning and feminism are about supporting voice, as one board member notes, “If you allow people to have their say, it can’t be warm and fuzzy.” And, as she points out, “At my age, I don’t want warm and fuzzy; I want honesty.” This statement resists the dominant discourse in feminist organizations (“can’t we all get along?”) and “the judges of normality” (Foucault, 1977, p. 304) who want things to be connected in women’s organizations. This participant resists by saying that warm and fuzzy is neither desirable nor a goal for her.

Yet, it must be said that although the discourses of the bureaucratic organization (“you the board are my boss”) and feminism (“we support staff”) are contradictory, women’s strength in organizations is their ability to negotiate this binary. As Foucault (1980) notes, “Each society has its regime of truth ... that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true” (p. 133). This research shows that two discourses can in fact operate as parallel regimes of truth.

### **Organizational Structures**

Feminist scholars have long held ideal notions of what feminist organizations ought to look like—relational, and supportive of voice and difference. In reality, as one director notes, “The organization is hierarchical by virtue of having an executive director and a board of directors.” A board member puts it this way: “So then you have feminists who want flat organizations but it’s so entrenched in the whole organization it creates more conflict you are trying to oppose patriarchy within confines of patriarchal organization.” This participant pointed out that after 4 years of being a board member she now understood that while everyone was trying to operate under feminist principles (participatory decision making, consensus) there are real life demands of funders that the organization be hierarchical, accountable, and adhere to governmental models of organization.

Yet, the rhetoric or regime of truth of these organizations being a home for all members continues. A prime example is the informal way in which some of the board meetings operate. A participant put it this way, “Informal sharing would intimidate women who were embarrassed they didn’t know....We would sit in a circle and share how we were and I was frightened to death.” This speaks to the disciplinary power of the circle (Brookfield, 2001) and the ways that the dominant and liberal discourse of a supposedly egalitarian structure actually served as an instrument of surveillance, a micro-practice of disciplinary power. Sometimes the larger goals of funding, creating work, and providing support for women in crises took most of the staff time. So, some administrative matters such as valuing volunteer time, were neglected. One board member remembered her experience: “[It was] easier to do it casual style and also people who were there go ahead and do it. Couple of times when I was assigned a task, I came to the organization and it was already done.” The needs of clients, board members, staff and leaders sometimes conflicted, leaving at least one group frustrated and interpreting informality as lack of respect. This seemingly benign exercise of power by the staff in getting things done

expeditiously resulted in an unpredictable case of exclusion and in turn a greater desire on the part of the board member to be heard. Yet, in naming the experience she resisted “the grip it has on” her (Foucault, 1977, p. 26).

Although Bordt (1997) argues that feminist principles and bureaucracy are not incompatible (p. 80), they do create some tensions, as the interviews point out. In these organizations it would seem that the leaders had an ability to navigate contradictory discourses and to model that for others in the organization. This produced the effect of a power-conscious relational learning that moved members to action.

### **Learning in the Organization**

One of the goals of a feminist organization is to foster the lifelong learning and development of women, especially in the area of feminism(s). Significantly, more than half of the 16 participants indicated that their learning about feminist organizations occurred informally and incidentally. Very few of the women reported having any formal study in feminism. They learned by watching the leaders, participating in meetings, organizing events for women and working with other members. Board members report a considerable amount of learning in “relation to personnel issues; budgeting . . . negotiation skills, finances, and fundraising.” One board member noted that her learning came through dealing with staffing issues, from finding out that sometimes there is conflict and not everyone wants to negotiate difference. Yet, she pointed out that they were able to work through the issues because “it was all women on the board; women are less inclined to grandstand or to engage in impression management.” Relational learning in feminist organizations has been subjected to truth rules, in a Foucauldian sense, about how feminist organizations ought to be, rules that have arisen in women’s efforts to define and support themselves, and also in their effort to effect social change. Yet, in practice, relational learning for women was influenced by two seemingly contradictory regimes of truth—relational and bureaucratic. The women in this study negotiated both regimes at once.

### **Implications of the Findings**

Adult education has long been attentive to the dynamics of complex power relationships (Brookfield, 2001; Cervero & Wilson, 2000), and to the gendered nature of teaching and learning relationships (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). Yet, some essentialist, universalizing, and stereotypical readings of women’s learning and relating remain. This study attempted to resist these readings by explicating the intersection of power, gender, and relational learning in women’s organizations, from a feminist and poststructural perspective. By probing these intersections, the research contributes to our field’s research on women, learning, and social activism.

The data show that these women’s nonprofits are complex, multivalent organizations in which the relational learning-in-practice serves as a critique to relational learning-in-theory, which ignores power relations. Intricacies of power, authority, and discord factor into the everyday discourse of the organizations, regardless of gender of participants or leaders. Yet, in women’s nonprofits there is an articulated attempt to surface these tensions and to engage in an oftentimes conflictual discourse, which does not always lead to harmony and caring. In fact, it allows two regimes of truth to be operative at once. The learning relationships are characterized by a continuous and careful attempt to negotiate the nexus of power, knowledge and ability among leaders, workers, funders, and clients.

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## **Race, Gender and Networks in Portfolio Work: Difficult Knowledge**

Tara Fenwick, Kiran Mirchandani

University of Alberta, OISE/University of Toronto

**Abstract:** This paper reports findings of our qualitative research exploring the multiple ways in which race, gender and class processes impact on portfolio work, with particular attention to networking processes.

Our study focussed on “portfolio work”, a recently-identified category where individuals create packages of self-employed work arrangements to contract their skills in a variety of contexts. Portfolio workers are, in effect, independent knowledge workers whose work conditions are inherently flexible and often mobile. In particular, we have been examining individuals’ negotiations of networks as an essential activity of both learning and labour in portfolio work. This paper presents one part of our findings, emanating from our analysis of 18 interviews with men and women of colour who are self-employed in portfolio arrangements in western and central Canada. This part focuses on the experiences of these individuals negotiating what are clearly gendered, racialized and classed knowledge networks of self-employment. We conclude the paper with implications of this analysis for deeper understanding of gender and race issues in work and learning, particularly in self-employed portfolio work.

### **The Centrality of Networks in Portfolio Work**

Self-employment and particularly portfolio work has been increasing in Canada, now occupying over 17% of Canadian workers, with the greatest growth occurring among women (Fenwick, 2003). Researchers of portfolio work or “the boundaryless career” have described it as an important emerging category of self-employment deserving closer study (Cohen & Mallon, 1999; Gee, 2000; Gold & Fraser, 2002). A central activity in the work and learning of portfolio self-employment appears to be participation in multiple networks. Some have argued that such individuals’ employability depends on ability to adaptively and flexibly ‘shape shift’ to integrate themselves into and produce knowledge for different networks (Garrick & Usher, 2000; Gee, 2000). Knowledge issues within these networks can be understood in two ways. First, portfolio workers’ capacity to find and maintain the clients who provide their income is closely linked to the value placed on the knowledge they offer to these clients, a value which depends on shifting need, worker’s credibility, client’s perception of knowledge relevance and degree of trust, ‘packaging’ and selling of knowledge, etc. Second, portfolio workers’ labour is bound up with continuous production and ‘transfer’ of knowledge. As such, they need both connections with networks of information and opportunity, and the capability to identify and translate knowledge in different networks. Portfolio workers’ participation in networks, therefore, involves building client relationships and exchanging knowledge for income, accessing others’ knowledge and translating it to local problems, and brokering knowledge or ‘bridging’ across different contexts. Within these networks, portfolio work may be experienced as hostile as well as exhilarating. Challenges include crossing boundaries between organizations and occupations, creating new vocational identities, adjusting to risk and flexibility forming the new psychological contract of the boundaryless career, and creating non-traditional worker-employer relationships (Cohen & Mallon, 1999; Gold & Fraser, 2002). Gender inequities exacerbate the challenges of these conditions for women (Fenwick, 2003; Hughes, 1999; Mirchandani, 1999). Women’s mobility through self-employment is deeply influenced by their access to ‘business networks’. Staber and Aldrich, 1995) argue that “networks are crucial assets for owners” and “affect the life chances of their enterprises” (p. 444). In contrast, many self-employed women of colour experience networks as structures of nepotism and exclusion (Mirchandani, 2002).

Much of this literature, typical of the growing literature on self-employment, has focused on white men and women, or ethnic minority men. The “woman entrepreneur” has become constructed in an essentialist manner focusing on the sex of the owner, without addressing issues of race at all (Mirchandani, 1999). These studies highlight the gendered nature of self-employment, but fail, as Zeytinoglu and Muteshi (2000) note, “to be attentive to how race, class, and citizenship have been underlying forces in the constructions and arrangements of flexible work, and how that work is differentially experienced by women along the trajectories of difference in industrialized countries” (p. 111). The result is a positioning of Whiteness as an invisible norm. And just as in adult education literature, as Shore (2001) shows, all others are compared to the White norm and described as deficient and disadvantaged, as though their rescue depends on the dominant group. “Whiteness as the unexamined norm has left the burden on groups who have less power to create ways in which they can achieve more and become more like the norm” (p. 128).

### **Insights from Feminist Anti-Racist Theory**

To be better attentive to these intersecting forms of inequality in our own analysis, we have drawn from feminist anti-racist theory which highlights the situated and interrelated nature of race, gender and class as processes in specific geographical and historical contexts. Glenn (1999) argues that such “processes” take place through representation (symbols, images), micro-interaction (norms) and social structure (allocation of power along race/gender/class lines) (p. 9). Razack (1998) urges exploration of the meanings of this dimensions, and their shifting relations, as they come together to structure individuals in different and fluid positions of power and privilege (p. 12). Our analysis examines the ways that racialized, gendered and classed forms of stratification intersect and overlap in sites of portfolio work, and particularly in the processes of networking that become central activities in the labour of portfolio workers. That is, both client networks and networks of colleagues who may be sources of opportunities and new knowledge are situated within hierarchies of privilege and inequality linked to race, class and gender differences. People of colour, and especially women who depend upon these networks for their employment and knowledge experience exclusion and disadvantage. However, they learn strategies for survival that demonstrate high levels of resilience, resourcefulness and creativity, defying stereotypes of the helpless victim that appear in literature describing ethnic entrepreneurs and immigrant women. Further, some construct resistant positions requiring them to learn how to negotiate difficult race politics as part of portfolio work.

### **Methods**

This qualitative study used a life history approach (Dominicé, 2000) to explore work experiences narrated by ‘portfolio workers’: self-employed individuals who contract their services to various organizations and clients in a variety of employment relationships, in what may be described as portfolio work. This paper focuses on a portion of the findings produced in the entire study, in which over 40 men and women based in five Canadian cities who described their work in these terms are being interviewed in-depth. Interviews and subsequent analysis explored two general areas: 1) individuals’ perceptions of and learning strategies for coping with the *conditions of portfolio work*, including benefits, challenges, resources, economic structures and so on; and, 2) individuals’ learning through *negotiation of knowledge networks* as part of portfolio work, including access and inclusion/exclusion, nature of knowledge produced, recognition of their knowledge, and strategies of participation. For this paper, findings are reported from 18 interviews with men and women of colour among the participant group, and one woman who works with people of colour. These participants live and work in Ontario and

Alberta in a range of sectors, including manual labor such as garment work, construction and custodial work, as well as professional work such as education and nursing. They report a variety of gendered, immigrant-related and racialized experiences confronted in their work histories. In-depth interpretive analytic procedures (Ely, 1991) were used to create and validate a narrative representing each participant's experiences, after which transcripts were coded and categorized at increasing levels of abstraction to discern both shared and exceptional themes. Then transcripts were analysed critically using a feminist anti-racist frame (Glenn, 1999; Morokvasic, 1991; Rasack, 1998) to identify the active ways in which men and women of colour structure their self-employment in a labour market characterized by simultaneously occurring racialized, class-based and gendered exclusionary practices.

### **Participation in Networks**

People who are self-employed spend considerable time and energy developing networks, both client and collegial, to support their work. As part of the process of generating and sustaining these relationships, they identify fruitful points of connection and actively construct positions for themselves at the nexus of these points. This process involves considerable labor additional to the multi-faceted work of self-employment, and considerable learning. This learning is partly strategic, partly about the structures of power, and partly about deciding how to position oneself within these structures. As Anne, an organizational developer, observed, "Some of the learning just comes from being in the wilderness and being a woman. Being a racialized woman means that I had to learn how to survive. That is quintessentially about organizational power" (ll.1417-1419).

*Establishing Credibility.* Nancy, a white woman interviewed explained, "Without networks there isn't a business – it exists in the networks" (Nancy, ll. 1240). One's past job is crucial, she noted, for building credibility with prospective clients of providing valuable knowledge, and for linking the portfolio worker to the higher decision-making levels in the organizations to whom contract services are being pitched. Reputations are built in an informal, tacit realm where judgments about a person's capability and trustworthiness can be based on hunches, rumor, appearance and personal prejudices. Meg, an organizational developer who often worked in partnership with a black woman, claimed: "It's very much word of mouth and in that respect it's very privileged too because it's mostly white people hiring" (ll. 872-873). In a competitive market of service offerings, without the instant status and credibility afforded by employment with a recognized organization, portfolio workers must find ways to prove themselves trustworthy to each new client. As Sasha explains,

When you say to someone you're a freelancer they don't know what to make of you. And they're not exactly sure whether you're serious. And they're not exactly sure where what they tell you is going to wind up. It would be much easier if I could say I'm working for [a major corporation]. (Sasha, ll.524-531)

Educational credentials would appear to be key in establishing credibility, but almost all of the individuals interviewed who were new immigrants to Canada had been forced to find work in occupations other than what they had been educated to do. Accreditation for their own professional qualifications involved either extensive further training and internship or expensive examinations. For example Elena, a professional engineer, found the only jobs open to her upon arrival in Canada were cleaning and sewing. After some months in the difficult conditions and low wages of a garment factory, she quit and began to contract out her own sewing services. Clive, a dentist, started a cleaning business then an alarm installation service on the side to help pay for his cleaning equipment, as well as a DJ business to earn extra income at night. So from

the start, these people confront the learning challenge of building credibility in unfamiliar networks – in areas much different from their training – at the same time as they are learning how to do the new work. But the credibility and networks they are building is for manual labor or non-professional services, which moves them further and further from spheres in which their own knowledge might be contracted. Women especially, regardless of their professional qualifications, tended to be drawn into portfolio work that contracted feminized labor of cooking, child care, home nursing, sewing and cleaning. This physical low-wage labor isolates portfolio workers from broader, inter-organizational networks and requires long hours to make a living wage, thus inhibiting workers from building professional networks and development. But even among women knowledge workers who contracted to larger organizations, the struggle for credibility was acute, particularly among women of colour:

Maybe because I'm a woman, maybe because I'm visible minority woman but sometimes more difficult for people to take me seriously because they don't know the knowledge that I have. They underestimate the values that I have and I find that I, I have to convince people. I have to work harder convincing people in order to make them realize that I do have a great knowledge in Human Rights which I've worked in this area for seventeen years. (San San, ll. 282-287)

Thus for women like San San, a layer of special persuasive work accompanies the marketing work required of all portfolio workers to establish every contract. She cannot rely on her reputation and networks to simply unfold in the way that other white portfolio workers experienced after a few years of hard building work: SH must continually push.

*Working the Network Boundaries.* Clive, like many others we interviewed, relied almost exclusively on his “own community” (Filipino, in his case) for his client networks. While these ethnic community networks appear to be densely interconnected and extensive especially in the cities, they are not without difficulties. Clive says he does not draw business from his own community because,

I suppose your own people expect you to do things for them for nothing you know where as you know the other people you give them a price they say, ‘Yea or nay.’ You know your own, they want you to do it for nothing or they try to beat you down with your price and then OK if you agree from that and you do the job then the other trouble is getting your money from them. You know so. It's more hassle working for your own so I, I try to stay away from them. (ll 352-358).

Yang, a nurse, explained that she needed clients who were willing/able to pay for her foot care services: these did not often come from her own contacts in her South Asian-Canadian community. She also felt that members of her community expected special low rates and extra services. So Yang, married to a Canadian man and having access to wider networks through her 17 years working in a Canadian hospital, avoided networking with her ethnic community.

Many of these portfolio workers are restricted to limited-return single-client contracts. That is, they must do the same marketing and relationship-building labor to sell one service to one client as they might do to win a contract with an organization with multiple needs, potential repeat contracts, and wide contacts. Further, the personal network which tended to characterize Elena's sewing business was restricted to single referrals received among her immediate acquaintances and their friends: her referrals depended on the extent to which she pleased each client. While she took pleasure in producing a garment that made a woman happy, she admitted frustration with her clients' unwillingness to pay the actual labor costs of her creations. Like other women interviewed whose home-based portfolio work offered free lance personal services

such as foot care, Elena found herself lowering her rates to accommodate certain people's expectations for cheap products and services. As a free-lance journalist, Sasha fought narrow containers created for her in white networks, where she was called only to do "the ethnic or culture piece" where she is suspected of bias towards the minority – and where she still struggles to get her name spelled correctly on her byline. Yet Sasha observed that among members of her community her work is also met with suspicion, requiring additional effort on her part to allay their fears,

convincing people of minority groups that I'm not out to nail their community. I'm not out to make them look like a bunch of pimps, hookers, gangsters, drug dealers, am I missing something? Muggers. (ll. 773-776)

Sasha found herself positioned either as a "white" or "brown" reporter in different situations, requiring her to first figure out the position and second to work it in ways that neither alienated (risking loss of the contract), perpetuated stereotypes (which her very career was dedicated to resisting), nor diminished her professional credibility.

*Becoming Visible*. This pushing work starts with gaining simple visibility: being recognized. Anne, a self-employed organizational developer who specializes in anti-racist work, compares her work to her white partner's:

I had to learn how to make myself visible, how to make myself heard, how to get credited with some level of competence and then how to build on that to actually being able to work effectively. All (laughs), that's before I even start getting to learn the organization and that's not something that [Meg] has to do. (Anne ll. 1429-1436)

In a separate interview, Meg confirmed this differential treatment. She also observed that follow-up contract offers and referrals stemming from work she and Anne had facilitated as a team tended to be directed to Meg, such as one situation when Anne "had just done a session with them on racism and she was utterly brilliant in this thing and not, you know, challenging".

I get a lot of calls because I'm a white person. I do good work but so do lots of people of colour and they're not in that network. And there's a resistance to bringing new people into the network particularly if there are white people hiring (Meg, ll.1264-1267)

Meg engaged in cross-referrals for work in racism, trying to link white employing organizations with contractors who were people of colour: However, she began feeling uncomfortable with a certain reification of whiteness in such acts: as though a person of colour must rely upon the white person's recommendation for visibility. As she worked with her partner, she developed some awareness of how her white privilege worked in everyday interactions:

I'm still learning all the ways, all the ways that exercising power is wired into my not so post-colonial need...I would say that racial identity for me is a key thing. (Meg, ll.1226-1234).

For Anne and San San, both well-educated women of colour who intentionally inserted themselves into white networks, their continuous burden apparently included not only the weary tasks of creating a presence and proving their value and credibility again and again, but also the task of educating whites about racial dynamics.

### **Implications for Work Learning Theory**

Portfolio work, in its ongoing learning/doing processes, relies upon networks. These continue to be gendered and racialized. Here we have discussed the structural inequities configuring networks of portfolio workers: immigrants forced outside their own professional networks and knowledge, the isolation and additional labor constituted by a reliance on gendered one-to-one networks that may offer limited referrals, the difficulty for people of colour to gain access to (white) organizational clients offering well-paying knowledge contracts, and the work

involved in becoming visible and gaining credibility. points out the contradiction in this work: “So when Meg and I walk in a room, the attention that goes to her means that I have to fight to make myself visible. Isn’t that ironic considering I’m called a visible minority?” (ll. 1427-1429).

Our findings illuminate three main themes: forms of exclusion operating in networks; forms of learning and emotion work demanded of individuals occupying racialized and gendered positions to participate in these networks; and the resistant subject positions and work undertaken by some to not only survive but also challenge deeply inequitable conditions of self-employment. In the learning processes experienced by different individuals to negotiate these networks, different identities and workloads are created. Some struggle to insert themselves into dominant networks, some name and challenge the structures of these networks, while others take on the work of crossing boundaries among networks. These findings can help challenge limited ‘victim’ portrayals and stable racial categories, and shed light on the layers of work confronting those who must learn to negotiate difficult race politics in addition to the outsider challenges facing all portfolio workers. For whites embedded in these networks, there is opportunity here to, as Manglitz (2003) suggests in analysing White privilege in adult education literature, learn to recognize and challenge their privilege and the power that is embedded in their everyday interactions, and to develop a rearticulation of White identity that is progressive and actively antiracist.

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## **Participatory and Engaging, but not Emancipatory: Democracy and Informal Education in Singapore**

Rick Flowers

University of Technology, Sydney

**Abstract:** Community work in Singapore offers an interesting case study of how informal education is used for purposes of community bonding rather than community action. Singaporean community workers work to an authoritarian agenda but I think there are misleading assumptions about the forms this authoritarian community work takes, such as that these community workers employ only the telling mode and value passivity and compliance among the people in community settings that they work with. In fact from my research I concluded that Singapore's community workers share with many Australian community workers a common interest in engaging, mobilising and facilitating participation. Given this seeming paradox, I will discuss various perspectives of participatory community work. I will ask, how successful are Singapore's community workers in facilitating participation? And I will suggest that Singapore's community workers have impressive skills in engaging and mobilising people, but not in fostering collaboration and independent action. I will conclude that it may be more apt to label their practice as interactive rather than participatory.

### **Participatory and Engaging, but not Emancipatory**

Community workers in Singapore have 'didactic' goals but do not use traditional didactic methods. They extol the virtues of the ruling political party, but they do not preach. They use methods that have many similarities to methods used in pluralist democracies such as Australia and Germany where community workers claim their practice is not didactic but participatory. Singapore's community workers have impressive skills in engaging communities, organising, facilitating participation, and in devising and managing informal education activities.

#### *Didactic versus dialogical, informal education*

The community workers I interviewed consistently emphasised that they believed the most effective way to educate the people about government policies was to do it indirectly and informally.

At our big functions – for example, Mother's Day event – we impart messages indirectly. It's not just about food and socialising. There's a message – look after the elderly. We inject cultural values.

The phrases "inject" and "impart messages" reveal the community worker's didactic intentions. This blunt didacticism is far removed from the values and concerns described by Mark Smith. Jeffs and Smith for example, argue that

informal education emphasizes certain values and concerns: the worth placed on the value of the learner, the importance of critical thinking, and the need to examine taken for granted assumptions (1990, p. 3).

'Injecting' and 'imparting' leaves little room for encouraging people to examine taken for granted assumptions. The differences between the Singaporean workers' didactic concept of informal education and the critical perspective of Jeffs and Smith suggest that, rather than looking for a single definition, it may be more useful to examine contesting traditions and practices of informal education. Just like formal education, informal education can serve the full spectrum of interests from authoritarian to democratic, but the distinctions may not always be

readily apparent. The informal education practices of Singapore's community workers may have elements that are distinct from the informal education practices of the British community workers Jeffs and Smith write about, but there are many common elements. For example, Jeffs and Smith (1990) suggest that an important element of informal education is "the focus on the everyday" (p. 2). Learning is related to, and drawn from, the experiences of living and working in communities. Community workers in Singapore share this focus on the everyday. In a later book, Smith (1994) introduces the notion of local education. He says:

Within local education there is a strong emphasis on promoting associational life and democracy (Hirst 1993); on working with people to identify common interests, to co-operate and to organise. This is clearly seen in the activities of many community workers and their concern for community development, mutual aid and collective action (p. 3).

Again, if we exclude collective action, there is an emphasis on similar elements within the informal education practice of Singapore's community workers.

#### *Thoughtful planning of informal education*

The informal education practice of the community workers in Singapore I interviewed was carefully planned. The workers were clear about what they wanted people to learn, and what strategies were likely to facilitate that learning. However they did not name their practice. One community worker said:

We do informal education without people knowing it. Officially education is not part of our portfolio. But a lot of work is about raising awareness about crime prevention, racial harmony, new laws and new technologies.

Their argument is that if people knew community work activities were designed to 'educate' people about government policies they would be less likely to participate. One community worker said:

We do not didactically give speeches on government policies. We do it subtly. We have information on hand and convey it informally when the occasion arises.

Another community worker said:

... we introduce government policies in the course of their participation in CC (community centre) activities.

### **Major Sites of Informal Education**

Singapore's community workers use a number of major sites to undertake or support informal education. They are festive events, continuing education courses, informal conversations, formal dialogue and sporting, recreational and cultural facilities.

*Festive events: Imparting information:* Community centres organise a standard number of festive events. These include Mother's Day, the Malay New Year, the Indian New Year, and the Chinese New Year. They also organise some ad-hoc events such as a Chinese orchestra concert, or a Malay sporting tournament. Community workers set up project teams made up of volunteers to plan and manage each event, and they devote considerable time to organising these sorts of events because they see them as effective informal education.

If one valued helping people learn to engage in independent action and analysis, then the process of planning, organising and implementing community group activities for a festival could be used to help people unlearn dominant discourses. Value would be placed on supporting them to not only plan the event, but also to decide on the content of the event. The aims would be to build upon and extend the experiences and views of the local organisers. From my interviews,

however, it seemed clear that the informal education practised by the community workers employed by the People's Association in Singapore was used to help people learn the dominant discourses. The community worker and party functionaries had the final say in the planning, and the content related as much to ruling party policies as to any local experiences.

*Continuing education classes: Getting close to the people:* All community centres offer a large number of continuing education courses. These range typically from computer skills, to arts and crafts, to foreign languages. The Singapore government invests in these courses in order to make continuing education affordable for those on low incomes and in order to get 'close' to the community. One community worker said that the government subsidises classes as a community development activity.

*Informal conversations: gathering feedback:* The community workers I interviewed placed a lot of value on informal conversations, whether they were over the counter or in the course of organising activities. These conversations were seen as an important way to help people learn about the policies of the government, and conversely, for the government to learn about the views of the people.

But how was this sort of informal education evaluated? I asked community workers how they knew people were effectively learning to engage with the ruling party's values and policies. And how they knew that people were telling them what they really thought, and that the government was effectively learning from the people. Their answers indicated a greater interest in instrumental than critical learning. They were more concerned about the residents acquiring knowledge than engaging in reflection and analysis. One community worker, when asked how he knew what residents learned, simply said: "We get feedback at MP-meet-the-people sessions or directly to the CC." Another community worker, when asked how he gauged people's levels of satisfaction, said "if they don't give feedback we know they're happy." This community worker believed that people could and would express their views directly. He saw nothing problematic about this. He said the community centre staff made every effort to be approachable. And this did appear to be the case. While I was visiting one community centre, a hawker came in giving staff little gifts of food as an unsolicited gesture of gratitude for their centre's advocacy efforts. If the only type of feedback community workers want is about petitionary matters like better amenities, residents can be seen as forthright. But if one is also interested in hearing and supporting the expression of alternative views then the notion of people coming up to the counter of the community centre is problematic. In all my interviews I formed the strong impression that community workers were more interested in using opportunities for informal conversations to gather feedback rather than engage in dialogue.

*Formal dialogue (meet the MP sessions): Creative and thoughtful planning*

Community centres hold regular meet-the-MP sessions. In the following account, a community worker describes how she planned and organised a public 'dialogue' session for a government minister. The public dialogue sessions are occasions where government ministers deliver formal speeches. But her planning reveals how she conceived the whole event as a process of informal education. Although it was not a course activity, she was intent on devising strategies to maximise learning. It is an example of the skill and effort applied at grassroots level for the People's Action Party to nurture support and highlights the ways participatory community work is used in Singapore. This particular community worker was a Malay woman with a Masters degree in adult education. She explained her session plan. The dialogue sessions are formal speech events but we try to make it informal by organising a series of activities which the Minister is expected to participate in.... so the Minister interacts with the people informally

before engaging in a dialogue session.... before giving a speech. We organised activities around seven stations.

1. Children's activities in a sports field.
2. Children's activities on the ground floor of a high-rise block.
3. Senior Citizen's Lounge.
4. Visit to a Study Skills Centre.
5. Sports carnival at a public park.
6. Cultural events – Malay wedding, dances etc
7. Dialogue session.

This program of informal education was carefully and creatively planned. The same community worker explained that effective informal education was aimed at engaging people so that they would be more receptive to the ruling party's messages and that to engage people effectively a community worker should devise opportunities for interaction rather than people being passive recipients. We try to be creative to get people involved. For example, we didn't want to hold a boring baby show. So we organised a baby race. It wasn't a health promotion event but about providing an opportunity to foster family values and for a government MP to mingle with residents.

*Extensive recreational, sporting and cultural facilities:* Recreational, sporting and cultural facilities, like the continuing education activities, help make community centres popular sites where community workers can engage residents. Many community centres in Singapore have a range of modern facilities that would be the envy of community workers across the world. These can include basketball and badminton courts, theatrettes, seminar rooms, IT labs, fitness gyms, dedicated study rooms, and canteens.

#### **The People's Action Party's use of Informal Education**

The People's Action Party has developed and maintained a wide range of structures and processes to bolster its political dominance. There is a tendency in reports on Singapore in the international media to highlight measures used to exclude oppositional voices, in particular media censorship. But other measures play an equally, if not more, important role in the long term and these include an array of grassroots educational activities planned and managed by community workers. These activities are designed, either directly or indirectly, to explain to the public the merits of government initiatives as perceived by the People's Action Party. For opposition parties this is intensely frustrating. The Social Democratic Party commenting on a report of the government's Advisory Council on Family and Community Life published in May 1989 had this to say:

The report revealed itself when it said that Community Consultative Committee (CCC) and Resident Committee (RC) members should become "opinion leaders" and help explain government policies. ... Grassroots leaders are now expected to become People's Action Party (PAP) apologists. The PAP intention is clear. If the people hear their side of the story often enough, they will accept the PAP version as truth (authors name not disclosed, 1992, *The Demokrat*).

The authors are saying that community workers use grassroots educational activities to bolster support for the People's Action Party. They devote their efforts to telling only "one side of the story." But because this process has become so enmeshed with the practice of diverse community work activities, it does not necessarily come across as partisan propaganda.

*Educating the public is more important than promoting welfare:* Community workers put the

task of educating the public about government policies above the task of promoting welfare. The community workers I interviewed reiterated this many times. Stimulating participation is a means to an end, namely explaining government policies and garnering community support for its policies. I do not believe that it is productive to draw a distinction between community work which is ideological and community work which is not ideological. Instead it is more productive to assume that there is an ideological dimension to all community work practices and to make the ideology explicit. If criticism is to be expressed, it should be directed at those who hide their ideology and at the ideology itself. This, in turn, leads to a wider argument that ideology has a foundational place in any analysis of community work practice. In the case of Singapore, the ideology of most workers has been shaped directly by a single, political party. Community work in Singapore is unlikely to change unless either the People's Action Party radically changes its ideology or its political domination is successfully challenged. It seems clear that the People's Action Party will continue to use government paid community workers to go about persuading the people to support its policies.

### **Insights from Singapore**

My research contributes to theory development about the nature of democratic informal education and community work. The field research I undertook in Singapore in the late 1990's provided a rare opportunity to compare informal education in a one-party state versus a pluralist democracy. Some existing theory suggests that the degree to which community work is democratic should be judged only by the (a) structural arrangements in place for management and control and (b) opportunities for and support given to community participation. I suggest that the degree of democracy should also be judged by the extent to which the workers and managers are (c) critically reflective and (d) committed to a dialogical versus a petitionary political culture. To judge whether participatory education practice is emancipatory one should look beyond the form to the intent behind it. The case study of Singapore might encourage community workers to more closely interrogate the ideologies and discourses that shape their notions of participatory practice. The following table might be used as a tool to do this.

<p><b>Why do community workers lay value on people's participation? It is because .....</b></p>	<p><b>Rank in priority order</b></p>
<p>.... they see it as a means to more efficiently implement ruling party policies. Participation is a means to more effectively convey information about ruling party policies than simply by relying on mass media and schooling.</p>	
<p>..... participation is a means to develop active citizenry, social capital, community capacity etc that in turn leads to a healthier community, and more ordered community in a style befitting the ideology of the People's Action Party.</p>	
<p>..... participation will create vibrant and active communities in the high-rise housing estates.</p>	
<p>..... participation is an important way of combating ethnic rivalries and promoting cultural harmony.</p>	

.... participation creates opportunities for social action, dialogue and emancipatory learning.	
.... participation is important to strengthen local democracy.	

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## **Safe Injections Sites: Insurgent Architecture? Drug Use and Learning as Social Practice**

Jean Flynn

Mount Saint Vincent University

**Abstract:** Within the context of a safe injection site, this paper will explore a social theory of learning that supports the importance of the everyday learning processes of people within communities of practice.

Educators contend adult learning processes are best supported under conditions of social justice. Young (1990) argues that these conditions “make it possible for all to learn and use satisfying skills in socially recognized settings, to participate in decision-making, and to express their feelings, experiences, and perspective on social life in contexts where others can listen” (p.91). I argue that a safe injection site is a type of insurgent architecture which inches us closer to Young’s notion of justice. I will use Young’s definition of insurgency as “the demand that bureaucratic services make possible, instead of replacing, local decision-making” (1990, p.81). Insurgent campaigns are particularistic and oriented to specific issues, rather than global; their goal is to create alternative institutional forms and independent discussion. Even small efforts in this direction can have large catalytic effect. Through this paper I will examine the establishment of Vancouver’s safe injection site as one such campaign that offers important support to the everyday learning processes of ordinary people. In addition to moving us in the direction of a more just society, the support offered through the site contributes to our capacity to make sense of drug addiction and to develop just practices to address its most dire impacts. Drawing primarily on the work of Etienne Wenger and David Harvey, I offer philosophical considerations for the support of social learning processes within this context rather than a panacea for addressing the challenges of drug addiction.

### **Safe Injection Site as an Intervention Location**

A safe injection sites is a special case of service provision in which drug users are permitted to inject using clean equipment under the supervision of medically trained personnel. The professional staff do not help administer the drugs; they merely ensure the user avoids the consequences of overdose, blood borne diseases, or other negative health effects that might otherwise result from using unclean equipment and participating in unsafe injecting practices. The site also helps direct drug users to treatment at rehabilitation programs, and can operate as a primary healthcare unit. The emphasis is on keeping those who choose to use drugs alive and disease-free, with rehabilitation open as a possibility. Moralizing about the intrinsic evils of drugs and drug use is avoided, and more importantly, the philosophy of the site recognizes that many of the ills associated with drug use result from an approach, we, as a society, created and continue to use to deal with these individuals.

### **Drug Use and Learning as Social Practice**

This discussion begins with a departure from traditional and popular views of learning and drug use. In moving beyond individualized notions of learning and drug use, the perspective I offer places learning and drug use in the context of our lived experience of participation in the world – that learning, in essence, is a social practice. I consider drug use a social practice, rather than an individual process as we cannot separate and isolate drug use from the communities in which we participate. When we broaden our perspective to include a social theory of learning, particularly regarding drug use, we are more likely to appreciate the very human costs in health, economic and societal contexts. Continuing to accept individualistic approaches to learning and drug use fails to challenge the structures and processes of inequality of marginalized groups that

often is a contributory cause for drug dependency in the first place. Furthermore, these individualized notions prevent the illumination of the socially constructed nature of “the drug problem”. Plumb (2003) contends that an individualized notion of learning fails to recognize the pervasive nature of the everyday learning processes that people can recognize as part of their lived experience: learning through interactions and relationships in network of others who are experiencing and working on the same challenges and tasks. We bond as a group, learn to share attention and set up the social patterns that sustain such bonding and sharing and thereby, produce and reproduce meaning. This natural learning process is a unique human capability which facilitates cultural reproduction. Throughout this process, we learn from other people, and consciously or unconsciously teach other members through a matrix of relationships and social exchanges in a culture-producing cycle (Wenger, 1998; Tomasello, 1999; Donald, 2001; Plumb, 2003). The notion of communities of practice, advanced by Etienne Wenger (1998), presents a social theory of learning that starts with the assumption that engagement in social practice is the fundamental process by which we learn and thus become who we are. The primary unit of analysis is neither the individual nor the social institutions but rather the informal communities of practice people form as they pursue shared enterprises over time. Members of a community of practice are informally bound by what they do together – from engaging in idle conversation to solving difficult problems – and by what they have learned through their mutual engagement in these activities (Wenger, 1998).

### **Negotiation of Meaning**

Negotiating meaning is central to Wenger’s concept of practice and is “the process by which we experience the world and our engagement in it as meaningful” (1998, p.53). In this sense, our participation in the world, whatever form it takes is a constant process of negotiating meanings. The negotiated production of meaning is a fundamental aspect of being a person in the world. Even when mental functioning is carried out by an individual acting in isolation, it is inherently social, or socio-cultural, in that it incorporates socially evolved and socially organized tools (Werstch, 1998). These tools are parts of larger social activities. They are learned socially, function socially, and are socially meaningful. From Wenger’s perspective, meaning exists in the very process of negotiation – “meaning exists neither in us, nor in the world, but in the dynamic relation of living in the world” (1998, p.54). At this point, the use of dialectical thinking is helpful. According to David Harvey (1996), dialectical thinking emphasizes the understanding of processes, flows and relations over the analysis of things, structures and organized systems. Dialectical enquiry is itself a process that produces a repertoire such as abstractions, concepts and bodies of knowledge which stand to be supported or undermined by a continuing process of engaged enquiry. Through dialectical enquiry, educators examine the process through which negotiated meaning is constituted and how is it sustained. In this sense, the mutual constitution of how meanings are formed and sustained rests on the notion that “part makes whole, and whole makes part” (Harvey, 1996, p.53). Through engagement we create and sustain a repertoire and this repertoire simultaneously forms the basis of our mutual engagement. In fact, once we think of learning as a process of negotiating meanings within communities of practice, in these dialectical terms, it is impossible to understand our world without simultaneously changing it as well as ourselves. Learning is the meaning-making activity inherent in the practice of communities. Learning or the negotiation of meaning is an integral part of life and lessons that comes not only from individual experience but from the experience of others. This experience is transmitted through relationships and networks of social interactions and reinforced by a sense of membership in the group that affirms and guides what participants know. Learning is often an

unseen but powerful product of a group's social life (Wenger, 1998).

### **Identity Formation**

In addition to learning being the process of negotiating meaning in a community practice, there is also a connection between identity and practice. Since learning transforms who we are and what we can do, it is an experience of identity. Wenger's (1998) focus on identity avoids the individual-social dichotomy on identity formation and instead focuses on the process of their mutual constitution: "Building an identity consists of negotiating the meanings of our experience of membership in social communities. The concept of identity serves as a pivot between the social and the individual so that each can be talked about in terms of the other." (p.145). Identity in practice is defined socially because it is produced as a lived experience of participation in various communities. Indeed, "talking about identity in social terms is not denying individuality but viewing the very definition of individuality as something that is part of the practices of specific communities" (Wenger, 1998, p.146). This is furthered by Donald (2001) who contends that our individualism is dependent almost entirely on culture for its realization. Here again, the notion of dialectics is helpful. A dialectical conception of both the person and the social structure of which the person is a part rests entirely on an understanding of the processes and relations by which persons and social structures are mutually constituted (Harvey, 1996). For example, how a specific person experiences addiction, interprets her status of drug addict, what she understands of the relationship between her ability to seek treatment and relapse is not simply an individual choice nor is it simply the result of belonging to a social group of "drug addict". Her identity is shaped not just by her participation within this specific community of practice but also by her participation in other communities as well. Identity is not some static object or a pre-existing essence of a personality; it is in a state of constant 'becoming' as the work of identity is always going on. It is a 'fluid social construct' that is open to innumerable processes that transect various communities of practices to which we belong (Harvey 2000). Our identity, much like the meanings we negotiate through practice, is something that we renegotiate during the course of our lives (Wenger, 1998). This temporal dimension of identities allows the incorporation of the past and the future in the process of negotiating the present. In addition to this temporal aspect, Paechter (2003) argues that identities are also 'locational' –that as we move from one place to another, we have to take on and learn to inhabit different identities. Harvey (2000) interprets this as the integrating of aspects of ourselves into the many different structures of our social world. Through this process of integration, we partially define who and what we are and refine, redefine and reproduce those social structures. Identity is neither a unity nor fragmented; it has to be constructed to include different meanings and forms of participation into one 'nexus of multimembership' (Wenger, 1998, pp.158-159). This is particularly obvious, for example, when individuals are consumed by drug addiction. In addition to the identities they assume in other communities, they must struggle to reconcile with the identity of drug user. Their use of drugs does not stop them from being parents, siblings, workers, or from assuming a multitude of other societal roles.

Wenger's (1998) conception of identity fits within the nonessentialist perspective of identity formation in that he assumes multiple identities that change across time and space that may conflict with each other. This perspective includes the issue of how socially constructed realities influence identity, particularly, the politics of location which acknowledges that people may have different positions in different communities of practice.

### **Positionality**

As a result of viewing identity as a 'fluid social construct', Harvey (2000) argues that we

must see individuals as an ensemble of socio-ecological relations. Our positionality or situatedness in these relations not only impacts who and what we are; it also influences what we see, how far we can see and where we see 'it' from (p.236). Everyone's experience is in some way reflective of positionality. Recognizing positionality helps us acknowledge that individuals construct knowledge in relation to others and that both the individual and others are situated and positioned within social structures where they are simultaneously privileged and oppressed. These social structures and power relations affect not only how knowledge has been produced and disseminated in society but also how what has counted as knowledge has been determined and by whom (Alfred, 2002; Tisdell in Hayes & Flannery, 2000). The point is not merely to "recognize these connections between our partially constructed identity and the social structures that inform our lives; it is also to actively work to change such conditions" (Tisdell in Hayes & Flannery, 2000, p.178). Harvey speaks of a 'thought experiment' in which we imagine how it is to be (and think) in a different situation (2000, p.238). A safe injection site is a location in which this 'thought experiment' has the potential to occur. By making incremental changes in our positionality which partly defines who we are, we can change our vision of the world. Sometimes these changes can lead to an authentic loop within which rapid transformational change can occur. To Harvey, acknowledging positionality provides much of the "grist of our consciousness and our imagination" (2000, p.238). This process of transcending a current reality to an envisioned future is not easy work nor can it happen in isolation; it requires both an individual desire to change, a link to other communities of practice, and the perspective of "a long revolution" (p.238). This includes, importantly, a willingness to see the materiality of social structures. Changing society means changing the space and time within which we live.

### **Modes of Belonging**

Up to this point, I have addressed identity in terms of belonging to communities of practice. But to understand learning and identity formation in a specific context such as a safe injection site, it is necessary to consider modes of belonging other than engagement or participation in practice. Specifically, the process of starting the 'long revolution' must be considered. A drug user's experience of participation is very much a part of her daily practice. However, it also reaches beyond street alleys or detox centres. In order break of the hold of drug addiction, she must align her plans and her interpretation of events with structures and systems beyond the safe injection site; she must find her place in broader social processes. She must see herself as a participant in social practices that exist outside her engagement in this specific community of practice. She has to make sense of many artefacts she encounters that originate from a practice she does not necessarily have access to. She has to use her imagination to get a picture of these broader connections. To make sense of these processes of identity formation and learning, it is useful to consider three distinct yet related modes of belonging: engagement, imagination, and alignment. These modes of belonging occur simultaneously within the practice of communities.

**Engagement** – I have already outlined engagement as the shared histories of learning, interactions, relationships and practices that occur within communities of practice. Wenger (1998) highlights the bounded character of engagement. In addition to the physical limits of time and space there are also physiological limits to the scopes of activities that we can directly be involved in as well as the number of people and artefacts with which we can sustain substantial relationships of engagement. As Harvey (2000) notes, it is a struggle to think of alternatives when confronted by the routine of a localized daily practice. While change begins and ends with the personal, more is at stake than mere individual growth. Intervening variables such as political

and class interests, various ‘treatment’ discourses, and public opinion are all involved. In the interplay of the personal and the global, a space for doubt and hope to flourish must exist. For Harvey (2000), this space exists in our imagination of the possibilities.

**Imagination** – Imagination is an important component of our experience of the world and our sense of place in it. Wenger’s use of imagination does not entail withdrawal from reality but the creative process of producing new images and generating new relations through time and space that constitute the self. In this sense, imagination is the production of images of the self and images of the world that transcend engagement (1998, pp.176-177). It is the process of creating a picture that does not currently exist – to conceive of alternatives and possible futures and identities. This is not an individual process; the creative character of imagination is rooted in the social interactions and communal experiences. It is a mode of belonging that always involves the social world and expands the scope of reality and identity.

**Alignment** – Like imagination, alignment is a mode of belonging that is not confined to mutual engagement. Through alignment, we become connected and part of something larger than ourselves because we do what it takes to play our part. Unlike imagination, however, alignment is the coordination of action and involves personal energy to a common purpose (Wenger, 1998). As Harvey (2000) notes, change will only work in progressive directions if it is connected ‘en route’ to some larger generalized movement. This means that there must be an alternative out there. Advances in one community of practice can be stunted or even regress unless supported by advances elsewhere. Our mistake lies in the belief that one community should contain all the influence and resources needed. Addictions treatment involves effort to connect users to community organizations to coordinate services necessary for progression through treatment. It requires participation in the form of boundaries practices and of people with multimembership who can straddle boundaries and do the work of translation.

Once again, the notion of dialectics is helpful. The exploration of possibilities is integral to dialectical thinking (Harvey, 1996). Not all processes produce change but it is worth considering what processes allow for change and what processes are manipulated for purposes of reproducing particular normative standards. Harvey (1996) argues that the exploration of potentialities for change, for self-realization, for the construction of new collective identities is the fundamental purpose of knowledge construction. Dialectical enquiry can be used to ‘create’ and not necessarily just ‘describe’ the order of the social world (p.56). In this sense, a dialectical way of thinking does not seek a path to a particular kind of reductionism but to an understanding of common generative processes and relations (p.58). Dialectical thinking is just one of several approaches to understanding and representing the human condition and the world in which human life unfolds. It is appealing because we experience life as a process. The dialectical approach is particularly supportive in this discussion as it sheds light on what it means to be committed to the process of maintaining, developing or letting go of the ‘things’ we create. This relational process oriented view provides the basis for questioning the ‘things’ that rule our lives no matter how hard we strive to move beyond them (Harvey, 1996).

### **Educators as Brokers**

Cervero and Wilson (2001) argue that adult learners must be understood relationally within the particular material, social and political locations of their participation and educators become brokers of knowledge and power in these locations. The role of the brokering is crucial. Brokering entails the translation, coordination and alignment between perspectives. Wenger (1998) addresses the role of brokering as “having legitimacy to influence development of a practice, mobilize attention and address conflicting interests” (pp.108-110). Brokering is a

practice of connection and requires the ability to connect practices by facilitating transactions between them and to cause learning by introducing into one practice elements of another. Brokering provides a participative connection because what brokers press into service to connect practices is their experience of multi-membership and the possibilities for negotiation inherent in participation. Simply put, brokers are practical and political actors (Cervero and Wilson, 2001). Aside from the establishment of a safe injection site, our response to drug use has involved a reactionary approach and late stage intervention. Brokers would advocate for proactivity and a strengthening of connections and translations between practices. Because edges surrounding social communities are not solid, brokering is an opportunity to find a way in to promote new rules or shape new spaces. In this sense, the connections forged through brokering presents a space of hope and the opportunity to negotiate meaning. In fact, Plumb (2003) asserts that brokering linkages in this manner can form their own social structures in time which creates the potential for new moments of negotiation through the development of effective practices. Brokering is one way to begin the process of critical awareness and to focus attention on the structures and processes of inequality (Cervero and Wilson, 2001). Brokering is political action that defines commonalities and registers differences to assist in the recognition of uneven distribution of power and knowledge. In connecting the local with the global, brokering practically and politically seeks to alter that distribution in ways that change who typically benefits.

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## **“The Continuous Restart”: Case Study on Young Adults in Societies in Fast Transition**

António Fragoso, Emilio Lucio-Villegas

University of Algarve, Portugal, University of Seville, Spain

*All historic experience confirm that people may not attain the possible if they don't attempt from time to time to reach for the impossible (Max Weber)*

**Abstract:** In this paper we reflect upon the role of young adults in local development processes in social contexts characterised by strong transition trends. The analysis of two sequentially different generations gives us important elements to arrive at some conclusions about social change, according to the theoretical framework we use.

### **Funerals and revolutions**

Dr. Bernal says that the origin and development of Social Sciences started as one form of analysis of the processes of social change, in societies or micro societies. In a society in fast and continuous transition the research into social change is therefore fundamental. In our case, we have sought out a model built on local development processes that allows us to research and explain social change. The theoretical framework of this model has its root on two authors and two concepts indirectly connected with social change: the funeral rituals in Java solidly described by Clifford Geertz, and the revolutionary processes performed by Eric Hobsbawm. Geertz researched the funeral rituals in Java between 1952-54. He proposes a form of analysis that discriminates logico-meaningful integration from causal-functional integration, sustaining that cultural structure and social structure are not mere reflections of one another. “In most societies, where change is a characteristic rather than an abnormal occurrence, we shall expect to find more or less radical discontinuities between the two [social and cultural aspects]. I would argue that it is in these very discontinuities that we shall find some of the primary driving forces in change” (1973, p. 144). The funeral rituals he analysed were but incongruities between the cultural framework and the patterning of social interaction that can be explained in depth only by a dynamic theory – which considers the divergences between the need to find significance and to maintain a functioning social organism.

Hobsbawm, who has studied modern age revolutions, defends the concept that revolution is a process of change that supposes mobilisation of mass population together with social-economic and political transformation in society's affairs. Although Hobsbawm distinguishes between structure and situation, he states that revolutionary processes are a mixture of structure and situation. Structural factors, the ones that gave sense and triggered revolution can be surmounted by the specific situation in which the action and its circumstances take place. So “structure and situation operate and decide action and decision's limits, but it is situation that basically determines action's possibilities” (1990, p. 30). According to the author, revolution is a period of unpredictable and uncontrollable convulsions that can make results uncertain. In this sense, at the beginning of a revolutionary process, the forces and the power present in the stage can face unpredictable developments – but this also leads us to consider the hard task of identifying the end of a revolutionary process. In fact, this is the last element of Hobsbawm's work we want to emphasise: revolution can be considered as finished when a new administration in public affairs is built, and when people find a new common frame of life, after a period of experimentation, hesitations and changing directions. Definitively, the essence of revolution is social change in societies; it is to replace the old for the new in an insecure social frame that it's less predictable.

### **Social Context and Methodology**

Our research was done in the mountainous rural area (200 Km<sup>2</sup>) of southern Portugal

called Cachopo. Some quantitative data that helps to understand the territory are (INE, Infoline): the negative population growth since the 60's (in the last two decades, 27 and 29%); the low population density ((5 residents per Km<sup>2</sup>); extremely high ageing index (400%) and dependency indexes; high illiteracy rates (38%); high percentage of population with only four years of formal schooling (48%). Economical activity and unemployment are a problem when we consider women. In fact, of the 10% of women who have a declared economic activity, 27% are unemployed. We could add to this scenario the strong isolation of the population (25%), the lack of basic health structures, or the lack of roads to the majority of homes. This along with the geographical isolation configures a strong social isolation that is felt mostly among children, women and old people. Other qualitative characteristics could be important. This was a population which lived on a subsistence form of agriculture both in a direct and indirect way: it was not only a great majority of people that lived off the land, as there were a number of traditional professions whose products were needed for agriculture. When demands of mechanisation and modernisation were one way out on the path of social evolution, it was rural life itself that became obsolete. Bankruptcy and decay were undeniable facts, social disintegration too with all its common symptoms – migration, ageing, and the rapid draining of the human resources that otherwise would be the credit of future generations. To conclude, this is a population that remained quietly in tradition, confusingly witnessing its increasing difficulties in reproducing traditional economic and social patterns. But when life itself is affected in this way, it gives rise to a cultural problem that could be more permanent and difficult to solve. Self-confidence, believing that change is possible, believing that the territory has a future, are all undermined. Therefore everybody chooses as first priority a very simple thing: to raise the formal educational level of their children – and then strongly advise them that the future is only possible if they escape their condemned community. This stagnated scenario could not be maintained forever. In the last few decades macro-social evolutions, characterised by increased flows of information and communication, by the full impact of globalisation, transformed this type of deprived communities – very common in Southern Europe – into something very ambiguous. Incapable of stopping fast transitional trends, local social fabric accommodates now a confused mixture of norms and values. Traditional roles and principles are still functioning while, at the same time, modern norms and values open the way to severe conflicts which, to put it in a nutshell, could be seen as the tensions between tradition and modernity. But above all this, local problems are persistent, and it seems hard to stop consequences such as desertification or the rapidly ageing of the population. Researchers, community educators, social workers and alike, especially those concerned with local development, often state that young adults are the solution to the problem. Their discourse says that to stop the draining of local human resources we should create specific processes designed for them. If new generations stay instead of leaving there would be a hope. Consequently, young adults were the target of a series of local development actions, hoping that the renewal of such deprived communities would take root.

All these motives lead us to think that our research is an important one. The main research problem was to understand, as fully as possible, the local development processes that took place in Cachopo, in the period 1985-2002. Regarding young adults – our focus in this paper –research questions follow: did local development projects for young adults contribute to stopping the migration of the population? Did such projects contribute to any social changes that overcome the temporal term of one generation? Of course, any possible answers to the second question imply that we analyse two sequential generations. Our research is a multiple case study (Yin, 1993) designed to understand the process (Merriam, 1998). In it we analysed five different

experiences in their multiple relations, unified in the local development history of this particular territory. First, the creation of an Infant Animation Centre and a community association that emerged during the process to manage it. Second and third, the creation of two productive micro-enterprises, as a result of original training programmes designed to promote self-employment. Fourth, the emergence of a local cultural association, whose central social actors were former beneficiaries of local development actions. Fifth, a religious association started by a young couple embodying missionary principles, who built a centre to support the oldest and other important structures (like a library or a voluntary service to help youngsters in their school tasks). Data collection was made over one and a half years using non-participating observation registered in a reflexive field diary; document analyses; in-depth and semi-structured interviews. Analysis was done through codification in categories and sub-categories, followed by a fragmentation that gathered the specific categories of all interviews. Later on, fragmentation was conveying poor results, as we sensed that the holistic vision of the case was being lost. Consequently, we returned to more natural forms of interpretation. Main references in methodological issues were Bogdan and Biklen (1991), Denzin and Lincoln (1998), or Taylor and Bogdan (1998).

### **Comings and Goings between two Generations**

In 1985, a team called Radial (Rede de Apoio ao Desenvolvimento Integrado do Algarve<sup>1</sup>) began to work with informal groups of persons in Cachopo, after the approval of a project that was supported by the Bernard Van Leer Foundation, which included three lines of work: support for infant education; capacitating local informal groups; and social-economic intervention. From 1989 on, the Radial team created a civic association called In Loco that followed the work being done in the Radial phase. The main characteristics of the methodology used by Radial agreed with some important points of the local development we believe in. Community problems were taken as a departure point for action (Rezsöházy, 1988). Radial mobilised informal groups interested in solving local problems, but stressing from the beginning that they were partners, and that local participation was crucial. In that sense, Radial was there to trigger the action, but soon persons would have to take responsibility for all the projects, thus promoting local control over the process and decision-making and increasing autonomy. The collective was the main unit of work, and as collectives people underwent educational processes (Ander-Egg, 1982) towards change, a fundamental characteristic in local development (Silva, 1990). The general aim of the launched projects was to improve the quality of people's life, and the processes should strengthen the capacity, organisation and self-confidence of people. In local development a lot is spoken about its endogenous character, taken as the capacity for inner strive towards change (Vachon, 2000), even if, in deprived communities such as Cachopo, in the understandable absence of inner spontaneous dynamics external triggering is often paradoxically required (Melo, 1988). Consequently, we think that in such cases local development can restore the lost endogenous capacity for action (Fragoso, 2003).

The initial actions of Radial were targeted at young adults. Radial joined young adults to create the infant centre; it was necessary to create an in-service action-research training programme for the candidates, which lasted for three and a half years. They joined young adults further to form a group (soon legalised as an association) who took care of the project of constructing a brand new centre, and managing it. They joined young women to enter two different professional training programmes, aiming at the creation of small production units, where women could be the owners of their own business. Radial's hopes were that these actions would create jobs, and stop the constant migration of young adults, looking for employment and

life somewhere far away. We also need to stress that precisely when In Loco ceased its physical presence in Cachopo, in 1991, an association was created by external elements connected with the Catholic Church (but who came to Cachopo to integrate into the community). This conveyed a new impetus to local processes, because the Day Care Centre alone employed a significant number of young women, not to mention other types of projects. It is very important to say that local educators working at the infant centre were trained to promote, at all times, the encounter between children and their own cultural elements. This means, for instance, that child worked yearly local themes (the cork, local medicines, oral tradition, etc.) and that the treated information was given back to people in a variety of forms. Educators were able to keep in touch with children when they grew up, and created groups of children from 10-16 years who still get together in the centre (and use some resources, like computers and the internet). In the year 1995, some former beneficiaries of local development processes (especially, from a weavers' workshop) created a new cultural association. In it, some older elements gathered significant numbers of young adults. They created a group to sing traditional songs; another to perform local dances, a third one to form a small guitar school, and so on. Every year this association performs a great number of cultural activities that specially integrate young adults. Summarising, the first generation of young adults, the ones who started working with Radial and later on made their own way, were capable of profoundly changing their lives and further to promote some changes in the territory and its people (we have no room to fully describe changes that occurred). It is certain that new protagonists arose, and there was local power re-distribution. Some women made wonderful progress. They were able to change the local significance of gender roles over the years. Their *conscientization* processes went as far as understanding the importance of political action. In fact, two of these women were candidates for local administration (integrated in different political parties). A significant number of jobs were created, and some former young adults stayed. Regarding the second generation of adults, the departure point of their cultural scenario was very different. They had chances to look at their own culture, not as something without any kind of value in modern life, but as something that it's a part of their positive identity. This change was made possible first by the philosophy of the infant animation centre, and second by the cultural environment built by the cultural association.

Today the majority of young adults don't wish to leave. Some are still forced to do so, because in the meantime educational levels have risen substantially, revealing a perverse cycle that is very common in Southern Europe. That is, the higher the education level of young adults in deprived communities, the lower the chances for them to stay. And so these communities are dispossessed of the best they have. We know that employment and housing are indeed key elements for preventing young adults' migration. Housing is a problem that can be solved politically. But in fact cultural changes are unpredictable and we detected a new problem. In the past it was possible to propose employment creation projects for young adults that produced low-income professions. The weaver's workshop, working at the day care centre, or other types of jobs formerly created belonged to this category. But nowadays, no young adults are seduced by such offers. There were several attempts to place young adults working for a period of time within the created structures, but they all abandoned sooner or later. On the one hand, this means that the projects initiated 17 years ago will fatally die with generation turnover. On the other hand, it is clear that the solutions of the past have no application to the present generation of young adults.

### **Conclusions**

We can conclude first that the processes that cause mass exodus of the population can

only partially be stopped by local development. The notions of market, the prominence of the urban over (the) rural life, the absolute mobility of capital and production structures, all of these are factors that influence life in small deprived communities. Local development can trigger important changes – but it cannot radically change society evolution.

Second, we can use Hobsbawm ideas to further analyse our case at the local level. The processes that occurred in Cachopo triggered very significant social changes. But indeed situation proves to be determinant. In other words, the first generation of young adults has accomplished so much, that we would predict that the patterning of change could be kept over time. But generation turnover transforms situation, which presents limitations to the possibilities of action. Also we think that local development processes were the engines of several social changes, but there is no way to predict the particular directions that these changes would take. So the new is in fact insecure and unpredictable, a characteristic that frequently enervates community educators or other field agents.

Third, Geertz framework is also very useful to explain our case. It is a matter of considering separately, and yet within their connections, social change patterning and cultural changes. Basically we can identify a clear discontinuity between the two, which explains the present situation. On the one hand, Cachopo had achieved a patterning of social change that, in theory, could open doors towards more organic changes, thus improving social life. For instance, it is a fact that the population has today a clear conscience that change is possible, and a new social dynamic expresses itself in the number of projects submitted to European programmes such as Leader, or other regional programmes. But young adults today are untouched by these social changes... simply because cultural and educational changes have led them to aim for something else, and again they have to seek their lives objectives outside their territory. This discontinuity explains why after these 17 years, young adults still are forced to leave.

Fourth, it is not strange that only a few changes did overcome the temporal term of one generation. Material structures can only endure if they are used; local protagonists and new balances of power can fade away. Cultural identity changes, which were triggered by the first generation, profited and embodied by the second, can make a difference. But at the same time, young adult's today still have no minimum conditions to participate in the social life of their territory, even if they want to. Despite the fact that the processes of local development in Cachopo reached an interesting level of social change, any further qualitative changes would seem to require the beginning of a brand new cycle of action, almost as if it was needed to begin from scratch. In our opinion, this effect, which we will call the *Continuous Restart*, is very likely to happen in societies in fast transition that presents strong differences between cultural systems of two sequential generations. In other words, recovering profound delays in a fast changing global society promotes the lack of continuous solutions that would build bridges from tradition to modernity.

Finally we don't want to state that *The Continuous Restart* is an universal element in modern societies. Far from it, but we have found similar situations in other researches. Last year, in San Francisco, we presented a paper (Lucio-Villegas and Fragoso, 2003) where the focus of the case was young adult's situation in Southern Spain. We had found a situation we called *The Perverse Circle*. It describes the following: young adults abandon school at the end of (the) compulsory education (16 years old) or before, to work in intensive agriculture and tourism. This situation is kept up for a period of up to six or eight years, after which they usually apply to local professional training programmes. This situation increases the spectrum of uncertainties that young adults experience regarding their futures, and constrains their personal development. On

the other hand, we don't know how many young adults do not escape the perverse circle. But the fact is that in our investigations both in Portugal and Spain, in communities characterised by processes of rapid social change, either we consider them in their micro or macro dimensions, it is very likely that morbid symptoms do appear. These symptoms are usually the mirror of ambiguous situations, of the social mixtures that lie in the grey areas between tradition and modernity. In this specific case, we think *The Continuous Restart* is a similar morbid symptom of social change processes.

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## **Limited Access: Exploring the Barriers to Executive Style Graduate Degree Programs for Women of Childbearing Age**

Allyson Friesen  
Vancouver, Canada

**Abstract:** This study explores the barriers that limit women's access, ages 25 to 39, to executive Master degree programs, particularly if they pursue both motherhood and a progressive career.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Women make up over half of Canada's population, yet they comprise less than half of the participants in many executive Master's degree programs (Simon Fraser University, 2000 and Queen's University, 2000) and only 34 per cent of managers and administrators in the work force (Wells, 1997, p. 61). These statistics provide insight into the cycle of frustration encountered when women of childbearing age seek admittance to graduate programs. Recent literature's focus is the successful careers of women over 40 (Maley, 1997). However, most of these women are childless and single or they are on their second marriage with stepchildren. It was, therefore, important to obtain feedback from women planning for a successful career who anticipated the need to balance a career and family. This study concentrated on the barriers that limit women's access, ages 25 to 39, to executive Master degree programs.

### **Context**

The global shift from a manufacturing based to an information- and service-based economy, demands a more highly educated workforce. Positions that previously required limited education now demand extensive training. This trend impacts young workers in particular who require more education for entry-level positions. White suggests that forging a vocational identity is even more complex for women, who need to integrate family and career roles (White, 2000, p. 168). Many women are forced to seek self-employment and consulting opportunities as these employment options offer the flexibility required to balance both familial and career roles (White, 2000, p. 240). The executive graduate programs, however, continue to focus on the mid-career learner. The typical student profile is male, 37 years old, with seven to fifteen years of management experience. By restricting their entrance requirements to the traditional career pattern, executive Master's degree programs fail to attract female applicants from the 25 to 39 year old talent pool.

Executive Master's degree programs have chosen to ignore the changes to women's roles and so they have failed to adapt their programs to meet women's education needs. The programs' focus is instead on those learners who have established careers. This position contrasts with the changes that have taken place in a workforce where more education is required to obtain positions that could previously be achieved without a Master's degree or professional designation. As a result, the management experience required for admission to many of the MBA programs is more difficult to obtain. This is especially true if maternity and parental leave are required, and if the employer ignores the skills that are acquired through parenting. The issue of access is compounded by the fact that women wait to procreate after their careers are begun or are established. Clearly, the child-bearing period clashes with the period that is the most lucrative for seeking an executive style graduate education.

Access to executive Master's degree programs is further complicated by the fact that universities expect and encourage executive program applicants to have the support of their organizations. An unanticipated response to this support has been excessive tuition fees which have financially crippled the independent learner (Queen's University, 2000).

## **Research Design**

The research was conducted in a four-step process spanning five months. Statistical information from eight Canadian universities provided the base for a comparative analysis of the design and demographics of executive Master's degree programs and established the attributes of the 'typical student profile'. On-line focus groups were conducted over a two-week period with ten learners who fit the study criteria from the MBA (Masters of Business Administration) and MALT (Masters of Arts in Leadership and Training) programs at Royal Roads University. Participants answered a series of thirteen questions and interacted with each other in news-group format. The incorporation of the learning circle principles created intimate and easy discussions (Roddick, 1993). The on-line component provided flexible participation times and accessed participants residing in remote areas. The decision to use focus groups to obtain women's perspectives was appropriate given Palys' (1997) position that even though the researcher provides a structure for the focus groups, the researcher's role is to "initiate, prompt, and referee the discussion" (p. 158). Further, the findings can be influenced more by the group than by the researcher. My bias determined that the women lead the discussion thus, effectively limiting my influence on the direction taken by the group. As moderator, I created a permissive and nurturing environment that encouraged different points of view, and allowed the absence of consensus (Krueger, 1994). Responses from the focus groups were coded, tabulated and converted into a database to determine general themes. Data obtained from the focus groups and statistical analysis was used to formulate the interview questions for faculty from the MBA and MALT programs. The interview questions were based on the concerns raised by the participants and the themes identified in the literature. This approach allowed for validation and triangulation of the data from the focus groups (Kirby & McKenna, 1989, p. 81). The participants also completed a survey to provide additional demographic information.

Interviews conducted on-line with three faculty members focused on program philosophy, intent, and design. The faculty interviews and statistical data offered insight into additional issues that are considered in the recommendations, such as including budget constraints, political issues, and organizational mandates.

## **Findings**

1) Two thirds of the interviewees see a correlation between the perceived prestige of an institution and its tuition fees. One interviewee explained that Royal Roads University targets mid-career learners because traditional markets are well served by traditional universities, and because these learners are generally able to pay market prices. This observation is profound given that the new wave of corporate funding limits women's access. Focus group participants explained that women are typically in a lower wage bracket and the associated entry-level or service industry salary makes it difficult to save or borrow the thousands of dollars necessary to enroll in a masters program. This concurs with the literature which shows that most women start their own companies to better accommodate the family's needs or because they arrive at dead-end positions (Vinkenburg, Jansen, & Koopman, 2000, p. 123). It is also difficult to approach an organization for funding when the company questions the employee's value. An employee who is looking to change her employment situation may require additional education. One focus group participant advised that if an entry-level position is maintained, the employee's educational aspirations may be given little consideration and so there may be negligible support in the workplace. A university administrator suggested that too many women in a graduate program could decrease the program's credibility, turning it into a 'pink MBA'. White suggests that "women are entrapped by male norms and they accommodate these norms rather than

challenge the rules of the game” (White, 2000, pp. 172-173). Some focus group participants advised they would have preferred admission to executive style graduate education at an earlier age to avoid the problems associated with having children while completing Master’s level work.

Figure 1.

University	Program	Percent sponsored	Cost per year (CDN dollars)	Av. age	Percent women	Program duration	Undergrad degree	Post-grad degree	Av. years work experience	Av. Mgmt
Royal Roads	MALT	Na	\$5,500	43	66	2 years	Na	Na	Na	5-7
Royal Roads	MBA	Na	\$11,000	39	40	2 years	Na	Na	13	5-7
*UBC	MBA	Na	\$5,600 or \$7,000 (whole program)	30	37	15 months	Required	Na	6	Na
Simon Fraser	EMBA	70	\$13,500 or \$16,500 (inclusive)	37	33	2 years	Required 75% (exceptions)	Na	6-10	4-5
*Queens	EMBA	Na	\$32,500 (inclusive)	38	33	2 years		5%	15	Na
*McGill	MBA	Na	\$3,797 (\$2,597 for Quebec residents)	28	20	2 years	Required 100%	11%	4	Na
*Rotman	EMBA	Na	\$31,500	37	27	20 months	63%	19%	14	8
*Richard Ivey	EMBA	75%	\$31,500	38	25	2 years	Na	20%	15	Na
*Ottawa	EMBA	75%; 25% full	\$26,000 CDN (inclusive)	39	25	21 months	Required	NA	15	Na

- **Universities ranked in the Financial Times survey of the world’s elite business schools (January 22, 2001)**

Figure 1 compares the six Canadian executive style Master’s degree programs ranked in The Financial Times survey of the world’s elite business schools (January 22, 2001) as well as other Canadian programs in close proximity to Royal Roads University. The information was obtained from the universities’ student profile data. Figure 1. also confirms that the “typical Canadian student profile” is male, 37 years old, has 10-15 years of work experience, and holds a management position. Royal Roads University has significantly more women in its programs, yet women in the MBA program comprise less than 50 per cent of the enrolled learners. UBC has the next highest percentage of women in its MBA program. It also has the lowest tuition fees of the universities surveyed. The literature and focus groups identified tuition and funding as barriers to women’s access to executive graduate degree programs. Royal Roads’ MALT program has the lowest tuition, highest average learner age and greatest proportion of women.

2) Seventy-two percent of research participants revealed they sought additional education that would enable them to change jobs or start their own companies. Corporate funding, therefore, presents a monumental financial challenge to learners who are required to fund their own learning. One focus group participant revealed that the tuition fees were a significant issue as she was self-employed. While her employees maintained steady incomes, she was the one who went without a pay-cheque when times were difficult. Making a large financial commitment and carrying the financial burden of a company is a daunting task. Another participant sought financing to secure tuition fees. She pursued a line of credit to fund her schooling. Even at the age of 36, she had to get her husband to co-sign for her because she didn’t make “enough”. Corporate funding, if available for learners, is often limited. Most of the participants had to assume responsibility for the majority of the tuition fees and other costs associated with the Royal Roads MBA. One employer committed to funding \$5,000/year towards tuition, but required the participant to allocate two out of their three weeks of holiday time to the residencies, and take one week of holiday time without pay. One participant advised that several other male employees,

who were groomed for management positions, received full funding for their MBAs. Other financial options including scholarships and funding that came with strings attached that included having the participants apply for student loans for which they were ineligible.

3) Consistent with Jack Mezirow's prediction, two-thirds of the respondents expressed concern that the transformational process and the constant questioning of the world around them would lead to career and marital breakdown. Mezirow suggests that the deepest level of learning occurs when people change their frame of reference regarding their beliefs, feelings and assumptions and their environment through critical reflection. This intensely threatening process, which results in a change of epistemic, sociolinguistic and psychic perspectives, often includes feelings of bewilderment and loss of control on the part of the learner (Boshier, 1989; Mezirow, 1999; Schugurensky, 2001). One faculty interviewee noted that a far greater measure of perceived value/prestige of a program is in the life-changing impact upon the program's graduates. However, the universities fail to provide formal resources to guide these changes and the qualified staff to support the transformational process, which contribute to the breakdown of students' relationships and employment situations. Several of the participants identified challenges as adult learners in programs promoting transformational change. A focus group participant expressed frustration and disappointment regarding the lack of interest and support from her employer and her inability to apply the information she learned in class to the workplace. Another participant described her intense feelings of anxiety that resulted from instructor's constant changes to the deadlines for assignments and from his confusing instructions. One focus group participant revealed that the more she learns, the more she questions her husband's lack of desire to pursue ongoing learning. Participants reported that the divorce/split rate for their program has been about 8%, with more men splitting up than women by a ratio of 4:1. Other participants expressed frustration with their lack of balance while pursuing graduate-level education, a career, and motherhood. One participant adopted a 'superwoman' approach without success. She is constantly thinking about all the things she needs to get done by certain dates while trying to appear completely in control of her situation at work and home. She revealed that her attempts to ensure quality time, as opposed to quantity time with her family often failed with her husband noting her mental absence. Another participant confessed that she is most concerned about her lifestyle's impact on her marriage and children. Another participant revealed that had she known that the quality and benefits of her education would be compromised by her goal of having children when she originally committed to the MBA program, she would have had to choose between them.

### **Discussion**

Program content, role modeling, corporate funding, and admission requirements continue to support the traditional career. Universities and adult education programs which adopt a proactive approach in the marketing and design of their programs must achieve an understanding of the barriers women face when they seek to balance career and family. Only by fully integrating the family into the learning process can universities hope to incorporate a holistic approach to education. Catalyst's 2000 study, Women and the MBA, determined that employers fail to support women who pursue MBAs. What are the universities' responsibilities? Women's careers and educations are impacted by societal, organizational and institutional factors and universities and the business community can influence each other. To significantly impact the barriers identified, changes must take place at the societal and corporate level. As, Phillips and Phillips advise:

Discrimination against women is engrained in our social and economic system, so deeply imbedded that equality will not be easily achieved by any number of specific remedial provisions, no matter how well intentioned. Basic to a systemic change must be the acceptance by men that the work in the home is not “women’s work” but work to be shared. (1983, p. 165).

Educational institutions teach behaviours that are valued in the workplace. Universities can, therefore, help remedy the corporate and societal injustice that women face by examining the universities’ cultures and practices and their obvious and covert influence on women’s learning (Powell, 2000; Hayes & Flannery, 2000). Further, many universities prepare learners for jobs in a non-existent work world. Those who enter the workforce face tough standards. Mid career may no longer be 40 years old for a woman. The literature reveals that women’s career development is lacking for the critical mass. This apparent change has resulted from the media’s profile of a few women. To effectively counter this change, universities must actively market their programs and recognize of the dangers of ‘like promoting like’.

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## **Women, Literacy and Voice**

Rebecca J. Garland, Sondra Cuban

Harvard Graduate School of Education, Seattle University

**Abstract:** This paper challenges unstated assumptions that women literacy learners constitute a unitary category with the same needs. The two qualitative studies presented examine two sub-groups of women ABE-level learners: bilingual Latina women and women suffering from health problems. Programmatic implications that question essentialist notions of undereducated women are discussed.

### **Introduction**

In the United States, the vast majority of adults attending ESOL, ABE, and GED classes are women (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Considering this fact, the need to better understand the learning issues of women with low literacy skills is critical (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). While studies of women literacy learners are increasing in number and scope (Caffarella, 1996; Redfield, 1996), the unstated assumption that this population constitutes a unitary category with essentially the same problems and literacy needs remains largely unchallenged. Few studies exist that contrast the learning issues of sub-groups within this population (see Luttrell, 1997).

The two qualitative studies discussed in this paper focus on two underrepresented groups of women literacy learners whose situations challenge essentialist notions of undereducated women. One study looks at three bilingual Latina learners attending a New England ABE program. The other focuses on thirteen women attending several different library literacy programs whose health problems have affected their school attendance. The first study uses an unorthodox method of analysis that is designed to tap unconscious understandings - called Interpretive Poetics (Rogers, Casey, Ekert, Holland, Nakkula, & Sheinberg, 1999) – with the goal of identifying participants' unspoken attitudes toward the English language. The second examines how the health problems of the participants affect their persistence, learning, and daily activities. Although both studies share a common theoretical framework, each yields findings that have different programmatic implications based on the diverse characteristics and situations of the two groups of women.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Tisdell (1993) has classified the wide body of literature that comprises feminist pedagogy into two general theoretical categories. One category, which draws on the work of feminist relational psychologists, emphasizes the importance of personal empowerment to women's learning (Gilligan, 1982/93; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). Proponents of this perspective espouse teaching practices that help women feel "connected" and "nurtured" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986, pp.214-229). The other category, which draws on critical feminist research, looks at pedagogy from a political perspective, emphasizing the salience of race, class, and gender as intersecting systems of power that affect women's learning (Collins, 1991/2000). Teaching practices that arise from this perspective are commonly described as "confrontational" (hooks, 1989, p.53). Educational practices that focus on personal growth are seen as incompatible with methods that emphasize the development of political consciousness.

The tendency to view these two perspectives as mutually exclusive implies a structuralist epistemological framework that assumes that each category is immutable and unchanging. While structuralist perspectives are important for social transformation because they highlight oppression, they may fail to consider the ways that individual women are constructed and re-constructed through shifting and intersecting relationships. The authors of this paper take a post-

structuralist feminist approach (Tisdell, 1998; Fine, 1992), acknowledging that “truth” for each participant is socially constructed through a complex and ever-changing interplay of individual and societal factors.

### **Study #1 - Attitudes Toward English of Three Bilingual Latina Women in an ABE Class**

The participants in this pilot study were three Latina women who were born in the U.S. and were attending an ABE program designed for fluent English speakers. One was 22, another 27, and the other 41 years old. Although all three had been unable to speak English when they entered American public schools as children, they now considered themselves fully bilingual. Unfortunately, their ability to read and write English was not commensurate with their ability to speak. All three were reading English between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade levels.

Clearly, school had been a place of failure for these women as children. What were they feeling as they entered a classroom again after so many years out of school? What attitudes and expectations based on previous school experiences did they bring with them? How had their situation as first-language Spanish speakers affected their ability to learn in school as children? And how might it affect them now? The researcher believed that answers to these questions might provide insights for adult education teachers working with this population. Unfortunately, questions like these are difficult to study because they deal with feelings and attitudes. While attitudes may be held consciously, they may also reside in the unconscious (Chawla, 1994). Collins (1991/2000) notes that black women’s knowledge is commonly hidden because it is too painful to express. Espin (1997) argues that poor women of color are commonly silent because they believe that no one is listening. How can a researcher hear what a woman does not say? How can she analyze narratives for meanings that are not directly expressed?

Josselson (2004) draws a distinction between two types of textual interpretation. The first, which she calls a “hermeneutics of restoration,” assumes that the participant is the expert of her/his own experience. The researcher’s job is to accurately represent the participant’s meaning. The second, called a “hermeneutics of demystification,” is based on Freudian psychoanalytic theory that assumes that surface appearances hide depth realities (Ricoeur, 1970, p.7). Both approaches are interpretive, since people vary their stories to suit their purposes and contexts. However, both can also yield useful information, depending on the research questions being studied.

For the pilot study under discussion here, the researcher tested an analytic method called “Interpretive Poetics” (IP), which reflects a “hermeneutics of demystification” (Josselson, 2004). IP was developed by Professor Annie Rogers and her students at Harvard (1999). It is an approach to analyzing interview that “draws out the resonance and variability in everyday language, rather than relying on fixed categories of analysis”(p.7). Based on the premise that the unconscious finds ways to express itself indirectly through metaphor, symbolism, pauses, and silences, the IP method seeks to identify linguistic incongruities and interpret them for hidden meanings.

The IP method requires multiple readings of a text to look at different registers of language use. These registers include: 1) interpreting the “relational dance,” or the relationship between researcher and participant; 2) identifying “languages of the unsayable,” which include negations, revisions, smokescreens, and silences; and 3) analyzing “signifiers,” which commonly take the forms of metaphor and metonymy.

The study was guided by two research questions: 1) How did the women participants learn English in American public schools? 2) What attitudes toward the English language do

these women currently hold, based on the stories they tell about their earlier school experiences? To address these questions, the researcher conducted two-hour, semi-structured interviews that focused on each woman's experiences in American public schools. The interviews covered the period from Kindergarten through high school, at which time all three women dropped out. The analysis led to two major findings: 1) For all three women, their initial exposure to English as young children was confusing, humiliating, and painful. 2) As these women became more fluent in English, they appear to have moved from an *inability* to use the language to communicate fully to a *reluctance* to do so. The IP method indicates that these women may associate the English language with the need to hide what they are really thinking and feeling. These findings suggest that at least some bilingual women may be entering literacy programs with ambivalent feelings toward the very thing they are there to learn: English.

*Study #2 - How Health-related Issues of Thirteen Women's Persistence in Library Literacy Programs*

The second study examined the experiences of thirteen women who were participating in a larger national research project on persistence within ABE programs (Comings, Cuban, Porter, & Doolittle, 2004). These women had indicated that health-related conditions affected their school attendance. The analysis was based on in-depth interviews with the women and on some home visits. Several of the participants were interviewed a second and even a third time. Case studies were created of each participant, with the goal of identifying how each woman understood her health problems as affecting her education and daily life. The following two findings have useful programmatic implications:

**First Finding:** Many immigrant women in the study reported feelings of isolation and frustration over the lack of social supports. The immigrant women in the study reported that they missed friends and family in their home countries, that they were depressed by their lack of social networks, and that they were frustrated by their dependence on their husbands for translation and general assistance. Many told the researcher that they felt trapped by their lack of transportation, heavy childcare responsibilities, and the scarcity of work opportunities. Some said they were pursuing an education in order to make friends and to escape from boredom and loneliness. Depression was a common health issue that influenced these women's persistence in school. In many cases, these women's tutors sympathized with their problems but did not address them. For example, when Carmen told her tutor that she was depressed about staying home with her baby, the tutor said:

You're doing better than you think you are...I just want you to work on that computer more...you have got to promise to try. Because Chris [her husband] and I might start crying if you don't get on that computer....It would be normal to be bored at home with a new baby. Any mother would be.

Carmen wanted to put her child in daycare and find a job. She felt that if she could work, she could acquire more English and make friends. This finding corroborates other studies that also note the desire of many immigrant women to enter public arenas to speak and practice English (Rockhill, 1990; Norton, 2000). However, Carmen's husband did not want her to work outside the home, and her tutor supported her husband.

**Second Finding:** *Many of the women suffered from cumulative health conditions that were chronic and situational, related to poverty, housing problems, employment, and transportation.*

The health problems of many of the participants were not related to specific medical conditions, but were instead circumstantial and related to social conditions (poverty, housing, employment). For example, one woman complained about back pain and problems due to domestic labor. Another injured herself while taking the bus to her home health care job.

Another, who was a nurse in Mexico but was cleaning houses in the U.S., developed rashes from the chemicals she used at her job. All of the women reported feeling exhausted due to heavy workloads.

These stresses affected the women's school attendance and performance. One woman suffered from a number of problems, including sadness about separating from an alcoholic husband, pain in her neck and shoulders, and foot spurs due to a lifetime of manual labor in her country. She said:

Like most time when I have problem take on, I can't concentrate. And she said, read me something - why you can't read? I told her I can't. I tell them I can't concentrate... Maybe one bit little, I can remember little piece, but like the whole story for say what the book, I said I am losing concentration. Something is wrong with me.

The two findings in this study suggest that the health-related materials typically available to women in literacy programs may ignore the issues that are most relevant for them. These curricula usually emphasize the medical facts of preventative and emergency health and often focus on specific diseases that are supported by major medical lobbies, insurance, and pharmaceutical companies (like Pfizer) that emphasize biomedical responses. This study demonstrates the importance of health care supports that arise from the women's lived experiences, and from their own health care strategies, rather than from top-down initiatives.

### **Implications**

A comparison of the two studies described above raises three issues of particular interest. The first concerns the value of qualitative methodologies to address research questions that relate to women's literacy learning. Both studies suggest that qualitative approaches are effective in identifying literacy issues faced by diverse groups of women. Findings from the first study point to the need for further research into the types of resistances bilingual Latina women may bring to the English literacy classroom. Programmatic interventions might include the introduction of materials and practices that specifically address the emotional issues surrounding these women's decision to return to school. Findings from the second study suggest that the focus on women's health from multiple perspectives might assist the adult literacy field in expanding its health literacy programming. The results from this study support the development of diverse health literacy curricula that use feminist approaches, focus on increased public services, and include community health collaborations. Future studies that examine the experiences of other sub-groups of women have the potential to generate additional insights that may further influence differential programming for specific groups of women.

The second issue raised by these two studies pertains to the question of text interpretation. Clearly, there are countless ways of analyzing narratives and case studies. Under what conditions is a "hermeneutics of restoration" (Josselson, 2004) the most appropriate approach? And under what conditions is a "hermeneutics of demystification" (Josselson, 2004) a better choice? Josselson (2003) notes that the stories people tell reflect their hopes, desires, memories and intentions rather than a single historical "truth." Thus, no matter how faithful a researcher may be to the actual words of the text, no single valid interpretation or set of interpretations exists. Both approaches are effective in generating meaning in different contexts and with different research questions. The different, yet fruitful, findings of the two studies under discussion demonstrate the respective value of each.

The third and final issue raised involves the question of the effectiveness of a post-structuralist framework. Both researchers claim to operate from this theoretical perspective. Both acknowledge the interplay of political and social realities with the personal experiences of their

participants. The big question, as always, rests on the translation of theory into practice. How useful for classroom practice is a perspective that weaves the personal with the political? Is it possible to be “connected” (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986) and “confrontational” (hooks, 1989) at the same time? How can teachers realistically incorporate different women’s lived experiences in a way that addresses the whole person?

Tisdell (1993) believes that a potential synthesis of teaching practices based on a synthesis of personal and political perspectives offers new possibilities for feminist pedagogy. She argues that the tension between these two apparent contradictions creates conditions that are ideal for the development of new theories of women’s learning. But she also recognizes the difficulties in integrating the two. Strategies for doing so include relating the discussion of political ideas to a consideration of how these ideas affect people’s actual lives. “Teaching strategies that unite theory and practice, that value affective forms of knowledge, and that require reflection on how the course content relates to students’ life experiences” may represent a good place to start (Tisdell, 1993, p.101). The two studies described highlight important questions and identify possible areas for future research.

### Conclusion

It is useful to compare studies that may, at face value, seem to have little in common. An examination of the points of connection and contradiction can generate new questions and insights. The comparison of the two studies discussed here has raised issues pertaining to the value of qualitative research methodologies, the usefulness of different analytic strategies, and the translation of theory into women’s literacy practice. Future comparisons might explore the relative contributions and limitations of qualitative methodologies versus quantitative, or contrast the learning issues of men to those of women. Comparisons that look across populations and research methods have the potential to contribute to a richer and deeper understanding of how different women learn.

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## Using Information Literacy to Build LGBTQ Cultural Literacy

André P. Grace

University of Alberta, Canada

**Abstract:** This paper engages the idea of using information literacy to build LGBTQ cultural literacy, exploring how the latter relates to learning and personal development. In doing so, it troubles both education and literacies as hegemonic social constructions. It also explores the notion of critical Queer cultural literacy as an inclusive, ethical practice.

### Introduction

Information literacy can be understood as having the technical and strategic capacities to retrieve, analyze, evaluate, exchange, and distribute information via media such as the Internet. LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or transsexual, and Queer) cultural literacy can be understood as having knowledge and understanding of being, believing, desiring, becoming, belonging, and acting for persons across a spectrum of sex, sexual, and gender differences, and having insights regarding how the prevailing social hierarchy and the dominant culture-language-power nexus impact LGBTQ culture.

In this paper I take up the notion of using information literacy to build LGBTQ cultural literacy, exploring how the latter relates to learning and personal development. In doing so, I trouble both education and literacies as hegemonic social constructions. I also explore the notion of critical Queer cultural literacy as an inclusive, ethical practice.

### The Culturally Illiterate Queer Me

Not only do heterosexuals and those questioning their sex-and-gender differences need to build knowledge and understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity, but LGBTQ persons also need to be so engaged. This is because we have usually grown up without seeing ourselves accepted, accommodated, or represented in any aspect of schooling or formal education for adults. Just as those who clearly see themselves as male/masculine or female/feminine and heterosexual need to address their ignorance and fear around LGBTQ identities and differences, those whose gender identity and/or sexual orientation lie outside what hegemony has deemed culturally accepted and acceptable also need to become Queer literate to counter heteronormative educational and other socialization processes that have shamed us and left us out.

Purves (in Fagan, 1996) maintains negotiating the personal and the cultural involves mediating a life or cultural curriculum:

In order to be an accepted and functioning individual within one's cultural context, the cultural curriculum must fill three functions: (1) to develop cultural loyalty, to know the expectation of one's primary culture, (2) to move beyond the primary context and learn how to interact with a wide range of people in terms of the use of oral and written language, tasks, and activities, and (3) to actualize oneself as an individual, to formulate goals and plans peculiar to oneself, to map out a course of action for one's future. (p. 2)

For a heterosexual who is male/masculine or female/feminine, fulfilling these three functions, while onerous, can at least proceed visibly and *naturally* or *normally*, as these terms are accepted and appreciated in a heterosexualizing culture. As a closeted gay man until my mid-twenties, I never knew the luxury of such fulfillment. In terms of my education, developing cultural loyalty meant adapting to the patriarchal, homophobic, sexist, and heterosexist environment of the Catholic schools that undereducated me and undermined my Queer difference, relegating it to the domain of the depraved. In larger cultural terms, developing cultural loyalty meant being co-opted by a heterosexualizing culture and compelled to adopt

heteronormative standards. This meant denying the Queer me, struggling with self-hatred, and assuming a straight-acting, straight-looking persona, a guise that probably fooled few who knew me. Interacting with others never meant getting to know Queer others or getting to experience Queer culture. Too fearful, too consumed by internalized homophobia, I never made that leap. I kept on hetero-assimilating and hiding the real me. I remained culturally illiterate of what it meant to be, belong, and act Queer, even though the desire to name myself and live Queer overwhelmed me in many moments.

Self-actualizing obviously never happened during this period. That happened later when the self-denial and self-hatred became too much. Physically, mentally, and emotionally worn out, I reached a point where I either had to come out or collapse. So I came out. However, formulating goals and plans peculiar to me initially meant experiencing the throes of teenage angst and socialization at twenty-five, all of which was exacerbated by the trauma of feeling like I was ten years behind in my life. Thus I still wasn't happy. For a long time, I cried a lot and lived to make it to my weekly appointments with my psychologist. Yet even then I knew I wasn't broken. It was a heterosexualizing culture that said I was broken, that wanted to break me. Thus the problem was the cultural curriculum. It wasn't a Queer curriculum, so I struggled, feeling dislocated, disconnected, and disempowered. Since cultural literacy is largely attained through formal education and informal interactions and experiences in families, communities, and other sociocultural settings, I had been denied, at least in terms of attaining LGBTQ cultural literacy to help me deal with my Queer identity-difference and socialization. Indeed, from a Queer perspective, I was culturally illiterate. I knew very little about Queer history, culture, politics, language, etiquette, and survival strategies.

### **Troubling Education, Troubling Literacies**

Sadly, despite an explosion of Queer in popular culture, it isn't much better for Queer and questioning youth and adults navigating education today. Tolerated hatred of LGBTQ persons persists across educational sectors (Grace et al., 2004). Ignorance and fear of Queer continue to lead to forms of symbolic (leaving Queer out of curriculum and instruction) and physical (beating Queers up in schools) violence against those of us whose sex, sexual, and gender differences lack hegemonic sanction. In Canada and the United States, attempts to address sexual orientation and gender identity in regular curriculum and instruction in K-12 education usually result in battles on moral and political grounds that let us know ignorance and fear as well as stereotypes and myths are alive and well in purportedly public education (Grace & Benson, 2000; Grace & Wells, 2001). It's no better in Canadian and US adult education, despite the rhetoric at the annual national conferences of AERC (US Adult Education Research Conference) and CASAE (Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education) that suggest our field of study and practice values community and the political ideals of modernity – democracy, freedom, and social justice (Grace, 2001; Grace & Hill, in press). In fact, historically, the field has largely ignored the LGBTQ educators, students, and practitioners in its midst (Hill, 1995; 1996; 2003). Even critical adult education, which emphasizes ethical practice, social justice, and meeting the needs of the disenfranchised, has, for the most part, been complicit in maintaining a heteronormative status quo through its usual omission of queer in its theorizing and practice. In this dim light, Herbert Marcuse's notion of repressive tolerance is actualized across our field of study and practice: While adult educators and learners may believe that sites of learning, research, and practice are open spaces where justice and freedom of speech and expression are pervasive, the fact is we are all working in a field that keeps a hegemonic status quo and accords in tact through its exclusions, omissions, and enforced silences (Brookfield, 2001). Thus queer

and allied adult educators and learners working to queer adult education take considerable risks in the face of colleague and institutional reactions that overtly or subtly dismiss queer work or place sanctions on it (Hill, 2003).

Whether it takes place in a K-12, adult, or higher educational environment, when formal education leaves LGBTQ persons out, we have to find a Queer curriculum in other spaces like cyberspace. Using information literacy to build LGBTQ cultural literacy can be a technical and strategic way to build a Queer curriculum. “Information Literacy is the set of skills needed to find, retrieve, analyze, and use information” (ALA, n. d., p. 1). As the ALA Presidential Committee on Information Literacy (1989) relates, it is about positioning people as arbitrators of information:

Ultimately, information literate people are those who have learned how to learn. They ... know how knowledge is organized, how to find information, and how to use information in such a way that others can learn from them. (ALA, n. d., p. 1)

This suggests that information-literate people are thinkers (with critical capacity) and doers (with technical capacity). However, while this sounds promising, we should not rush to employ literacies without exploring their parameters and problematizing the forms they have taken. After all, literacies have power in contexts and social practices. As Carrington (2001) concludes:

The mythic quality attributed to literacy by Western social and educational theory, as well as in public sentiment, has obscured the self-limiting features of school-based literacy pedagogy. ... In this sense the universal “right” to literacy becomes the “right” to be inculcated into particular subjectivities and politicized versions of social reality (p. 283).

Thus literacies have to be critiqued. Since certain ways of knowing and understanding frame literacy work as a key element of educational work, we ought to interrogate what perspectives and principles undergird literacy practices. For example, from a Queer perspective, literacies can be seen to be tied to heteronormative understandings of citizenship, constitutional personhood, and democracy. Like other educational ventures literacy programs are embodied and embedded in politics and purposes, so they should be carefully scrutinized to determine whom they enable or disenfranchise. We need to do this in a continuous and consistent manner.

Historically, literacies have been hegemonistic, so, like education in general, they have not been attentive to the struggles associated with the exclusion of outsider sex, sexual, and gender differences. Indeed literacies have been normative tools that restrict sex, sexual, and gender positionalities and practices to the confines of heteronormative legitimacy. “Locked within a particular sanitized and phobic perceptual environment” (Carrington, 2001, p. 276), heterosexuals who are male/masculine or female/feminine are often illiterate regarding the social realities of those who articulate their positionalities and practices outside the heteronormative box. For many in this cultural group, the notion of individuals occupying a spectrum of sex, sexual, and gender differences is taboo, with contemporary foci on intersexuals, transsexuals, Two-spirited persons, and others only adding to what they perceive as a Queer anathema. Of course, considering their formal under-education in these matters, LGBTQ persons also have to contend with this cultural illiteracy. Moreover, we have to confront malediction (the words that demean and defile us) and self-deprecation since Queer persons are “trained to judge themselves as subordinate, thereby sealing their social fate in a hierarchical society” (p. 277).

### **The Need for Cultural Literacy**

While we need to trouble cultural and other literacies, this critique should not belie the need for them. Indeed building literacies can be a crucial part of inclusive education that employs

ethical pedagogical practices. Luke (1994) infers undergraduates need to engage media and cultural literacy in their studies so they can come to understand how social subjects are constructed in cultural texts. She defines cultural literacy as “a critical literacy of the cultural present—not of the canonized past—of which media literacy is just one component” (p. 30). Offering this critical perspective, Luke maintains undergraduate students have learned (and learned to learn) from media representations to a degree at least comparable to their formal learning using static print texts.

Media ... provide powerful public pedagogies which shape concepts of self, gender and race identity and relations; ideas about which social groups count as culturally relevant and politically powerful; and what counts as ‘history,’ ‘progress,’ ‘science,’ ‘cultural difference,’ ‘family,’ ‘individuality,’ or ‘political processes.’ What I wish to argue here, then, is ... students’ diverse and extensive knowledge of media(ted) and cultural texts, icons and practices needs to be acknowledged as valid and lived experience. But students’ knowledges need also to be interrogated and challenged toward a critical reappraisal of their own taken-for-granted assumptions about themselves and ‘others.’ (p. 31)

In this light, building critical cultural literacy challenges students to interrogate how individuals are named, represented, and located in maintaining the status quo. It teaches them to expose power inequities embodied and embedded in the hegemonic culture-language-power nexus that empowers some citizens while disenfranchising others. It situates a study of the cultural as a study of politics, language, and structures that impact what knowledge counts and what experiences are accepted and acceptable. It is important that students learn to problematize media texts and how popular culture impacts them; it is also important that student investigate how media texts impact the social identities and the cultural and political positions students assume (Luke, 1994).

### **Toward a Critical Queer Cultural Literacy**

Since the 1990s, increasing attention has been paid in such disciplines as philosophy, sociology, and education to multi-perspective theorizing as a way to advance social and cultural theorizing. Multi-perspective theorizing juxtaposes ideas from different theoretical discourses to create more encompassing theories that speak to contemporary social and cultural formations, problems, and projects. Engaging in such theorizing reveals both similarities and tensions in trying to compare ideas from competing theories. As an example of multi-perspective theorizing, it might be useful to consider the problems and possibilities of developing a critical Queer cultural literacy. Queer theory itself engages how the realities of ignorance, fear, hate, and oppression permeating the dominant culture-language-power nexus impact the sex-and-gendered subject’s positionality in contextual, relational, and dispositional terms. Critical theory has focused on domination, and on resistance and transformation in the face of power. In this light, there is common ground between these theories to consider the possibility of building a critical Queer cultural literacy with meaning and value to inclusive, ethical, and transformative politics and praxis. Certainly critical ideas like cultural democracy, ethical public practice (framed in education around being there for *every* student), and disenfranchised Queer citizens as change agents could be explored in terms of framing a Queer project to advance access, accommodation, and full constitutional personhood and citizenship for individuals across sex, sexual, and gender differences.

Education is a sociopolitical enterprise caught up in the larger contexts that bind society in particular ways; it legitimates particular ways of being and acting (McLaren, 2003).

Nevertheless, education can also play a key role in political and cultural action for social transformation (Allman, 1999, 2001). Critical and Queer analyses reveal this paradox. In education both critical pedagogy and Queer pedagogy have focused on transgressing and transforming the mainstream field as a sociocultural and political site where discourse and institutional arrangements have traditionally aided and abetted an exclusionary status quo. Thus these pedagogies intersect to have common concerns and goals. Both can inform strategies of resistance to give Queer persons presence, place, and an opportunity to speak and be heard in education.

Of course, thinking of these possibilities for a multi-perspective engagement that involves both critical and Queer insights is not unproblematic. For example, Queer theory as a postfoundational discourse rejects critical theory's notion of an autonomous subject with a prescriptive identity. However, Queer theory's fluid subject with an unbounded identity, while most useful as we consider the spectral nature of the array of sex, sexual, and gender differences that keep Queer open, is itself problematic when we want to develop tangible plans of resistance to move Queer access and accommodation forward. Queer has to be captured, at least partially and for the moment, to help us think about resistance in relation to whom. Thus key issues in emerging critical Queer theoretical, pedagogical, and cultural literacy work include how to focus on Queer identities without essentializing them and how to juxtapose deconstructive practices integral to Queer theory with action research and productive practices (Ristock & Taylor, 1998). Addressing these issues is necessary to mobilize Queer work for social action in vital and vigorous ways that attend to ethics, politics, justice, agency, and results (Ristock & Taylor, 1998). Such mobilization is an exercise in education for just and democratic citizenship that links inclusive education to the everyday needs of LGBTQ persons.

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# **Citizenship, Immigration and Adult Education: The Role of Immigrant Service Organization in Building a Learning Community for Adult Immigrants**

Shibao Guo

University of Alberta

**Abstract:** This paper examines the founding and historical development of an immigrant service organization in Canada, and the role it played in building a learning community for adult immigrants.

## **Introduction**

Canada is a country of immigrants. Immigration has played an important role in transforming Canada into an ethnoculturally diverse and economically prosperous nation (Knowles, 2000; Moodley, 1995; Palmer, 1975). The 2001 Census of Canada (Statistics Canada, 2003) reveals that as of May 15, 2001, 18.4% of the total population were born outside the country, and that 13.4% identified themselves as visible minorities. According to the Ethnic Diversity Survey, almost one-quarter (23%) of Canada's total population of 22.4 million people aged 15 years and older were identified as first-generation Canadians who were foreign born. The latter number indicates that a large proportion of the new immigrants are adults. Despite our rich history in immigration and the strategic role it plays in our future, the issue of immigrant settlement and adaptation is still prominent. We are still grappling with questions such as: How do new immigrants adapt to a society very different from their own, with a different language, culture, and tradition? How do they navigate the complex paths that citizenship (all the skills required) entails? In this regard, where do they go for assistance? What is the role of voluntary organizations concerning immigrants' settlement and integration? What is the role of adult education? This study was designed to address such questions through investigating the founding and historical development of an immigrant service organization in Vancouver called SUCCESS - United Chinese Community Enrichment Services Society. The research focused on two areas: The founding and historical development of SUCCESS between 1973 and 1998 and The role of SUCCESS in building a citizenship learning community for adult immigrants

## **Theoretical Framework**

Citizenship can be defined as membership in a socio-political community which comprise dimensions: legal status, rights, identity, and participation (Bloemraad, 2000). The past decade has witnessed a revitalized debate regarding the concept of citizenship. Part of this debate has been focused on the membership of immigrants in the national community, or the identity dimension of citizenship. Traditional liberals advocate a culturally neutral state (Rawls, 1971). Critics of such paradigm claim, however, that the ideal of a culturally neutral state embodies an oppressive illusion (Kymlicka, 1995; Tamir, 1995; Taylor, 1994). It promotes a universal citizenship, which ignores differences and perpetuates oppression and inequality. Consequently they propose "differentiated citizenship" as an alternative model (Young, 1995).

As to the best approach of promoting citizenship, all the records examined reveal that there was no consensus. Four contradicting perspectives can be identified here. Walzer (1995) argues that voluntary associations, including ethnic and religious groups, are the best "schools of citizenship," and that it is the best for the state to leave these organizations alone. On the other hand, Arneson and Shapiro (1996) argue that the sort of socialization provided by ethnic and religious groups can inhibit, as well as promote responsible citizenship. They propose mandatory citizenship education in the schools to supplement and correct the lessons learned in civil society. Okin (1997) goes even further to argue that the state should actively intervene in certain

ethnic and religious groups to prevent them from passing on illiberal or undemocratic attitudes and practices. As well, Derwing (1992) conducted a national study among government-sponsored citizenship programs in Canada, which claims that citizenship is often treated as static, as something to be acquired rather than a process of continuous growth in attitudes, skills, and knowledge. As an alternative the author suggests community-based participatory citizenship education. This study was situated in the current debate over citizenship and citizenship education.

### **Research Design**

The central guiding question for this research was: How did a community-initiated voluntary organization such as SUCCESS respond to changing needs of an ethnic community in a multicultural society? Two major qualitative research methods were used to conduct this study: document analysis and personal interviewing. The selection of research methods derived from the nature of this research as an interpretive study, and its attempts to understand people's lived experience with the organization. The document analysis included SUCCESS annual reports, newsletters, AGM meeting minutes, important speeches, and program brochures. Twenty interviews were conducted with the Executive, Board members, and Program Directors. Time and space did not permit interviews with clientele, so their views of this organization were not represented here. In addition to the two major methods, site visiting and participant observation as a volunteer were used as complementary methods to help me contextualize what was read and heard about the organization.

Multiple data sources and methods indicated that this study adopted a triangulation approach which ensured the credibility of the research. For the analysis of the research, a four-stage process was developed: (i) identifying main points, (ii) searching for salient themes and recurring patterns, (iii) grouping common themes and patterns into related categories, and (iv) comparing all major categories with reference to the major theories in the field to form new perspectives. The four-stage process assured that there was frequent interplay between the data and theory.

### **Founding and Historical Development of SUCCESS**

#### *Founding of SUCCESS*

SUCCESS is a community initiated voluntary organization founded in Vancouver in 1973. Its founding was in response to the failure of government agencies and mainstream organizations to provide accessible social services for newly arrived Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong. During its initial stage, the organization mainly provided basic settlement services. By the time the Society reached its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it SUCCESS has become a well-established multi-level service agency providing a wide range of programs and services to both Chinese and non-Chinese. More importantly, it has created a home and a community to which immigrants have felt they belonged. To analyze the founding and development of SUCCESS, it is important to review the social and political context within which the organization was founded. In the post World War II period, Canada was experiencing dramatic social and economic changes. The nation needed skilled immigrants to help with the booming economy, but Europe as the traditional source of immigrants was not able to meet the needs of Canada because of the economic recovery there. The Canadian government turned its recruitment efforts to traditionally restricted areas – Asia. In 1967 a 'point system' was introduced by the Liberal government, which based the selection of immigrants on their "education, skills and resources" rather than their racial and religious backgrounds (Whitaker, 1991, p.19). According to Whitaker, the 'point system' was successful in reversing the pattern of immigration to Canada away from Europe toward Asia and other Third World areas. By the mid-1970s there were more immigrants

arriving from the Third World than from the developed world, with the largest number from Asia, followed by the Caribbean, Latin America, and Africa. Among them, many were from Hong Kong. However, many of them did not speak good English when they came. In particular, with the group who came under the family reunion category, many of them arrived in Vancouver with little or no English at all. Owing to their language difficulties and cultural barriers, many people had problems accessing mainstream social service agencies for assistance. The Hong Kong Chinese also had difficulty in getting help from the local Chinese associations because many of them mainly served their own group members. In 1973 SUCCESS was founded out of this context to bridge the gap in social services.

#### *Historical Development*

To facilitate an understanding of the historical development of SUCCESS between 1973 and 1998, its twenty-five year history has been divided into three stages. This division was made on the basis of a general review of the history of SUCCESS, its programs and services, and its organizational development. Stage One, from 1973 to 1979, is the founding and establishing stage. Stage Two, from 1979 to 1989, is the developing and maturing stage. Stage Three, from 1989 to 1998, deals with its expansion and transformation.

During **Stage One**, following its establishment, the Society successfully sponsored its first project, the Chinese Connection Project. SUCCESS provided direct and referral services to meet the needs of individual immigrants. Meanwhile, they worked with mainstream organizations to help them provide better services to non-English speaking Chinese clients. In addition, SUCCESS also participated in advocacy activities, such as forming a special task force to pursue discussions on the publication of the Green Paper which contained proposed new immigration policies in the Citizenship Act. Volunteer development also started during this stage. The spirit of voluntarism, mutual help, and self-help was manifested through sponsoring refugees from Vietnam in collaboration with other Chinese ethnic organizations. All their programs and services were very popular.

Despite high popularity of the Society, SUCCESS encountered financial difficulty when the Chinese Connection Project came to an end in 1977. However, the Society did not disappoint their clients and decided to continue with their services. Board members, staff, and volunteers all worked together to overcome the difficulties and rebuild the Society. The rebuilding process ended by winning recognition from mainstream organizations in joining the United Way. This also marked the end of the Founding and Establishing Stage and the beginning of the Developing and Maturing Stage.

Demographic changes of Chinese immigrants in Vancouver in the 1980s contributed to the branching out of SUCCESS programs and services to Vancouver South and Richmond during **Stage Two**. In late 1980s, there was a big increase of Chinese immigrants primarily from Hong Kong. Such changes were reflected both in the volume of its services and budget.

Also during Stage Two, SUCCESS held its first Walk With the Dragon Walkathon event in 1985, jointly with the United Way of Lower Mainland. Also in 1985, SUCCESS became a member of the Vancouver Foundation. Also during this time, the Board of Directors approved in principle the proposal to build a permanent SUCCESS Social Services Complex and Extended Care Facility for seniors.

Besides providing programs and services, SUCCESS did not forget its roles in advocacy and fighting for social justice. It participated in the debate over W5 Campus Give Away and the Dim Sum Diary incidents. The Society also strengthened its public relations, fundraising, membership, and volunteer development. As a result of its dedicated hard work and compassion,

it won a number of awards and recognition from the Chinese community and community at large. Although its influence on mainstream society was not obvious at this time, it had become a well established organization by the end of Stage Two.

**Stage Three** was characterized by expansion and transformation. During this stage, there was an increasing number of immigrants from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China. Among the most recent group, there were more business and independent immigrants than before. Their needs for services were different from their early counterparts. To respond to the new demographic changes, SUCCESS expanded its programs and services to business and employment training. They also set up special centres to accommodate the needs of Mandarin speaking immigrants. Furthermore, the Society extended its program and services to other ethnic groups. Following the opening of its first two branch offices, Fraser and Richmond Offices during Stage Two, SUCCESS set up another 6 branch offices in Stage Three in order to meet the changing needs. Stage Three also witnessed the completion of the New Social Service Centre, home to its Head Office. To many people, this meant permanence and stability, a symbol of pride, and a sense of belonging. By the end of Stage Three, success had developed into a holistic, multi-service agency providing a comprehensive array of programs and services based on community needs. To be more specific, these programs and services were categorized into six areas: Community Airport Newcomers Network (CANN), Language Training and Settlement Services, Family and Youth Counselling, Small Business Development and Training, Employment Training and Services, and Group and Community Development. The study reveals that SUCCESS played multiple roles with a three-pronged focus: providing professional programs and services, advocating on behalf of immigrants, facilitating citizenship education and community development.

### **Building a Learning Community for Immigrants: The Contributions of SUCCESS**

The preceding discussion has made it clear that SUCCESS has grown exponentially between 1973 and 1998. This paper concluded that during its initial stage, the organization mainly provided basic settlement services and language assistance. By the time the Society reached its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it had become a well-established multi-level service agency providing a wide range of programs and services to both Chinese and non-Chinese. During its first twenty-five years of existence, it has contributed tremendously to the ethnic Chinese community and Canadian society at large. Its contributions touched both practical and theoretical fields of immigration, citizenship education, and integration. Its social impact was extensive.

An area that SUCCESS has had a great impact on was the Chinese community itself. First, Chinese immigrants benefited immensely from its programs and services. By providing culturally- and linguistically-appropriate services, SUCCESS was able to increase the access of Chinese immigrants to settlement and other social services, which they were entitled to but deprived of, owing to the failure of mainstream social service agencies. It has been instrumental in filling the gap between immigrant community and government services. Furthermore, it helped create a safety network, a home, and a community to which Chinese immigrants felt they belonged. In addition, it helped form a united front among immigrants to fight for social justice and equity in social services, immigration, and other government policies.

Second, SUCCESS has played a significant role in increasing citizenship participation. It acted as a mediator between the individual and the state, which are often seen as two sides of the citizenship equation. It provided a means to investigate the dynamic between individual immigrants' agency and the structural or institutional constraints they face in exercising that

agency (Bloemraad, 2000). As a transitional institution, it has helped immigrants ease the process of settlement, adaptation, and integration. To many immigrants, SUCCESS was a stepping stone for them to integrate into mainstream society.

Furthermore, it built a citizenship learning community. This study demonstrates that SUCCESS adopted a community-based participatory approach in promoting new citizenship learning. It built an infrastructure which incorporates activities that required engagement and collaboration among a number of stakeholders. Besides acquiring knowledge and skills, more importantly it helped immigrants foster a sense of critical consciousness while educating them about their rights and responsibilities. In this learning community, learning is fundamentally socio-cultural and socio-political. It involves constructing complex social relationships between the immigrant community and society at large. In addition, the study reveals that the role of SUCCESS in citizenship education is two-sided. Through its community development events and activities, SUCCESS has contributed to sensitizing the mainstream organizations about their service approaches and changing public attitudes towards immigrants. It helped enhance mutual understanding between immigrants and mainstream society, hence shortened the social distance between the two groups.

### **Implications for Adult Education**

This study has many significant implications for adult education. First, it demonstrates the central role that immigrant community organizations have played in providing accessible and responsive community-based adult education for immigrants. Second, this study sheds new light on the root of adult education in citizenship education and community development. Third, it speaks to the aim of adult education in bringing about democracy and social change. Fourth, as our population is growing more diverse, it is imperative for adult education to be more inclusive in order to embrace people from different ethnic and cultural background.

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