

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Women and Graduate Adult Education:
A Feminist Poststructuralist Story of Transformation

by

Tammy D. Dewar

A DISSERTATION

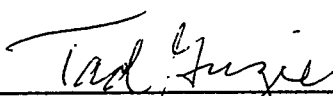
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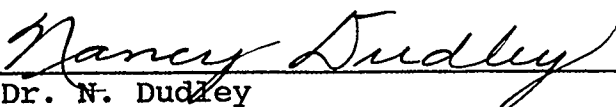
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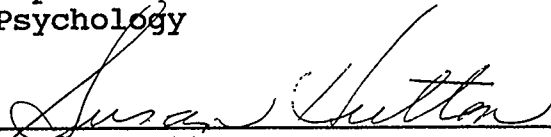
The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a dissertation entitled **Women and Graduate Adult Education: A Feminist Poststructuralist Story of Transformation** submitted by Tammy D. Dewar in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



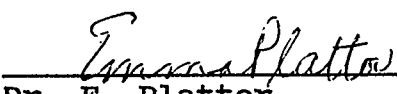
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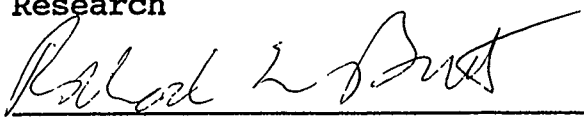
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ABSTRACT

Our increasingly complex information age has demanded of adults a continual involvement in learning projects throughout their lives, not just those confined to high school and preparatory education. Given this current recognition of and emphasis on lifelong learning, there is a corresponding need for competent, ethical adult educators who can skilfully facilitate adult learning. The critical examination and improvement of adult education practices, generally, is of great importance, but the more profound inquiry is that which examines the education of adult educators, especially at the graduate level.

Within a feminist poststructuralist framework, I investigate and problematize the focus of my research through the question "How do women experience their graduate degrees in adult education?" Through repeating hermeneutic cycles, I deepen the problematizing of myself, peers, and the academy in relation to graduate adult education.

I demonstrate a self reflexivity in form and content as advocated by leading feminist poststructuralists, but seldom demonstrated. Individual and collaborative autobiography, real and imaginary dialogue, circles of learning, narrative, fictional representations, stories, deconstruction and poetry are woven together to explore the various and contradictory discourses that frame my own experiences as a

woman/adult educator/researcher; the research process itself; and the graduate adult education experiences of six women adult educators.

The central theme around which everything revolves is transformation - of myself, others, the nature of research and knowledge, and the changing role of the academy in the postmodern world. Readers are invited into my story as observers, but, ultimately, challenged to reflect upon their own experiences and sense of self in the rapidly changing postmodern world. This examination of one's own subjectivity is especially relevant to those involved in graduate programs in adult education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.
"Four Quartets", T.S. Eliot

It was a long time ago and just this moment that I began and finished this dissertation. My linear acknowledgement of the people who cheered me on does not adequately capture the feeling I have that my past, present and future were all spiralling around me as I was writing in 1995 and 1996.

My parents, Don and Betty Dewar, and my sister and brother, Jenny and Phil, are with me in everything I do. They have supported and loved me in my endless risk taking and searching. Our divergent paths and individual life struggles have taught me much about love, joy, despair, strength, courage and spirit. I am blessed, too, with a large extended family and numerous lifelong friends whose background cheering, love and support is never far away.

My involvement with the learners and instructors in the Certificate in Adult and Continuing Education (CACE) has been the most significant of my professional career. I learned much about the true ethos of adult education, and embraced the sense of community that developed among these hundreds of people. It is indeed unique in our fragmented world, and continues to be a source of inspiration and vision to me as I continue my development as an adult educator.

My feelings for the circle of women who participated in this research study - Jyllian Bonney, Pat Fryers, Carol Gerein, Jacquie Peters, and Maureen Motter-Hodgson - go well beyond a thank you. Their support of me and commitment to adult education was sustaining and inspiring as I moved through many "dark nights of the soul" while I was writing.

The role that Tad Guzie, my advisor, played in the completion of this degree is profound. He has truly been a mentor, friend, colleague, benefactor. I would not have finished the degree without his support and advocacy. My other committee members - Richard Butt, Nancy Dudley, Susan Hutton, and Em Plattor - ensured that my final defense was a meaningful and memorable celebration of my work.

Dianne Edwards, whom I met at the Center for Positive Living, has been a recent spiritual mentor. My involvement with the Center, and specifically Dianne, has been a catalyst for significant shifts in my life, and I have recovered my sense of awe, purpose and vision.

Many thanks also go to members of the Teaching Online I class facilitated by Rob Higgins of Cybercorp who, having never met me in person, cheered me on from all over the world as I finished the final draft in the spring of 1996.

And finally, my thanks and love go to Rob Higgins for showing me my future.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

I am a privileged white woman and so are the women in my study. I remember reading that line in one of the dozens of dissertations I read while trying to write my own and, I suppose, in a traditional feminist sense, this is true of my study too. But I wanted to ask the woman who wrote that line "Is that true for you all of the time? Is it true for the women in your study all of the time? Does just being white privilege me? How do I deal with myself and others when I don't feel privileged and others assume I am?" And then I thought to the dilemma faced by any white male in our society who has had positioned privilege thrown in his face by some feminists, myself included. I think all of us want to be treated as individual "me's", not as faceless members of some group which, collectively, takes over our identities and determines how we are treated by others.

Thankfully, a space has been created in the postmodern world to "theorize the contradictory moments"¹, to make room in the research world for the personal accounts of multiplicity and contradiction that have always characterized the classrooms of teachers and learners,

¹ Jennifer Gore, *The Struggle for Pedagogies* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 49.

regardless of age, subject, or institutional context. I write from one of those postmodern perspectives, a feminist poststructuralism which

. . . rather than centering on class analysis reflective of traditional critical theory, the generic "human interests" of critical inquiry, or the "holy trinity" - gender, race, and class - allows the exploration of the shifting, contradictory, incomplete, and competing interpretations of personal identity.²

Such contradictory and shifting interpretations cannot be presented concisely, sequentially, conclusively. You will not find here neat chapters labelled introduction, literature review, methodology, analysis, results, each containing the "cream risen to the top in abstracts or first sentences of paragraphs."³ You will also not find a passive voice, absent narrator, or long, inelegant, repetitive authorial statements. What you will find instead is an engaging and embodied account of my journey as a woman/researcher and how that coincides with the stories of the women who agreed to participate in research about their experiences as graduate students in adult education programs. To help you follow my circuitous path into, around, and through this research project, I offer the following guidelines:

First Person Segments - are directly taken from my own experiences and, thus, every attempt was made (however

² Colleen A. Capper, "Multiparadigm Perspectives of Administration: Informing Theory and Practice," in *Proceedings: Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association*, (1992), 21.

³ Laurel Richardson, "The Consequences of Poetic Representation" in *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience*, eds. C. Ellis and M. Flaherty (Newbury Park: Sage, 1992), 131.

impossible that actually is) to accurately describe and capture the places, events, people, and conversations as they actually happened.

Third Person Segments - are fictional representations of some aspect of myself as a researcher, the research process, the research itself, the writing up of the research. Descriptions of places, events, people, and conversations in these fictional representations are a compilation of my own observations, experiences, thoughts, and conversations with others. These fictional representations did not occur as described, although the footnotes do refer to actual literature. Third person segments include "Making Salsa - Fall, 1995"; "Living/Learning Feminist Poststructuralism - Fall, 1995"; and "De/constructing Language - Fall, 1995."

Poetry Segments - are based on the research participants' comments in the learning circles and/or their written comments. I have taken apart their words and rearranged them in a way that tries to capture the essence of each woman's words.

Italicised Words - are the research participants' actual words, either as spoken at the learning circles or written to me in individual responses. When used in first person or poetry segments, they should be attributed to the identified speaker, within the identified context.⁴

The above conventions are intended to provide a context for you to make decisions about the validity of the research

⁴ For a full discussion of multi genre approaches to research, see Laurel Richardson, 1994. "Writing: A Method of Inquiry" in Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, eds., *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.

study and engage you in the "storying" that would not go away when I was writing this dissertation. They are also used to deconstruct traditional social-science writing conventions that mask the ethical/methodological issues and decisions of researchers, especially their own situated subjectivity, and point out the blurry line between "intellect-emotion, self-other, researcher-research, literary writing-science writing"⁵ that is always present, if not directly articulated. Schuerich points out that "If feminists can show, as I think they have, that their 'bias' can often produce better science than a value-free approach, the conventional view of science is, at least, questionable and, at most, displaced by a new view of science."⁶ Zeller elaborates further on the form such research may take by suggesting that "as the filters through which experience is shaped and given meaning, we might find that fictive forms or strategies could enlarge the appeal, understandability and possibly even the authenticity of empirical work."⁷

Above all else, this dissertation is a story of transformation - my own as a woman/researcher, that of the research participants, and that of the nature of knowledge and research. In keeping with a feminist poststructuralist perspective, I seek to engage you in an exploration of that transformation, not come up with the definitive answer. In that regard, I am

⁵ Laurel Richardson, "Poetic Representation, Ethnographic Presentation and Transgressive Validity: The Case of the Skipped Line," *The Sociological Quarterly* 34.4 (November, 1993), 706.

⁶ Jim Schuerich, "Methodological Implications of Feminist and Poststructuralist Views of Science" in *NCSTL Monograph Series No 4*, ERIC Doc# ED 364 421, (1992), 5.

⁷ Nancy Zeller, *A Rhetoric for Naturalistic Inquiry* (Indiana University: Unpublished Dissertation, 1987), 91.

reconstituted or constructed as a socially reflective researcher, as a researcher that is persistently self-conscious about her or his personal biography and social positionality and the positive and negative effects those might have on the research process and the published report of the research. Again, though, this reflectivity cannot be reduced to simply reporting one's gender, race, and class within a research text. The kind of social self-consciousness that I am proposing is more profound, more complicated, more suffused throughout the research process and text.⁸

So, the overall guiding framework for the study is a feminist poststructuralist one as described in the preceding paragraphs. My research question is "How do women experience their graduate degrees in adult education?" The research method is learning circles which were held with the research participants on August 17, 1994 and March 17, 1996. Additional follow-up information was collected through written responses from the participants in March, 1995. All of the research participants chose pseudonyms. They are Carley, Elizabeth, Helen, Nahanni, and PJ. Five of us have completed our degrees at the University of Calgary and one at the University of Alberta. In addition, all of us are teaching or have taught in the Certificate in Adult and Continuing Education (CACE) at the University of Calgary.

Other details will unfold in this dissertation in much the same way they unfolded for me while I was writing it.

⁸ Jim Schuerich, "Methodological Implications of Feminist and Poststructuralist Views of Science" in *NCSTL Monograph Series No 4*, ERIC Doc# ED 364 421, (1992), 8.

CHAPTER TWO

Circling Women

I am Tammy and the women in the circle are very much
like me or

like me looking for connection
uniting the disjointed

bits

of
our/the
lives
we create to
live in community our voices, our beauty, our pain, our
spirit.
We are here - affirming self/other into existence -
 have you
 heard us yet?

I am Tammy and the women in the circle are very much

not
like me
at all.

I am
not wife, not mother, not juggler, not ...
- not woman?

I cheat with luxury - guilt - of time
and space.

I can have a bath whenever I want. There's no one else to
think
 about...

ii

(buzzing and laughter)

Okay. I think we're set up. Okay. I'll start.

I am Tammy and I'm sure I don't know much here

being unemployed when I started
 didn't even know what adult ed was
 an eye-opening discovering
 I can put together a program

she passes the raku spirit woman

I am PJ and I'm going to say ditto (she laughs) about the
 practical application of learning but/and sometimes I don't
 remember what people say exactly but I remember how people
 are,

so anyhow,

there's all these strong emotions that come over me....
 that's when there's significant learning for me, so anyhow, I
 can always learn from the positive and the negative emotions,
 people

she passes the raku spirit woman

I am Nahanni and I have always felt, I think,

(sigh)

ripped off
 that it was such a farce.

Lucky that serendipity weaved the missing threads....

once I had that, it seemed that everything else got a lot
 easier.

It took so long

the

affirmation and validation of the way I learn.
 Finally.

she passes the raku spirit woman

I am Carley and ah

(long pause)

this learning roller coaster,
discomfort,
dissatisfaction,
rehashing at coffee machine...

(pause)

coming home to adult ed, the excitement,
whole other wonderful library world,
word processor comfort,
watching others in action

(pause)

taking risks as a learner and facilitator - transformed

she passes the raku spirit woman

I am Helen and I need to know what the experts have written
and how that compares with what I know.

my knowledge does have some merit

My master's was a secret indulgence, a freebie, because I
could work on it at work.

no one else knew or cared

I'm curious, Tammy, from a research perspective, how are you
going to present this data and tie it in?

she passes the raku spirit woman

I am Elizabeth and "let's see some of this adult ed stuff" but
I saw nothing

even Brookfield really misses the boat

And I also wonder a lot about this gender thing in learning,
you know, is men's learning as rich as the things we're
bringing out?

This master's degree is taking me so darn long....

to finish.....

Life has this way of interfering with our best-made plans.

she passes the raku spirit woman

iii

We are the women in the learning circle

*creating our own knowledge base
being validated and validating one another, said Nahanni.*

*And what if we'd had a man in this group tonight?
How would that have changed things? asked Carley.*

CHAPTER THREE

Making Salsa - Fall, 1995

"How can I write a dissertation about how women experience their graduate degrees in adult education when I feel so disillusioned?" Tammy told her good friend Sharan, while they were transforming yet another twenty-five pounds of tomatoes into salsa. "I mean, I look around me and I see chaos and unethical behaviour wherever I turn. The universities are dangerous, dysfunctional, abusive places. Everyone and his dog has hung out a consultant's sign - training for this and that - and workshop peddlars like Seminars Unlimited breeze through town packing hotel rooms with a hundred people and employing wannabe comediennesses as instructors. Where do they get off advertising what they do as education? I've just spent the better part of eight years getting degrees up the ying-yang and look where it got me. Unemployed, beat-up, unappreciated..." She looked up from the pot on the stove where she was fishing out the blanched tomatoes at Sharan, who was skinning and chopping them, up to her armpits in tomato juice.

"You don't really feel that way, do you?" Sharan questioned, looking at her friend rather helplessly. She wasn't quite sure how to respond to the anger.

"Of course I do! How the hell else would I feel after what I've been through?" Tammy announced. A very large part of her did believe this, although she was sure that somewhere, beneath many layers of pain and anger, lay her original passion and commitment to the field. Where had it gone and how could she get it back? "I mean, tell me, do you see anything different? Look at what's going on in educational institutions all over the place. What is wrong with people? Has everyone gone crazy?"

"I know. I know." They became silent, each one

grateful for the task at hand. The day long project had been punctuated by these alternating verbal outbursts from Tammy and silent retreats to the messy redness that oozed around the kitchen. Tammy's thoughts drifted back to her last day of work at the eastern US college. She'd spent the afternoon in tears, her pride and self esteem cut to shreds by a colleague's words. "You could have at least waited until I left to badmouth me," she'd said on her way out the door, thankful to leave behind, yet again, the family dynamics that followed her everywhere she went. Her boss's face blurred into her father's, her behaviour around her boss blurred into her teenage behaviour around her father.

"But remember that excerpt from Ken Carey's *Return of the Bird Tribes*¹ that I sent you last winter," Sharan said, her own space occupied by a larger analysis of the times in which they were living. While she empathized with Tammy's situation, she believed there was order under the layer of chaos that was currently presenting itself in most of society, and some sort of intrinsic order to the seeming chaos in Tammy's life. She also believed that anger fuelled more anger. But then again, when she thought of her own work situation, she was reminded of the challenges of moving through anger and chaos herself.

"Kind of. Remind me." Tammy replied, jerking herself into the present, a familiar feeling these days. Funny how the past keeps sneaking up on you in a crisis, she thought, never far away, like a stalker, threatening your present life with endless reminders of what you did, who you were, what you were to other people. Thankfully, the present moment, like the daylight, sends the stalker back to the shadows, at least for a time.

"Well, remember Carey said that the decades we're

¹ Ken Carey, *Return of the Bird Tribes* (San Francisco: Harper, 1988).

living in now will be characterized by a distinct separation between fear and love - that if you express or feel fear yourself, that's what you will see. Go over to the bulletin board. I've got a paragraph posted there to remind me."

Tammy wiped the blood red pulp from her hands and walked over to the bulletin board and read aloud,

As the sun rises, the shadows become sharper and more clearly defined. As the energies of love grow stronger, the shadows of fear become more visible than before. To some it may even appear that they have grown in number and in strength, but this is not so. What was hidden has simply become revealed - that it might be healed and brought to peace.

Action born from fear is becoming less effective with each passing day. Institutions, traditions, and societies forged in fear have already begun to falter. Change is occurring everywhere, for as the planetary awakening proceeds, the consciousness that determines the quality and nature of life is itself changing.²

She walked back to the stove and rescued another tomato from the boiling water.

"So really, Tammy, these things you're talking about are good things, just as Carey says. These shadows of fear are simply being brought to light for healing, and your own fearful emotions are also opportunities for healing."

"Yeah right. Now I remember all that stuff. No kidding, we all need healing. My spiritual self buys that, but my poor old ego today is just ticked off and says how the hell am I going to pay my bills, finish my dissertation, build my self esteem, find my energy and vision?" She flipped the last tomato out of the boiling water rather aggressively, and turned to the counter to help Sharan skin

² Ibid., 151.

and chop the last few tomatoes. A telephone conversation with her junior high English teacher last winter found its way into her consciousness. "It's easy to be spiritual when things are going well Tammy. It's when things are not, that you get to see what you really believe. What a great opportunity you've created," she'd said. Humpf, she'd thought then. I don't like all these opportunities I seem to have created in the past year. Humpf, she still thought.

"So how are the salsa makers?" Sharan's husband, Stephen, had come into the kitchen.

"Well, according to this recipe for Three Beer Salsa, it's time to crack open the first beer for the cooks. Seeing as how we don't drink beer, how about a bottle of wine?" Sharan looked up from her large bowl of tomatoes.

"So, that's how it works! The beer is for the cooks, not the salsa. I wondered why you too were so interested in making this!" Stephen laughed as he headed downstairs for a bottle of wine.

"Incentive enough for me," Tammy replied. "I love it when I can combine a couple of my favourite activities - eating and drinking. At least some things still give me pleasure and haven't changed. Okay, the next step in this salsa is to let these tomatoes soak in the coarse salt. This sucks all of the water out of them, leaving just the flesh of the tomatoes. Then we cook the tomatoes with all the other ingredients and can it. Time to tackle chopping

up the hot peppers and onions. I'll take the onions. I could use a good cry."

"Well, that leaves me with the hot peppers. I think I'll use the food processor. They're supposed to be finely chopped." They set about rearranging the kitchen to suit the next few steps in the salsa, enjoying the wine that Stephen had poured for them.

"So how's the class going at the university? What was it again? Some sort of research class?" Sharan was carefully taking half the seeds out of each hot pepper.

"Interesting, I guess. There's only four of us and the professor. Two men from the school board on sabbaticals and a woman from the government who travels every week from another city. I have to admit, just as in all our master's classes, I get real tired of school board talk, and I have some pretty strong reactions to the one fellow. He's kind of arrogant. I like the professor. He really knows his stuff, asks good questions, redirects the discussion when it's moved too far afield. And the focus of the course is right on with my dissertation."

"So what's the focus?"

"Historical/narrative research. At first I didn't get the connection because I don't have any sort of history background at all. I slept through all of my social studies classes in high school and outside of the history of adult education in the master's program, haven't taken any other

history courses."

"So what is the connection?"

"I knew you were going to ask that! It makes sense to me intuitively, I think. Not sure I can explain it articulately, but I'll give it a shot. Seems like postmodern thinkers³ have questioned the so-called objective stance from which history has been written. You know, the approach most of us have been exposed to - here it is written in this book, this is the truth, and that's the way it is. None of us, well at least myself in my upbringing, were taught to question things. We believed what we were told and believed that there really was one truth out there."

"Your parents didn't encourage you to question?"

³ The postmodern movement is a complex one. My early exposure and influences are found in Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point* (New York: Bantam, 1982), a critique of the Cartesian paradigm which I discovered in 1992. I was not introduced to the term postmodernism until 1993 when I read Paul Rabinow and William Sullivan *Interpretive Social Science: A Second Look* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987) and Bryan Turner, ed., *Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1990). It was only when I discovered Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln eds., *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, (California: Sage, 1994) in 1995 that postmodernism started to make sense and at which point I made the connection back to Capra's ideas. I then followed the many trails to feminist poststructuralism which helped me apply postmodernism to my own life as a woman, educator and researcher. My final discovery was Robert Goodman and Walter Fisher, eds., *Rethinking Knowledge: Reflections Across the Disciplines* (New York: State University of New York, 1995). Their introduction is an excellent summary of Cartesianism and the current postmodern challenges to its centuries' old influence. To me, postmodernism is the attempt in many disciplines to give voice to the traditionally marginalized; ultimately, it is an attempt to redress imbalances between dominant groups and the marginalized.

"Not that I remember. Doctors, lawyers, teachers. They were all very smart and I was taught to be respectful, which meant not questioning people in positions of authority. Let me change that, there was no questioning of anything in my family. Nothing was ever really discussed in that way."

"So what's the connection between historical and narrative research?"

"Well, people like Schama⁴, O'Brien⁵, and Heilbrun⁶ all suggest that we understand and live our lives through stories or narratives and that we know ourselves and recreate ourselves each time we tell stories. Whenever we tell these stories, there is an element of fiction - like details get lost, certain memories take precedence over others, and after a time of telling them, it's the telling of the story that becomes the truth for you, not even the actual event when it happened, so the truth is always shifting. Each time we write or tell our stories, things shift."

"So I'm still waiting for the connection to history."

"Well, Schama talks about the historian's dilemma of digging around in the documented past of someone or

⁴ Simon Schama, *Dead Certainties* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

⁵ Timothy O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (1990).

⁶ Carol Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: Ballantine, 1988).

something - you know the written documents, interviews with people, that sort of thing - and then somehow bringing it to the present moment and writing it as history or biography. The narrative the historian creates links the past with the present. He also suggests that any conclusion of such an inquiry, just like the supposed conclusions of any doctoral dissertation in the human sciences, is just wishful thinking. There are no conclusions.

"Heilbrun, writing from a feminist perspective, suggests that women's stories have been repressed to serve the interests of a patriarchal society that keeps women in certain roles. The others do not say that but they do point out that there is no objectivity in history, biography or autobiography, but rather a blurring of the lines between fiction and so-called truth. All of us are always recreating and we create from our own subjectivity."

"Well, I don't know about Heilbrun's notion that there are no women's stories. That's a little extreme."

"Perhaps, but think about it. Can you name one woman we studied in our history of adult education class?"

"No, I can't. I can name men - Roby Kidd, Moses Coady, E.A. Corbett."⁷

⁷ The historical writings of the field of adult education in Canada are dominated by a few writers - Gordon Selman, Roby Kidd, Moses Coady, and E.A. Corbett. In Gordon Selman and Paul Dampier's 1991 *The Foundations of Adult Education in Canada*, for example, one page is devoted to the women's movement and seven to the Women's Institutes, of which two is devoted exclusively to Adelaide Hoodless, its founder. The women in my research study who teach

"I can't name a woman either and, given that eleven of twelve people in our class were women and that I've been surrounded by women wherever I've worked in adult education, I'm somewhat astounded. Surely there were women in adult education in earlier years? Why don't we know about them? How come nobody's written about them?"

"Good question. They must have been there somewhere."

"And how many women can you recall from any history class? All I remember of high school is endless discussions of men in wars. Do you ever remember hearing about what the women were doing while all of these men were off living out the hero's story?"

"Actually, no, I can't."

"The stories must be there somewhere. It's no wonder women struggle with self-esteem and finding a voice, to use Belenky et al.'s⁸ metaphor. By the time they graduate from high school, they have no point of reference for female voices. Which is also Heilbrun's point. Women come to writing simultaneously with self-creation."

"So, okay, all we have is stories. Let's take that as

the Foundations of Adult Education in the CACE program have actively sought to remedy this imbalance, and some of their students have completed assignments on women in adult education. These unpublished works are the beginning of a more enlightened and equitable view of the field of adult education in Canada.

⁸ Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger and Jill Mattuck Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

a given. And let's say that these narratives form the basis of knowledge. And let's also say that the line between fiction and non-fiction is blurred. How can we judge the validity of a knowledge claim then? If, for example, you're doing the type of research you are - recording women's stories on their graduate experiences - isn't the whole claim to knowledge suspect?"

"That's exactly what the professor brought up the first day of class which freaked me out then and still does," Tammy replied. "He called into question Clandinin and Connelly's⁹ work on teacher talk or narrative as teacher knowledge. What, ultimately, counts as knowledge and how do we escape the hopeless relativism that accompanies such a perspective?"

"And the answer is?" Sharan asked.

"Well, I don't know! I'm still trying to figure that out. I think part of the answer lies in the ability to see, perceive or appreciate the different paradigms of knowledge construction, especially as they inform your own as a researcher, and shed light on knowledge from a point of your own subjectivity. This reminds me of a dissertation I just read by a woman named Ann Victoria Dean¹⁰ at Dalhousie.

⁹ See D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, "Personal Experience Methods" in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (California: Sage, 1994) for a summary of their work with teachers.

¹⁰ Ann Victoria Dean, *Teachers Writing about Themselves* (Dalhousie University: Unpublished Dissertation, 1992).

She spent years gathering teacher autobiographies for her dissertation and at the end of it she decided it wasn't ethical for her to complete the dissertation."

"Why not?"

"Because she felt that some researchers reduced people's stories to bits and pieces and themes and took them out of the social context in which they occurred. These researchers also hid behind educational jargon. They didn't approach the stories from a subjective viewpoint. She believed these researchers were appropriating the stories to suit their own purposes and felt that education should not be concerned with such reduction but rather should be a clarification of individual expression. In Dean's mind, the usual approach taken by researchers to reduce people's lives to themes wasn't ethical. Ultimately, she felt she had no business telling anyone else's story."

"So what did she do?"

"She wrote her own autobiography. It's a great dissertation and a wonderful read, mainly because of the clear language she uses. It's free of the educational jargon that characterises most stuff because she suggests that this jargon is used to cloud issues. Autobiography is about the human spirit. I wanted to cheer when I read that because, as you know, I've always been impatient with jargon. Remember when I presented that paper from my candidacy exam at the Canadian Association for Studies in

Adult Education (CASAE) conference? A woman came up to me and said, I just loved your paper. I could understand it, but can you really get away with that kind of writing in a dissertation?"

"So what are you going to do with your own research?" asked Sharan.

"I don't know. I get a kind of sick feeling in my stomach whenever I think about it. So maybe I'll pretend that none of this discussion we've just had exists. Carry on as if things were just hunky dory. Employ a traditional qualitative data analysis and try to triangulate, whatever the heck that means. Use the right educational research jargon and march my way through the dissertation."

"Do you really think you could do that?"

"No, not really. Not sure what I'll do. I'm kind of lost in my own stuff right now. It's hard to get out of myself long enough to actually listen to the tapes, read the transcripts, make sense of things."

Stephen reappeared from the basement just as Tammy was trying to figure out how she WAS going to get out of herself long enough to write about her research. "So is it time for the second bottle of wine?" he asked them.

"Could be," they replied laughing. The salsa making continued late into the night - twenty-five pounds of tomatoes and other raw materials cooked and stewed and transformed into the best tasting salsa ever, at least as

far as they were concerned. They both got lost in the task of preparing food, drinking, and eating, leaving behind the many troubling issues of the day's conversations. And too, there was order out of the messiness of the day. Twenty-four little jars of salsa packed neatly away in two twelve-jar boxes. Amazing.

This was not the only example of Tammy's attempt to order her outer world. There were to be many others. Was this what others did in crisis?

CHAPTER FOUR

Painting the Granaries, Fall, 1995

"I need to paint the granaries this fall. It's been over ten years since they've been done and they look terrible - shabby, run-down," my mother told me over the phone.

Just like I feel, I thought to myself but said instead, "Well, let me know when you're going to do them and I'll see what I'm up to. That's too hard a job for one person. Besides, I've become a real pro these days, after helping Ross paint his house. Doing something concrete like painting makes me feel useful, like I'm actually accomplishing something in my life." One part of me knew this was an odd statement to make, much less believe. I have always achieved and accomplished, collecting degrees and job experiences along the way. I don't think it was because of any conscious planning, but rather driven by boredom, restlessness, a search for something that could sustain my interest, excitement, passion. Or perhaps it was a sense of inadequacy that ran very, very deep? Whatever the reason, the truth was that my take on the events of the past year had reduced all of these accomplishments to meaningless drivel and I felt like a failure.

I drove up to Leduc that September 29, 1995, to the farm where my great-grandparents, my grandparents, my parents, my brother, my sister and I had all wrestled with our respective and intertwined identities and emotions, partially shaped, I think, by the Alberta seasons. It was one of those exquisite fall days one finds on the prairies - that distinct smell of harvest that permeates the country air, a combination of grain dust and human energy that can only be inhaled deeply and experienced, never adequately described. Above the rows of golden grain that lined the

landscape, sandwiched between an endless deep blue sky, was a ridge of blue-black cloud, somewhat threatening but so far into the horizon as to be easily forgotten if one looked high enough in the air. And so I greeted my family, looking high enough into the air so as to perhaps ignore the darkness that gripped us.

I found my mom on the roof of a granary with a small roller (no extension handle, it's important to note) wearing an assortment of mismatched plaids and stripes, kerchief on her head, covered almost entirely in white paint. I'm somewhat in awe of my mother's largely unconscious audacity - there she was, a short fifty-seven year old, balancing rather precariously on top of a steeply slanted granary roof, reaching to paint that very top, top point just this much beyond her reach, and there I was standing on the ground, mad at her for doing such a thing but in awe nonetheless. I've always been so intimidated by these frequent displays of her physical bravery and perseverance that I never really know what to say, much less do.

So I said a rather obvious thing, "Mom, you really shouldn't be up there. It looks pretty dangerous."

"Well, it's got to be done," she said without looking up. I just knew she would say that. She always says that. And she says it in such a definitive way that all my years of work experience, self-help enlightenments, and education just dissolve in the face of such practical, unshakeable determinism. I felt my teenage insecurities starting to swarm around me. I never really did any of those physical, farming type tasks very well - you know, planting potatoes, picking raspberries, feeding the cattle, cleaning the chicken barn and my favourite, killing and plucking chickens - and I never really cared to. But I always felt tremendous guilt, and still do, for not caring about them because my mother cares so much. So there I was feeling pretty anxious about my ability to paint the granaries after all, despite

my articulated intent a few months earlier. And if I couldn't paint the granaries, what about everything else I had come to believe I couldn't do?

Like getting married and having kids. I had just taken my suitcase into my mother's room (another of my mother's practicalities - she insisted I sleep in her room while she moved to a mattress on the living room floor because her room had the bathroom and I would have the privacy I should have - and again there was no discussing it. That's just the way it was.) and hung up some of my clothes in the closet. There on the top shelf were the numerous children's toys and clothing that she had been collecting. For whom, I once asked her, as she'd been doing this for a number of years. Oh, you know, she replied, Rebecca and Sarah, when their birthdays come up or if they're visiting and they've been good and I'd just like to give them something. As she was talking, she got this wistful look on her face.

It broke my heart to look at all of those toys and look at the joy on her face as she talked about spoiling the kids. She would be the world's best grandmother but she had none of her own to spoil, and even though she's never said she's disappointed, I knew she felt the absence of being a grandmother on that day. I could tell it ran deep - her life and meaning were about being a wife and a mother and eventually a grandmother. How could my "achievements", especially where they'd taken me in the last year, take the place of those much anticipated but never realized grandchildren?

"Hullo, how're you?" came my thirty-four year old brother's deep voice, nudging me out of this rumination. Phil never really spoke, I thought, but forced words out of himself that came from a bottomless space, one intimately familiar with the shadows of despair, only occasionally brushing up against the joy of life. Or so it seems to me anyway; I have no idea what he thinks. We haven't really

talked that much.

He had come from behind one of the other granaries and taken me a bit by surprise. An unspoken reason for my trip home had been to make sure my mom was okay, as she was worried about my brother. I, too, was worried, painfully conscious of his precarious hold on life and dangerous dance with the other side, to paraphrase a Jim Morrison lyric. I could only guess at the realities of his world, certainly not relate, certainly not understand. I have spent my entire life alternately disowning and reclaiming him as my brother. I think he probably feels the same way about me. It is only recently that we are coming to explore our fragmented relationship as brother and sister.

"A little better than you these days by the sound of things," I replied regretting almost immediately my choice of words. It's kind of what I meant but it didn't come out right.

"Yup." Silence. Agonizing, squirming silence.

"So I see you've been painting too, " I finally said, making another one of those obvious observations.

"Yup."

The awkwardness was unbearable so I did what I usually did - looked for mom. She could always rescue me from Phil. When she was around, everything seemed OK. She had a special kind of relationship with him that no one else shared or understood. So I yelled up to her on the granary roof, "What would you like me to do mom?"

"Well, you can start scraping that other granary. All of that chipped paint has got to come off."

"OK, let me go change my clothes." Yuck, scraping paint off the granary. How I despised that part of painting - memories of scraping those buildings ten years ago came flooding back. It was such a disgusting job - little slivers of paint being forced off a building to which they've clung for ten years, usually landing in your eyes or

up your nose, most certainly accompanied by all kinds of dried spider webs and dirt clumps. The job did, however, match my rather weathered state of mind. Within an hour I had an open blister on the inside of my thumb and was getting ready to make sure everyone knew about it when my dad appeared on the scene.

"Hullo," he said. My father too, at times, forced words out of himself, and I sensed that his space was as bottomless as my brother's at times. As with Phil, I have spent my whole life disowning and reclaiming my father, although I've sensed, even during his descents into the madness of alcoholism, that he's never disowned me, despite what his outer actions might have indicated, and despite what my constantly bruised sense of self might have concluded.

At sixty-five, his body is old beyond his years. A lifetime of physical labour and drinking binges have completely worn him out. He quit drinking a few years ago, much to my great surprise and immense relief. I have never understood his addiction, never will, but at least now I have an opportunity to get to know and love the man who is my father, and I treasure those moments.

"When's supper mom? Do I have time to go into town or not?" Dad and I also have our awkward moments so he did what I did, turned to mom to rescue us.

"Oh yes, we're not quitting until it's dark. It might rain and we have to get this painting done." Ever back to practical matters and that denial of physical limits. On with painting the granaries. Friday afternoon dissolved quickly into Friday night and my sister, Jenny, buzzed home from college in Camrose for supper and hauled me off to a hockey game at NAIT with her college friends. I marvelled at her self-confidence, playfulness, exuberance. At twenty, she had already run the entire county recreational programs, a staff of program leaders working under her, and now was

the coordinator of RA's at Augustana University College. Quite a contrast from the little three year old my brother and I teased mercilessly. I was only now coming to know and appreciate her as a sister, having left home when she was still so young.

I remember my mom's pregnancy like it was yesterday. I was in grade nine, an aspiring basketball and volleyball star, constantly offering my mother's chauffeur services for the teams. When she started to show, I became horribly embarrassed, totally overwhelmed by the SEX of the whole thing. There it was, just like the teachers had taught me in health class, an accident at her age. Or at least, that's always been the story and the joke. I'm not sure I completely buy that. I think there were other things happening at that time.

I fell asleep that night massaging my aching shoulders, gazing at all the baby toys lined up on the closet shelf, wondering how I'd gotten to be where I was today, and what could possibly be in store for me next.

"What are you doing? I scraped that whole granary yesterday," I blurted out as I discovered my brother, wire brush in hand, hugging the same granary I had just less than twelve hours earlier.

"Well, you didn't do it good enough. Mom and I tried to start painting and all this paint kept coming off." He gave me this rather disgusted look.

"Just as well. I hated doing it anyway. You're better at it than I am." I wondered if my words sounded as juvenile as I felt at that moment. I could feel tears starting to exert that all too familiar pressure behind my eyes. I never seemed to do anything on the farm "good enough". It was humiliating - how could I scrape paint off a building

the wrong way?

"That's okay, you can come and roll this building. It needs a second coat of paint." Mom's words rescued me from almost certain embarrassment. "We can each trim the edges, then you can roll and by that time, Phil will have finished scraping the second granary and I can start trimming that building."

"Right. Where's the handle for the roller?" I asked.

"I don't know if we have one," mom replied.

"You don't have one?" I said incredulously. "How did you roll the granary yesterday?"

"With that roller."

"With this little roller? How did you reach the top?"

"With the step ladder."

"The step ladder! That must have taken you hours! Why didn't you use a handle? You could have just stood in one place and rolled the whole thing." I think I raised my voice somewhat.

"You can't exert enough pressure with a handle. You're too far away."

"Really?" I was truly stunned now. "But mom, I've painted my entire condo using a handle and a roller. I've always been able to exert enough pressure."

"You should get more pressure using a handle mom, more leverage," came Phil's voice from behind the granary.

"Basic physics mom - fulcrums and leverage," I added, then feeling a little curious walked around the side of the granary and asked my brother, "Did you watch mom roll that whole granary yesterday before I arrived? Why didn't you say anything?"

"Dunno." He looked at me a little helplessly as if to say "you know how difficult it is to talk mom out of physical exertion - it's her right."

Meantime, Dad had been standing off to the side taking in all of this, not saying a word. He, too, had that same

helpless look. He shrugged his shoulders as if to say "you know how your mother is".

"Mom, have you ever tried rolling with a handle?" I asked.

"No. I guess I'm not smart enough," she replied.

Ouch. I could feel her pain and sense of inadequacy just as surely as I'd felt my own a few moments earlier. I suddenly remembered her hesitancy to write me while I was away. She'd told me that her grammar was too bad, that I would get frustrated editing it. "No, mom, that's not it. It's just that you love physical work and you wouldn't waste time trying to figure out easy ways to do things. I, on the other hand, am basically lazy when it comes to stuff like this. That's the difference between us - you use your body and I use my head." And there it was, so obvious, probably, to anyone who knew mom and I, but somewhat a revelation to me and, I suspect, my mom as well.

"Well, I can go into town and buy a handle," dad volunteered. And then it further dawned on me. There was my dad, just standing there outside the family feeling somewhat dwarfed too, I think, by my mother's endless physical energy and unshakeable determination. He was a lot like me after all. There was a time, I suspect, that he would have rather used his brain than his body. He should have gone to university, he should have had a chance at education. He loved philosophizing, telling stories, recalling trivia, laughing - that's when he was living his gifts. But, he was the eldest son and expected to take over the farm. So he did. I think he hated it as much as I did, but now, after many years of a life forged from physical labour, his identity was firmly planted in the land on which he was standing, the land he and my mother worked hard to keep through many rough years. What was he to do now that his body would no longer cooperate?

And so I spent a beautiful September Saturday rolling

endless sheets of plywood with bright white paint, while my brother chipped and hacked away at stubborn paint chips, while my mother neatly trimmed around the edges, while my father poked around in buildings and made trips to town, each of us lost, no doubt, in an endless parade of memories and moments that only physical labour could unearth. Oddly, I felt comfortable and content that day, knowing that regardless of the divergent paths our lives had taken, we were forever connected by blood, drawn together over and over by a past that had sprung from the land. Looking back now, it was a perfect fall day full of surprising gifts.

CHAPTER FIVE
Writing Women I

i

*In an ideal world, Tammy wrote on March 13, 1995, I would
ask you to another learning circle*

but

*since I'm in Buffalo and you are not, could you respond in
writing to me? Why did you enter a graduate program in
adult education?*

Carley

*ten years of intuition, trial and error
teaching adults*

*craving personal legitimacy
academic connection/credibility/respectability*

a fluke entrance, the rest is history

PJ

*the clincher - a young colleague, less experience, with a
master's,*

got the job

needed a tool for my toolbox

*to feel fulfilled
receive sufficient remuneration
work at a more sophisticated level*

Helen

a perfect fit, the part-time master's
fell into teaching adults....
practised intuitively
curious about adult education
I had a need to know what the experts said.

Elizabeth

*simple logistics, circumstance, not altruistic undertaking
wanted to pursue a master's....
 didn't really know what I wanted
friend referred/ [husband] prodded
 just go for it*

Nahanni

working in field, on advisory committee, adult ed master's
10 and behold, admitted to first year of program

enthusiastic learner/need to understand theory behind doing
continuing pattern of synchronicity in my life

Tammy

an internal urging?
credibility?
bored?
needed a challenge?

it felt like the thing to do at the time?

ii

In an ideal world, Tammy wrote on March 13, 1995, I would ask you to another learning circle

but

since I'm in Buffalo and you are not, could you respond in writing to me? Why, despite many challenges, did you complete the program?

Carley

I'd come home to adult ed

interdisciplinary, diversity, richness, flexibility, applicability, inspiring philosophy, loved literature/learning

no repeat of previous unfinished experience

PJ

short term pain (my roles/responsibilities)

for long term career gain

I'm a survivor, hard worker

driving thought - not a quitter

Helen

goal directed/achievement oriented

perseverance/determination

the right decision would work out in the end

Elizabeth

still persisting because of silly piece of paper

swaying.... back and forth...

do I really need this silly piece of paper?

do I really need to kill myself for this stupid degree?

personal goal now - stress-free life in 6 months

Nahanni

a marvel I could continue at times

demanding/stressful job

but blessed

*supportive people - husband, supervisor, advisor
community of learners*

went down to the wire of six years

Tammy

open doors

group bonded

too stubborn to quit, became a pride thing

large extended family - no master's degrees

parents values - finish what you start

so I did

CHAPTER SIX

Living/Learning Feminist Poststructuralism - Fall, 1995

She couldn't believe it. Here was the perfect conversation about to unfold before her eyes, just as she was tackling the topic in her dissertation. Such luck - who could ever explain the magic, the serendipity, the synchronicity? The wonders of the Internet oozed into her home, her daily "communing" with these faceless, bodyless voices an early morning ritual. Something was not right in the world when the university's computer system was down.

But on this morning, there was more excitement than usual for her. On the adult education listserve, Dave Johnson asked "Could someone please define the terms "modernist" and post-modernist" in relation to adult education, comparing and contrasting each?"¹

She'd zipped off an answer that very morning, hoping to spark interest and get something going:

Subject: Re: Definitions

To: aednet@pulsar.acast.nova.edu

Date: Tue, 6 Nov 95 13:25:13 MST

From: "Tammy Dewar" <tdedewar@acs.ucalgary.ca>

MIME-Version: 1.0

Dave:

This is quite a challenging question you pose and if anyone gives you a clear answer, I'd love to quote it!! I'm just writing my dissertation right now and trying to address the issue - tough to find a succinct definition!

My sense (and again if someone can correct me I'd be pleased) is that there's not that much written about the

¹ Dave Johnson, *Definitions: Discussion on Modernism and Post-modernism* (AEDNET@PULSAR.ACAST.NOVA.EDU, February 6, 1996).

application to adult education. I think all of us are struggling with understanding it ourselves and seeing how it does/does not make sense in research and practice in adult education? I've read a great deal about the feminist poststructuralist position and am applying it to my own research, but it's truly an open ended exploration....

Regards,

Tammy Dewar
Calgary, Alberta
tddewar@acs.ucalgary.ca

Within a week, her email box was full of replies. Ian Bryant had written "To ask for definitions is to lock yourself into a modernist stance which seeks clarity and certainty. The attractiveness of post-modernism is that its very elusiveness allows for play, risk and a multiplicity of voices."² Suzette Jestin responded that "knowledge has been seen as the discovery of some reality existing out there and the way to find it was to be objective, value free, detached. Today many scholars argue that detached objectivity is a myth. The observer's own values and perceptions inevitably affect how events are studied."³ Next came a lengthy series of complex messages from several people about the radical and chic appeal of postmodernism, and the endless deconstruction that had come to typify such an approach.

Then, one message came back to her personally, instead of to the whole list, from a woman in Toronto in a doctoral program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

² Ian Bryant, *Definitions: Discussion of Modernism and Post-modernism* (AEDNET@PULSAR.ACAST.NOVA.EDU, February 10, 1996).

³ Suzette Jestin, *Definitions: Discussion of Modernism and Post-modernism* (AEDNET@PULSAR.ACAST.NOVA.EDU, February 13, 1996).

November 14/95

Tammy:

I too am reading about feminist poststructuralism, which is definitely located within the postmodern perspective, but is kind of unique unto itself. Would you like to discuss this further? I think it would help both of us move forward. What is your research and what have you learned about poststructuralism and adult education?

Phyllis

Tammy couldn't contain her enthusiasm. She immediately replied.

November 15, 1995

Hi Phyllis:

Glad to get your note. I would LOVE to discuss things further because I never really developed a PhD group while taking my degree. I was working almost full-time and never got "connected" with anyone.

My research question is "How do women experience their graduate degrees in adult education?" and I have used learning circles, a type of collaborative research. My candidacy exam was a mini thesis and in it I pointed out that there was little literature in the area of graduate adult education.⁴ Most studies were descriptive and focused on the types, numbers, and core curriculum of adult education graduate programs. Perhaps reflective of the field's attempt to legitimize itself? In any event, I found

⁴ Tammy Dewar, "Learning Circles as Catalyst: Exploring Adult Educators' Training and Development" *Unpublished Paper* (Calgary, 1994).

nothing that addressed the rich experiences and perspectives the women in my study described.

I also became uncomfortable taking the research participants' voices out of the transcript to support a point that would somehow relate to some literature in adult education. It felt so forced and arbitrary.

So I went searching, I guess, and stumbled across feminist poststructuralism quite by accident. I saw a chapter in the *Handbook of Qualitative Research* on writing by Laurel Richardson.⁵ It was wonderful! Basically, she said that she was bored by the deadly qualitative studies she had been reading and suggested that it was time to explore different ways of representing knowledge. She even talked about using poetry! As she said:

The historical separation of literature and science, however, is not immutable. Today, scholars in a host of disciplines are doing major deconstructive and reconstructive analyses of scientific and literary writing. Their analyses concretely show where and how literary devices are used in science writing. I present this material to lessen the grasp that the idea of "objective" writing has on both quantitative and qualitative writers.⁶

She also talked about writers and suggested that

To make sense of the events in their lives, people reconstruct biography. The experience of renarrativizing - like the experience of biographical time itself - is open ended and polysemous, where different meanings and systems of meanings can emerge.⁷

⁵ Laurel Richardson, "Writing: A Method of Inquiry" in Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, eds., *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (London: Sage, 1994).

⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁷ Laurel Richardson, *Writing Strategies: Reaching Diverse Audiences* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1990), 23.

I was so excited because it seemed to me too, that everytime I tried to write I was renarrativizing, as she said. So I read a bunch of her stuff first and kept seeing the term poststructuralism and decided to track that down.

But enough for this note. What about your own experience?

Tammy

November 16, 1995

Tammy:

Interesting you should mention legitimacy in your note. While I'm not at the research stage yet, this is exactly what I'm interested in - the marginality of adult education. At this point, I'm interested in how adult educators experience and respond to this marginality.

It seems to me that the whole postmodern movement is a reaction against dominant groups, an effort to address the issues of marginalized people? I have not heard of Richardson's stuff (but will check it out). I have found a few gems that relate directly to postmodernism and adult education. As you mention above, it appears as if adult education is lagging behind other disciplines. As Collard and Law point out, "However, to our knowledge, adult education has yet to consider the impact of postmodern thought on its foundational bases and on the normative social and political goals it draws from these."⁸

Also, I found the following two quotes helpful:

Postmodernism interrogates the master narratives of foundations and totality that underpin Enlightenment

⁸ Susan Collard and Michael Law, "Universal Abandon: Postmodernity, Politics and Adult Education" in *Annual Adult Education Research Conference Proceedings* (Athens: Georgia University, 1990), 54.

faith in science and progress; it emphasizes language not as a representation of reality but as productive of narratives of the real.⁹

What is obvious is that in its rejection of universal propositions about humankind and its capacities, and in its focus on a micropolitics of power, postmodernism reforms - if not rejects - the universal analyses of society and of its transformations upon which the radical and reformist traditions in adult education have been traditionally premised.¹⁰

I found the last quote, specifically, very helpful. I have **always** had problems with the radical position in adult education because of its **insistence** on dividing the world into the oppressed and the oppressors. It is just not that simple. I have been oppressed and I know I have also oppressed others. Radical/reformist traditions do not address these contradictory positions that operate in me.

I have also been reading Weedon.¹¹ She is difficult, but her work seems seminal in linking poststructuralism and feminism.

Phyllis

November 18, 1995

Phyllis:

Thanks for the great quotes and the perspective of the marginalized status of adult educators. Makes sense to me! I also agree about the polarization that happens in the radical approach - I am both oppressed and oppressor, it does depend on the context!

⁹ Ibid., 56.

¹⁰ Ibid., 57.

¹¹ Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

I did stumble across Weedon and, like you, I find her difficult but important to read! She does suggest that the whole postmodern movement draws from a range of theoretical positions that share a focus on language, representation, subjectivity, and power. I would say this is my observation as well (nice to agree with an expert). Most do identify the role that language plays in our sensemaking of the world (in fact that's all we have, some would suggest) and how, then, knowledge is represented. Richardson was helpful here again. She says

All of the social sciences have prescribed writing formats - none of them neutral, all of them value constituting. How we are expected to write affects what we can write about. The referencing system in the social sciences discourages the use of footnotes, a place for secondary arguments, novel conjectures, and related ideas. Incorporated into the text, albeit in parentheses, are the publication dates for citations, as though this information counts the most. Knowledge is constituted as focused, problem (ie. hypothesis) centered, linear, straightforward. Other thoughts are extraneous. Inductively accomplished research is to be reported deductively; the argument is to be abstractable in 150 words or less; and researchers are to identify explicitly with a theoretical-methodological label. Each of these conventions favors - creates and sustains - a particular vision of what constitutes sociological knowledge. The conventions hold tremendous material and symbolic power over social scientists. Using them increases the probability of one's work being accepted into core social science journals, but they are not *prima facie* evidence of greater - or lesser - truth value or significance than social science writing using other conventions.¹²

I totally agree with Richardson and am "representing" knowledge in my dissertation in a very different way....I wonder how people will react to it....

Weedon suggests of the subjectivity, power issues:

¹² Richardson, 1990, 16-17.

How we live our lives as conscious thinking subjects, and how we give meaning to the material social relations under which we live and which structure our everyday lives, depends on the range and social power of existing discourses, our access to them and the political strength of the interests which they represent.¹³

Feminist poststructuralism, then, is a mode of knowledge production which uses poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change. At the level of the individual, this theory is able to offer an explanation of where our experience comes from, why it is contradictory or incoherent and why and how it can change.¹⁴

Weedon's ideas relate very much to your point about being both oppressed/oppressor. As she points out, we know ourselves and our own *power* depending upon our access to the discourses that operate in our lives. I thought of myself very specifically. I use very different language with my family, and experience my own *power* in that setting based on the rules, values, and norms with which I was raised. To a certain extent, even though I've moved into a very different educational and occupational arena, when I'm with my family, I very often use language and experience my power in much the same way I did as a teenager. Now that's interesting, isn't it? I think Weedon has something to say about this when she points out that:

The individual is never in a state of innocence when faced by a choice of conflicting subject positions. Indeed, often the individual is unaware that she has a choice. Insertion into language begins at an early age and always happens in the context of specific discourses governing family life and childhood more generally. Moreover, it is a consistent feature of

¹³ Weedon, 1987, 26.

¹⁴ Ibid., 40-41.

most forms of discourse that they deny their own partiality." ¹⁵

Then, when I interact with people in the university, I use different language and I experience my own power according to the norms and values of the university. It is similar when I do consulting work in business. When I'm with my female friends, a whole other discourse is operating. Most importantly, as Lather points out, are the differences in power that operate in each of these situations:

Feminist poststructural theory, however, suggests that language should be examined and . . . understood in terms of competing discourses, competing ways of giving meaning to the world, which imply differences in the organization of social power . . . ¹⁶

It is no wonder that any one of us struggles with our identity, our subjectivity - it really is a constantly shifting and ongoing re-creation of who we are. It also helps to explain how certain people, by virtue of the language they use, are excluded from a discourse. My favorite examples here are the professions - doctors, lawyers, even teachers, often use language that makes little to no sense to the average person. In a way, it does keep people powerless, doesn't it, to not have access to the language that typifies a discourse?

Discourse is central to feminist poststructuralism. I've alluded to its meaning by my previous examples. How do you understand the meaning of discourse?

Tammy

¹⁵ Ibid., 98.

¹⁶ Patricia Lather, *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy with/in the Postmodern* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 24.

November 20, 1995

Tammy:

Thanks for the quote from Richardson. Very helpful. I may use it to defend my own format when I get to writing the dissertation.

I understand discourse to mean the "common sense" beliefs a particular group of people have and the language they use to express it. Your example of the professions was right on.

I found a helpful quote on discourse:

One is discourse as practice, or discursive practices, the analysis of which involves the examination of stretches of talk. Our particular interest in examining such stretches of talk is to discover the ways in which people are constituted and constitute themselves as people and as particular kinds of people in that talk. But we also use "discourse" as a noun to refer to the way in which particular ways of speaking have been institutionalized, have taken on a life of their own, have, in fact, become constitutive of people and their actions.¹⁷

I was also interested in the examples you used to describe the various discourses in which you find yourself. First, because they point out what some have said of the feminist addition to poststructuralism. As Capper says,

Consequently, the feminist contribution to poststructuralist theories includes, in part, the retention of practice with the development of theory, the reinstatement of the human potential to "make a difference" in practice, and the predisposition to "take a stand" in the midst of continual self-

¹⁷ Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harre, "Contradiction in Lived and Told Narratives" *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 25 (1991/2), 4.

reflection.¹⁸

What you're referring to is just that. Recognizing the type of discourse in which you find yourself and taking steps to change things, a very practical theory, I would say!

Second, you also point out what I've been struggling with myself and that is a sense that I am flawed, that something is wrong with me because I experience myself in so many competing discourses. I also feel guilt, guilt for everything. Is this a woman's thing? Part of the female discourse? I'm not sure if this applies to all women, but it definitely is mine. I found a gem from Davies that I keep posted on my bulletin board whenever I start berating myself:

. . . it involves a recognition of the inevitability of contradiction in a world made up of contradictory discourses, and provides a fundamental shift in the definition of self such that the contradictions are not experienced as a personal flaw but as ways of constituting the social world which are themselves amenable to change. I speak myself into existence through the discourses available to me, I know myself through the stories I live and the stories I tell (each of these deeply imbricated in the other) and so I can choose, with others, to change the stories and to develop new ways of talking about them. Equally I can refuse discourses that speak me into existence in ways I no longer wish. That refusal is dependent on my ability to see the way in which my identity is discursively constituted.¹⁹

Davies also alludes to something about imaginary narratives. How do you understand that part of her work?
Phyllis

¹⁸ Colleen A. Capper, "Multiparadigm Perspectives of Administration: Informing Theory and Practice," in *Proceedings: Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association*, (1992), 18.

¹⁹ Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harre, "Contradiction in Lived and Told Narratives" *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 25 (1991/2), 8-9.

November 23, 1995

Phyllis:

Interesting you should ask about imaginary narratives because I've been wondering about that too. I think I'm beginning to see what Davies means. She uses an example in one of her articles of reading a fairy tale against the grain²⁰, taking what might be seen as a typically patriarchal interpretation of women as powerless victims and reading it against the grain to see the women as powerful. Her point, I'm assuming, is that seeing a different interpretation then leads to using language in a different way which then leads to challenging a discourse and shifting one's own place in it. As she suggests,

Who we are, our subjectivity, is spoken into existence in every utterance, not just in the sense that others speak us into existence and impose unwanted structures on us, as much early feminist writing presumed, but, in each moment of speaking and being, we each reinvent ourselves inside the male/female dualism, socially, psychically, and physically.²¹

Davies further suggests that we need to create new stories.

The lived and imaginary narratives that we generate in our attempt to speak into existence a different way of being outside the male/female dualism need to achieve several contradictory purposes. We need stories that are elaborations of existing stories that mark their problematic nature. We need not only to see the problems in rational, didactic terms (though we need that too) but to see freshly the images and metaphors and story lines we have grown up with and to learn to

²⁰ Bronwyn Davies, "Women's Subjectivity and Feminist Stories" in *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1992).

²¹ Bronwyn Davies, "Women's Subjectivity and Feminist Stories" in *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1992), 74.

read them against the grain.²²

I am analyzing the tapes and transcripts from the learning circles I held for my research study and realizing that the women in my study are doing just that, they are re-creating some of the adult education discourses in their own teaching lives.

Phyllis, I've really enjoyed our chats and hope we keep in touch. I'm going to have to go off-line for a time to finish the rough draft of my dissertation. I'm thinking that you might be reaching the crunch point for some of your courses - final papers, etc? Perhaps we can touch base again in a few weeks.

Tammy

November 27, 1995

Tammy:

Funny you should mention papers. I was indeed starting to feel overwhelmed by the number of papers I have due in about a month, so, I too, will need to devote some time to that.

I have loved our talks and learned a great deal. Let's do keep in touch.

Until then,

Phyllis

²² Ibid., 74.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Moving Through Silence - Fall, 1995

"Dammit, I can't believe I can't find my notes on *Women's Ways of Knowing*.¹ They're always in the book, always. I've done this talk half a dozen times and I always put them there," I said to the bookshelves in my office, hoping they'd hear me and perhaps the notes would fall into my hands. Nothing happened. I was, once again, very frustrated and angry about the disruption in my life caused by the move to Buffalo a year ago and the move back this summer. It was exactly a year ago to the day, I realized, that I'd left Calgary. October 24, 1994. Since then my stuff had been in storage twice and I'd only had a home for six of those twelve months. Somehow more things had disappeared in the move, more things were broken, more things were damaged and dirtied. I thought back to the lies in my job interview, the dysfunctional, emotionally abusive work environment, the corruption on campus starting with the president, the many injustices suffered at the hands of a sexist male boss, the actual witch hunt in our department (I was the witch) that led me to resign and return to Calgary. And this was adulthood, I thought. This was what I had committed my life to.

It was 2:30 pm. I had a class to go to at the Center for Positive Living at 7:00, had to leave there by 8:00 to be a guest speaker in a CACE adult learning class on feminist pedagogy at 8:30. Why had I told the instructor I'd do it? It was too risky to talk about feminist pedagogy and I wasn't up for being called a male basher, which

¹ Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger and Jill Mattuck Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

inevitably happened whenever I gave this talk in class. And why, on this day of all days, would I lose my notes, lose those hours of work I'd put into that presentation? I didn't have time to be volunteering for this either. I needed to focus on my own work, writing my dissertation, and finding a job. I couldn't afford not being paid for things. How in the world was I going to pay my bills?

I caught myself getting sucked into this downward spiral of anger, frustration and anxiety. I started to think about the principles of the classes I'd been taking at the Center. "Change your mind, change your life" popped into my head. Indeed, it had become a guiding phrase for me. So, I stopped the noise in my head, visualized the bad stuff floating away in balloons and created a more positive image. What emerged for this talk on feminist pedagogy was not all that surprising.

I walked into the Continuing Education Seminar Center Room 77 at 8:20, greeted by an anxiously awaiting class. They were looking at me as if I were late. I was there early, I thought.

"Did I tell you the class ended at 9:30?" the instructor asked as I walked to the front of the room.

"Yes," I replied, starting to feel a little anxious.

"Oops. We quit at 9:00. Sorry about that," he looked embarrassed. "Can you adapt your stuff?"

"I guess so. If we start right now, we'll have 35 minutes." I started to unpack my stuff while he introduced me. I looked around the room. A few familiar faces of people I'd met while still CACE Coordinator. Most were smiling warmly at me. That helped. There was a nice tone in the room. The instructor's personal warmth and commitment were evident. I was thinking furiously about how to adapt. I'd planned on an individual go around the table

getting one-word descriptions from people about the readings on feminist pedagogy that were part of this course. Then I was going to spend half an hour talking, followed by 5 minute buzz groups, and finally a large group discussion/reaction to my talk. What would I do? He had finished a very nice intro to me. It was time.

"Thanks for the kind words. Nice to be here. I recognize a few faces from last year. As some of you may know, I spent last year at a college in the states and so have just moved back into my home. This afternoon, I hauled out my *Women's Ways of Knowing* book because that was where I kept my notes on this talk. I've given it several times in the Adult Learning class. Well, somehow in this move, I've lost the notes, which initially panicked me, and then I realized that it was very appropriate. I think it's time for me to start fresh with this topic.

So let me start by saying that I consider this topic extremely risky, the riskiest topic I've dealt with as an adult educator. I would much rather be doing the Myers-Briggs² right now - I see you've been working on learning styles - it's safer, it's fun and I've never been called a male basher when I've done it. But I have been called a male basher, or at least the intimation was there that I was one, every time I've done this talk. And I have to tell you that it hurts. And I have to tell you that that's never been my intent, so I don't know if I say things that lead people to believe that, or if people are responding from a particular perspective and it wouldn't matter what I said. In any event, I find it challenging and risky." I looked

² The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is a personality instrument intended to make the theory of psychological types as described by C.J. Jung understandable in people's lives. Please refer to Isabel Briggs Myers and Mary H. McCaulley, *A Guide to the Development and Use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator* (Palo Alto: Consulting Psychologists Press, 1985) for a full description.

around the room. I certainly had their attention, especially when I mentioned the male basher thing. Good that that was out. It occurred to me that because I'd already used it, its power was diminished.

"I'd like to start by asking you to take a small risk. I think that feminist pedagogy, above all else, is about connecting with people and it would help me connect with you if I could get a sense as to your initial reaction to this topic. I was originally going to ask everyone for a one word reaction to the readings on the topic, but since we don't have time, I'd like to get a quick one-word response from each table."

I think I scanned the room and returned my gaze to the table to my left, at which point a man started talking. He talked at great length actually, given that I'd asked for a one-word reaction. I don't remember exactly everything but part of it was, "Well, I don't know who writes this stuff but it's just so off base. I mean this might have been true sixty, seventy years ago, but today? This just doesn't make any sense."

"Thank you. Other comments. Let's move around the room." I was able to detach from that comment. I'd asked for their feedback and it wasn't my place now to start a discussion.

"Well, I teach all men in my classes and I don't have a problem at all. I don't see why we would be spending time discussing just women's perspectives. What's the point?" said a woman sitting at his table. I don't know if my face showed it but I was taken aback by that one. All we ever read about is men, I wanted to tell her.

"Thanks. Let's move to the next table." The rest of the comments were interesting. A couple of women said they'd found the readings interesting and eye-opening. One other man made a similar observation about this not being relevant today. That it might have been true sixty years

ago. A table of three women to my right chose to pass, even after I'd addressed their table specifically.

"Well, thank you all for your feedback. It's very helpful. I'd like to tell you my perspective and I stress the MY. I want you to remember as I speak that this is my experience and while others might share it, I'm only talking about me. I was thinking today what it meant to me to be a feminist educator and I decided for me that it was about making connections with people, building community, contextualizing knowledge and learning, being authentic, helping people unearth the knowledge that's deep within them, speaking truthfully but with compassion, and having the courage to expose my own thinking to a group and take risks as an educator that might leave me feeling vulnerable. Now, it's very easy to TALK about this stuff. Who would argue with some of the things I've said above? BUT, it's extremely difficult to live it because most of our socialization and institutions reinforce a very different kind of thing - they reinforce a competitive, hierarchical environment.

"In my time as an adult educator and I've taught in many, many contexts - in front of a group of rig workers for Nowsco Well Service, professional development workshops like today, upgrading stuff at Alberta Vocational College - I think I've been able, with the help of the learners, to create this type of learning environment. At other times, I think I may have missed the mark. I think I missed the mark for a reason, and this is the dark side of feminist pedagogy which few people talk about, and which wasn't really addressed in your readings.

"And that is telling the truth of our experience which very often involves anger. Because when you expose yourself, or rather I, expose myself to some of the feminist literature and I start looking around me I get very angry. And I think that anger and our grappling with anger is

central to whether or not a class is successful. When I've been angry, I don't think my classes have functioned as well." I think I really had their attention now, so I pressed further, taking more risks.

"And even though some of you think that things have changed, I can tell you from my perspective that they have not. I have taken many, many classes and I still struggle with the issues raised in your readings. I am going to read you an excerpt from my learning journal from a course I'm taking right now. It's a research course for Ph.D.'s. It is taught by a man, there are two men, one woman and me. The other woman has a demanding work schedule and misses a fair bit, so usually it's me and the three men." I looked around the room. Not a word but I sure could feel eyeball beams focused on me. I read directly from my journal.

September 19/95

I'm anxious about not talking - I want to listen/process but feel I should talk/contribute.

September 25/95

I find myself in a constant struggle in classes - you would think I'd be used to it by now - after all these degrees - but I'm not. Always trying to find words "to fit" the conversation - wanting to contribute, wanting to speak "my truth" but never quite feeling listened to. For example, was my comment about the illusion of teacher talks = student learns really slamming schools? The conversation was stopped and redirected rather quickly. Why? Am I "too personal", "too emotional"? I listened to the entire first class and to me it was just that - school talk - very personal, very emotional. Am I too sensitive to gender differences in the class? Am I "too sensitive" period?

Narrative does tie together events, past, present but again do we create space and really listen to everyone's narrative? That's why I like learning circles - I feel I am given space to speak, speak my truth, and not have anyone censor it, change it. In a learning circle, people really listen without thinking about the next point THEY want to make.

I find these discussions both thought-provoking and terribly silencing, all at the same time.

I need more time to think, to process - I can't come to conclusions too quickly - I need to question, be tentative for a long time before I can make profound observations.

My learning really is about relationships. I tune out whenever the one man talks because he reminds me of every arrogant, pretentious middle-aged man who's ever controlled/influenced my work life. I have to force myself to stop reacting to him so that I can hear what he's saying. Is there a basis for this reaction? Where does it come from?

I continually struggle with issues of competence and being liked and this influences how I participate in classes. What if I didn't care?

October 2

The construction of knowledge really is a political (and sometimes economic) act - critical theorists have always said this - everyday it hits home more and more. For example, the movie "And the Band Played On." AIDS was not discussed with the public because of an

American researcher's ego - now that is scary. And a whole narrative was created around that.

And why are we spending so much time in this class talking about wars (and the male experience of it)? Why aren't we talking about the women and kids left behind - wasn't it equally as "traumatic" to deal with a man who came back scarred or didn't come back at all? Why aren't we talking about the equal (perhaps worse) horror of having your husband/partner beat the crap out of you? Why isn't that type of "narrative" in this course?

October 16/95

The professor's words - "men understand the male duplicity of male narrative. Women don't and thus they get into trouble." Wow, is this really true? Is there a duplicity in male narrative? Do all men know this? If so, I wished I'd known this years ago. I could have saved myself a lot of heartache.

You could have heard a pin drop. I suddenly wondered if I'd made a mistake in exposing this much of myself to a group of almost virtual strangers. I pressed on, conscious of the fact that it was now 8:45 and I wanted at least a few minutes to debrief.

"I think the threads of feminist pedagogy are embedded in my journal. In standing back from my journal (as much as possible given it's mine), I see silence, silencing, wanting to speak up, gender issues, and anger. Now I've been socialized to never express anger, never even admit I felt it and so for years I didn't. But you can't do that over the long haul because one of two things happens. Number one, you get sick. Physically sick. And I was sick for

years plagued by migraine headaches that just wouldn't go away." I saw a number of women nodding their heads and smiling knowingly.

"Or number two, it oozes out. It comes out in inappropriate places and gets directed at people who don't deserve it, who have nothing to do, really, with your anger. And so, I think that feminist educators need to grapple with their anger and I think they have to do it continually because you cannot create an empowered learning environment if you're angry. And it's tough. Because there are a lot of things that make me angry. And I have discovered that the only way, FOR ME, to transcend that anger, not ignore it nor feed it, but grapple with it has been spiritually, not psychologically."

I hadn't even got the psychologically out when a woman to my left asked, "What do you mean by spiritually?"

Oh, oh, I thought. This was getting really intense. I sputtered a bit. "Well, II....for me, it's acknowledging the anger, acknowledging the reality of it, being truthful about it, but ultimately recognizing the highest in everyone, despite what the outer reality might be. Seeing the highest in everyone regardless of race, gender, realizing that in all of us that highest exists, despite what I might see going on around me. " I didn't know what else to say. I didn't want to get into something that might get people going about religion. I didn't want to use words like God, higher power, etc. I looked helplessly at her. She nodded, smiling, again, that knowing nod and smile that a few women had shown me throughout my talk.

"Well, I really find this kind of talk rather intense. Please talk in pairs, small groups for five minutes and we'll come back as a large group to debrief a little." The instructor walked over to me from the side of the room, while the room filled with a buzz.

"Wow, I'm stirred up by your talk," I think he said. "This is good. I think people were ready for this. I think it's timely."

"I hope so," I responded. "I hope I didn't turn off too many people. Always the risk with this topic. Always."

"Maybe. But then you may have turned some on too," he pointed out.

"Let's come back as a large group for the last five minutes," I said. "Any questions, comments that you'd like to make as a summary?"

Before I'd even finished talking the man to my left started in again. I don't remember now the exact words but the essence of his previous comment was there and I remember one comment in particular. He said, "Who is this woman who wrote this crap? I'd like to get her down here and find out where the heck she's at!" Boy, did he hit a nerve with me. "The woman" was a friend of mine, a committed feminist educator who I admired for continuing to speak up when it would have been easier not to. Here was just what I was talking about. Anger. His, for who knows what reason and mine, because I felt he was devaluing my experience as a woman, insulting other women, and monopolizing the discussion with his rigid views. He'd had his air time and here he was taking up more.

"Well, actually, her office is directly above us, two floors up," I said, trying, I suppose, to remind him that he was talking about a real person, not some abstract entity.

He thought I meant let's get her down here right now and so replied, "Well, I doubt she'd be working at this hour." He looked a little uncomfortable.

"Actually, she might be. I know she often works late into the evening. Let's move around the room and get some other comments." Enough of this. How easy it was to get sucked into a no-win conversation.

"Well, at our table as soon as you told us to work in

small groups, the other two women turned to the only man at the table to see what he would say. I felt a little left out because I was trying to turn my chair to face the group and the others were focused on him," said the third woman at that table.

"Very interesting," I replied. There followed a bit of a discussion at their table, followed by some comments from other tables.

"Well, I'd just like to thank you Tammy for being so honest and taking the risk that you did. Not everyone will respond in the same way to your openness but I think you modeled what you were talking about. Thank you." The comment had come from a woman in the middle of the room. I was a little embarrassed but pleased. If there was one thing I did want this group to get out of my presentation, it was the importance of walking the talk, of taking the risk to speak honestly, from the heart. Another woman at that table then shared her experience of finding her voice while serving on a volunteer board. It was moving.

Other comments followed, the details of which are not with me today. Certainly a number of issues were left hanging. They had to be. This was a topic with hundreds of years of history behind it. How could one possibly make sense of it in thirty-five minutes? A number of people hung around after, thanking me for the talk, following up a little more on some ideas.

As usual with this presentation, I had mixed feelings. There were always a few who were upset with the topic, maybe even upset with me. They were usually men, but not always. There were always a few whom I had touched deeply. They were usually women, but not always. And then there was that whole group in the middle, who had said nothing, who left quickly at the end of the class, returning to their own worlds, probably glad to escape the tension that inevitably developed during a class on this topic. To not talk about

this topic in a class on adult learning and development would be to deny the reality, to continue to perpetuate paradigms of education that have not and do not work for a good number of people. To talk about it risks alienating one person from another, which is the opposite of what is intended in a feminist pedagogical framework.

I had ended the presentation by saying, "As adult educators, each of us has to make MINDFUL, conscious choices about these kinds of issues and how we're going to handle them in the class. We have to. It's our responsibility as adult educators." That was true, I guess. I really didn't know what else to tell them. I knew for me, at least right now, that I had to grapple with anger as part of making those mindful, conscious choices. Even though I suspected that anger might be an issue for others as well, I couldn't make that kind of generalization. I could only speak for myself.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Writing Women II

In an ideal world, Tammy wrote on March 13, 1995, I would ask you to another learning circle

but

since I'm in Buffalo and you are not, could you respond in writing to me? What does your graduate degree mean to you today?

Carley

opened doors

academic credibility (contemplate phd?)

*internal source of satisfaction/
external indication of achievement*

PJ

*my outward, inward bound experience - a black diamond run
(working, young kids, back to school)
(discover innner me, newfound confidence)*

metaview of profession/complexities/nuances

high expectation - I moved from

I'll take any job

to

I'll bide my time for opportunities that fit

Helen

aura of credibility, professionalism

*don't think about degree - think about
knowledge/experience*

process impactful, learning highlight, an indulgence

I'm not a dabbler.

Elizabeth

*internal need/challenge?
dad workaholic and PhD?*

broadened horizons/opened doors

*accreditation for new career
opportunities in adult ed exciting*

Nahanni

critical incident/turning point/rite of passage

spoken of it to few

*six women - speaking out about an incident
interrogation/harassment*

*academic world fraught with academic jealousies, petty
rivalries, massive insecurities and misunderstandings*

moved from naive student to mature adult learner

degree a symbol of tenacity

but

interest in doctorate forever quashed.

Tammy

I could compete with the big boys.

*a symbol of
transformation/development/strength/persistence/confidence
to finish despite financial/emotional stress*

*lifelong friendships from program
most significant of my life
I cherish them.*

CHAPTER NINE

De/constructing Language - Fall, 1995

"Tammy, you cannot do this. You cannot. This is too colloquial. Your language. It's not scholarly. You just can't..." Gordon had settled himself on her loveseat, pulling out dissertation draft number whatever that she'd given him to read. He was taken aback by it, very uncomfortable. He was used to more scholarly writing. What was this she was doing?

"Why not? Who says I have to write a certain way? This is what's coming out. I tried the distanced, more objective scholarly stance. I can't do it. It doesn't feel right. Besides, there is support in the literature for this." She felt herself getting defensive again, but why? She had just spent days in the library, reading about feminist poststructuralism and, while she was reading it, it made such perfect sense. While she was writing her dissertation it had made sense too but in her heart, she was afraid to show her work to anyone. Maybe that's the grip that the conventional scientific paradigm has on people, as Richardson¹ suggested. Only certain kinds of writing qualify as knowledge.

"Yes, I know. I'm a little familiar with some of the feminist poststructuralist literature you mention, but the writers I've read - Lather², Weedon³, Gore⁴ - certainly don't

¹ Laurel Richardson, *Writing Strategies: Reaching Diverse Audiences* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1990).

² Patricia Lather, *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy with/in the Postmodern* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

³ Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

write the way you do. Their writing is formal, much more appropriate to a dissertation which is supposed to demonstrate your academic/scholarly abilities." She is just going to get murdered, thought Gordon. Just murdered. Having recently defended his own dissertation a few months ago, he was well aware of the types of questions that could be asked. She was not humble enough, and a great deal of what she'd written was mere conjecture, casually dismissive of the long history of the scientific method. Besides, she was so self disclosing - it made him uncomfortable. He felt like a Peeping Tom reading her stuff, something he could not say about any other dissertation he'd read.

"Well, that's true but there are other writers - Dean⁵, Richardson⁶, Davies⁷, Ronai⁸ - who do employ a colloquial style. And then there's people like Cixous and Clement⁹ and Minh-ha¹⁰ whose work is almost indecipherable because of the multiple voices and perspectives and the ever so fine line between fiction and non-fiction. At least I try to give my

⁴ Jennifer Gore, *The Struggle for Pedagogies* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

⁵ Ann Victoria Dean, *Teachers Writing about Themselves* (Dalhousie University: Unpublished Dissertation, 1992).

⁶ See Laurel Richardson (1990), (1992), (1993), (1994).

⁷ Bronwyn Davies, "Women's Subjectivity and Feminist Stories" in *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1992).

⁸ Carol Ronai, "The Reflexive Self Through Narrative: A Night in the Life of an Erotic Dancer/Researcher" in *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1992).

⁹ Helene Cixous and Catherine Clement, *The Newly Born Woman* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

¹⁰ Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989).

readers some signposts to follow. I try to provide some sort of rationale for what I'm doing and why." She half believed that she knew the rationale behind what she was doing. The other half felt compelled to write certain things, only discovering their importance or place in her dissertation after they were written. She was reminded of an artist acquaintance who talked about being on the edge of his brush - the brush did the art, not him. That's how she felt sometimes when she was writing - something (one?) else was doing it. That sure didn't fit in very well with the scientific discourse that suggested research proceeded in a logical, sequential way. Could her approach be considered legitimate?

"For example Tammy, the part about going home to paint the granaries. It was interesting reading and I guess I learned a lot about you I didn't know, like how insecure you are despite your extraverted appearance, but what does that have to do with your dissertation?" He almost said "and this is not the time or place for therapy", but caught himself. He could sense her vulnerability.

"Why, absolutely everything! Don't you see that? What's embedded in my story about going home is everything that feminist poststructuralists talk about - the interactions and contradictions among subjectivity, power, language, and what we come to know as common sense - how these are used to examine our potential for change. That's just what Weedon talks about." Was she not getting it? Had she misunderstood the feminist poststructuralist paradigm? Or was Gordon just so caught up in expecting research and writing to be a certain way that he couldn't hear what she was saying? "Well, and it's not just that sketch in particular, but any sketch that introduces readers to the elements of my own subjectivity and what I take to be common sense. The way I grew up and the role my family still plays in my life is profoundly connected to everything else I do -

the various contradictory discourses in which I find myself."

"Such as?"

"Well, for example, the value my family placed on hard work, physical labour, the practical and down-to-earth, traditions such as marriage and children, the issues of self-esteem and lack of voice that characterize alcoholic households, even the role that traditional religion played in my upbringing. That's a very different discourse from say, what's valued in the academic world."

"Yes?"

"Well, so as Davies says, I know myself through the various discourses in which I speak myself. If I speak myself into a discourse, for example, that values marriage and children, I am a failure. If I speak myself into a discourse that values long term employment in one company, I'm a failure. If I speak myself into a traditional scientific discourse, my writing is self indulgent, therapeutic, scientifically suspect. And so on. There are a multitude of discourses in which all of us find ourselves - some conscious, some not."

"I guess. But you still have to have some respect for aprior theoretical stances. I don't buy this notion of not imposing theoretical frameworks on the world. I have a real problem with it." Gordon was ticked. Talk about anti-foundational and deconstructive. "There's got to be some order to research or it just becomes a free for all, hopeless relativism oozing out everywhere, no criteria for judging the superiority of any claim!"

"Why do claims to knowledge need to be superior to others? As Lather points out, that's a hierarchical conception of knowledge that suggests that only certain people are right or that certain types of knowledge are better than others. Relativism is only a problem for the dominant groups who are having their views challenged. It

also assumes that an appearance of order equates to validity, which is definitely something I don't buy. Also, in our more lucid moments as teachers ourselves, we know that a good deal of educational theory has little to no relevance or application to the classroom. Watch teachers' eyes glaze over whenever an academic tries to tell them about some new theory. Now there's a couple of different discourses going on - just whose needs are being met by the research?"

"Tammy, you're just not getting it. You can't write a dissertation and not discuss validity, or at least the qualitative equivalents to validity, like trustworthiness, verisimilitude, dependability, confirmability."

"OK, fine. Here it is. New paradigm researchers say that validity is about the relationships among the researcher and the researched¹¹. Richardson¹² suggests validity is not a triangulation issue where we try to point to some fixed truth out there somewhere, but rather an issue of crystallization. There is no one fixed point of truth but many shifting ones. A crystal reflects light, creating different colours, patterns. What we see depends upon where we're standing at the time. Lather¹³ speaks of a validity of transgression which focuses on what frames our seeing, a similar idea. I am trying to be as clear as I can about my point of reference. It is up to the readers to decide validity. That's all I can do. Which, by the way, reminds

¹¹ See for example P. Reason and J. Rowan, eds., *Human Inquiry: A Sourcebook of New Paradigm Research* (Chichester: Wiley, 1981); and Peter Reason, *Human Inquiry in Action: Developments in New Paradigm Research* (London: Sage, 1988).

¹² Laurel Richardson, "Writing: A Method of Inquiry" in Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, eds., *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (London: Sage, 1994).

¹³ Patricia Lather, *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy with/in the Postmodern* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

me of another important point to my story about my family and why it belongs here."

"Well, now I'm really curious. What is that?" Gordon was studying her intently.

"My disdain and reluctance to write more scholarly comes right back to my roots. Remember my mother's hesitancy to write me when I was in Buffalo? Well, it goes deeper than that. She feels embarrassed and stupid by her own limited access to language. I've come to believe that sometimes language can be used to oppress, to lock out certain people from a discourse and even to embarrass them. It can also be used by researchers and writers to mask their own questions, their own uncertainties, their own contradictions, their own subjectivity. The omniscient voice of science lets people hide - no, encourages them as embodied people with emotions, experiences, and insecurities - to hide behind language.

"I have decided, unconsciously at first but now quite deliberately, that I would not exclude people from my writing and I would not hide from them either. I want to give my dissertation to anyone and have them make sense of it. I do not want to use language that excludes. As Dean said in her own dissertation, people think you're simple minded and naive if you write clearly. You're not at all. It's far more difficult to write clearly than hide behind educational jargon strung together in confusing sentences and paragraphs."

"Hm. Is that really why you write this way or is it because you don't have a good command of language and, therefore, a grasp of complex ideas? Sometimes you need different language to convey complex ideas."

"I don't agree." She was very aware of the line walking she did, the numerous discourses that shaped her reality. She wanted her parents to be able to read what she had written, even though she was utterly terrified of what

would happen if they ever did. She wanted the research participants to read her work, but was anxious of how they might respond to her representation of their knowledge. She wanted numerous people outside of her Ph.D. committee to read her dissertation but, again, she was utterly terrified at what they might think or what they might say. She wanted other academics to respect her work, but not if it meant suppressing her own voice. She wanted her own Ph.D. committee to read and appreciate her work, even though she knew she was asking them to take a risk in their own academic lives by approving her work.

No wonder traditional social science writing had such a hold on everyone. It's so safe, so unambiguous, so distanced, so removed. Writing like this is terribly risky, almost like walking around naked. "Let's talk about the gossip at the faculty, Gordon, and get off this topic. I've been living and breathing feminist poststructuralism. Time to give it a rest."

"Gladly." He hated this conversation. It flew in the face of everything he'd been taught and come to believe about research, knowledge, even his own recent Ph.D. It challenged his own sense of competence and accomplishment. What, really, did his own Ph.D. mean if he bought into Tammy's perspective?

The conversation had been disturbing to Tammy as well. What she didn't realize then is that it would be a few months before she returned to her writing.

CHAPTER TEN

Hitting the Wall - January, 1996

I'm sitting at my desk looking out the window at the Calgary City Hall Mirrorplex (that's my name for the oddest city hall I've seen - thousands of mirror-like windows endlessly reflecting the city back upon itself), and the outdoor rink at Olympic Plaza. It is -30 today and there are 3 brave souls (fools?) skating around. I am actually writing again after a month of sitting at my desk at home, staring blankly at a computer screen. This new office in the Dominion Bank Building, and newfound energy and focus is quite the contrast from the prison I had created in my mind and home.

This change of scenery and outlook all started last week when I hit the wall, or hit bottom, to borrow AA's term. It happened a week ago when my counsellor said, "You may want to consider drug therapy to help you get through this. You're pretty resilient, Tammy, especially given your family history and personal circumstances of the past year, but you shouldn't have to suffer these emotional ups and downs so much. Perhaps this might help you get on with things? I'm not saying to go out and do it, just consider it," my counsellor said. I was stunned. I still am, kind of, but also somewhat thankful she said that. It got my attention.

The following two days were a blur. I remember lying on the floor in the middle of my living room, staring at a crack in the ceiling for minutes? hours? who knows? Time took on an especially fluid character. I called university health services to make an appointment with the resident psychiatrist. The receptionist informed me that the next available appointment would be the middle of February. A lot of good that would do me now, I thought, as I hung up

quickly. I had never felt so alone, so trapped, so empty, so devoid of purpose and spirit. If this was what Carey¹ meant by shadows of fear, I felt it in every inch of my body. I was terrified.

What was wrong with me? I had a supportive, if troubled, family, but don't we all? I had wonderfully patient and understanding friends and colleagues. I was healthy. I was privileged. I had skills and talents. I had an education. I had opportunities. I had everything I could possibly need, except, perhaps, the most important thing.

And then I got angry, at no one, everyone and myself most of all. I found myself walking around and around my tiny living room, pacing like a caged animal. Then I put on my coat and forced myself to go outside, because I hadn't left the house in a few days. I walked for hours and I prayed for a miracle, something, anything that would get me beyond this awful place. I ended up at a matinee of "Waiting to Exhale". Why? I have no idea. Just seemed like the thing to do. But something happened while I sat in that empty movie theatre in the middle of the afternoon watching four beautiful women cope on-screen with their respective demons. Something very profound, something hard to articulate, a spiritual awakening, a shift in perspective, a miracle really. I think I rediscovered the "me" that had been missing for some time, my spirit, my essence, my own inner power, a sense that I was okay despite what might be going on around me, a sense of connection even though I was sitting all by myself in a huge room. A sense that I was more than the outer appearances and distractions in which I'd been wallowing.

I suppose that Mezirow would call my experience a

¹ Ken Carey, *Return of the Bird Tribes* (San Francisco: Harper, 1988).

perspective transformation, precipitated by a trigger event, a disorienting dilemma (or several dozen such dilemmas, at least in my case). He says, "Meaning perspectives are transformed through a critically reflective assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, and psychic [meaning psychological] distortions acquired through the process of introjection, the uncritical acceptance of another's values."² Ah, is that what I was doing? It seemed like I was doing a lot of other things this past year quite unrelated to his implied systematic analysis of distortions. I think I engaged my hands and body in quite a few activities - I made a lot of salsa, a lot of wine, painted a lot of buildings and walls, strung a lot of peppers, baked a lot of cookies, walked a lot of miles - in the hope that I might find myself again. I know I also did a lot of praying that went something like "help me". But critically reflective assessment? I don't think so.

Other theorists would analyze my experience by their own relevant discourses - long range effects of an alcoholic household, a patriarchal society that marginalizes women, post-traumatic stress syndrome (which is how my counsellor referred to my experience in Buffalo), genetic predisposition to clinical depression, and so on. The psychological and sociological explanations are endless, confusing, contradictory.

But this perspective transformation, or whatever you want to call it, is not about any of the above, at least to me. I had been wrestling with spiritual issues, not psychological ones, not sociological ones. And while assessing the epistemic, sociocultural and psychic distortions might be an interesting distraction, the way

² Jack Mezirow and associates, *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990), 14.

back to the self is an inward journey to the soul, perhaps facilitated, at least in my case, by an outward engagement with the physical world. To be in the world, but not of it.

We cannot ignore the spiritual in our theories any longer.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Writing Women III

In an ideal world, Tammy wrote on March 13, 1995, I would ask you to another learning circle

but

since I'm in Buffalo and you are not, could you respond in writing to me? How did your participation in graduate work change you?

Carley

*feel differently about my learning
self-confidence, self-esteem, self-directed, independent*

value learning community

*feel passionately about adult ed
sense of mission about lifelong learning*

transformed, empowered, energized, taking risks

PJ

higher respect for self

greater confidence

expectations of professional gratification

Helen

*multifaceted
sorting out other things - divorce, self discovery*

coincided with forming philosophy of adult ed

new-found confidence, became comfortable in gray areas

Elizabeth

more eclectic, understanding, tolerant person

*so many instrumental people
in my fumbling search to understand myself*

grown spiritually

Nahanni

better thinker

network of colleagues still connected to today

connection/commitment to adult education

critical incident led to question my part in academic world

Tammy

transformation, perspective shifting, catalyst

found my passion/bliss in the ethos of adult ed

made a lifelong commitment

I can do what I love and get paid for it.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Experiencing Research - February, 1996

So here's the question of the day. When does "research" in the social sciences take place? Does it take place in the mind of the researcher when she is in the library reading about a topic of interest to her, forming the impressions that will frame the study? Does it take place when she's writing up the research proposal? Does it take place (to venture into quantum physics, transpersonal psychology, new age spirituality) when the participants are contacted and the group energy begins to form? Does it take place at the time that the research participants are interviewed, surveyed, observed? Does it take place when interviews are transcribed? Does it take place when the researcher is writing up the study? Or does it take place when you, the reader, read the study and go on your way quoting, reading from, or incorporating into your own beliefs and practices the results of such an inquiry?

Can anyone provide a definitive answer? Any and all of the above I suppose, given the postmodern context. Laurel Richardson in "Poetics, Dramatics, and Transgressive Validity: The Case of the Skipped Line"¹ demonstrates the hold of the written word over the actual event itself. She presents the results of an interview with an unwed mother as a poem at a conference, only to have an audience member demand to see the transcript to check for validity and reliability. As she says, why didn't he ask to hear the tape or speak face-to-face with the interviewee? What kind of power does the written word have? Why is it assumed that

¹ Laurel Richardson, "Poetic Representation, Ethnographic Presentation and Transgressive Validity: The Case of the Skipped Line," *The Sociological Quarterly* 34.4 (November, 1993).

because the interview was "written up" as a poem that it is any less valid or reliable than if it were written up using the unchallenged, taken-for-granted conventions of an objective researcher writing from a distance, using an already established theoretical framework in which to analyse/disect the interview/interviewee and have the conclusions rise to the top like cream?

My research into the graduate experiences of women adult educators has been happening for a few years; it didn't start or end with the learning circle two summers ago. The group of six women, including myself, talked and listened to each other's stories, and left that night, each of us taking home something a little different about ourselves, about our experiences, about each other. We were all researching, making sense of our worlds, constructing knowledge. Then, when I asked participants to respond in writing to more questions, the act of writing responses became another layer in the meaning-making surrounding their graduate work. In writing it up now, I am engaging in yet another round of meaning-making. I agree with Richardson's observation that

Postmodern culture permits us - indeed, encourages us - to doubt any method of knowing or telling can claim authoritative truth. We have an historical opportunity to create a space for different kinds of science practice. . . . In that practice, one's relationship to one's work is displayed. There is a sense of immediacy, of an author's presence and pleasure in doing the work. Lived-experience is not "talked about", it is demonstrated; science is created as a lived-experience. Dualisms - "mind-body," "intellect-emotion," "self-other," "researcher-research," "literary writing-science writing" - are collapsed. The researcher is embodied, reflexive, self-consciously partial. A female imaginary, an unremarked gynocentric world, centers and grounds the practice. Space is left for others to speak, for tension and differences to be

acknowledged, celebrated, rather than buried alive.²

My candidacy exam in October, 1994 addressed the question, "How do the experiences of the Certificate in Adult and Continuing Education (CACE) instructors at the University of Calgary contribute to the literature on the training and development of adult educators?" I suggested then that our experiences pointed to one theme - that being an adult educator is about embracing tensions and, therefore, our training and development is quite fundamentally connected to surfacing, living with, and welcoming these tensions.³ A year and a half later I find that notion remarkably similar to the central concepts of feminist poststructuralism - that we know ourselves by the various and contradictory discourses that both shape us and are shaped by us. But in the candidacy exam, I TALKED ABOUT lived experience. Here I want to DEMONSTRATE lived-experience. As Lather says,

data might be better conceived as the material for telling a story where the challenge becomes to generate a polyvalent data base that is used to vivify interpretation as opposed to "support" or "prove." Turning the text into a display and interaction among perspectives and presenting material rich enough to bear re-analysis in different ways bring the reader into the analysis via a dispersive impulse which fragments univocal authority.⁴

² Ibid., 706.

³ Tammy Dewar, "Learning Circles as Catalyst: Exploring Adult Educators' Training and Development" *Unpublished Paper* (Calgary, 1994).

⁴ Patricia Lather, *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy with/in the Postmodern* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 91.

Thus am I drawn back in time to August, 1994 through watching the videotape of the session and listening to the audiotape. Thus do I discover the non-temporal, non-local nature of writing up research, the endless meaning-making that characterises such an approach to research. Thus do I recreate for you in February, 1996 what happened in August, 1994.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Speaking/Circling Women - August, 1994

Preparing for the Circle

I arrived early for the 7:00 pm learning circle, lugging in the goodies promised to research participants. The techie from Communications Media was already in the continuing education basement seminar room, setting up the audio and video recording devices. I looked around the room. They had tried to fix it up, hanging some nice artwork on the walls, but the truth was it was still kind of ugly and not all that inviting. There were no windows to the outer world. I, and some of the other participants, had spent hundreds of hours in this room as master's students. I often felt claustrophobic in that room, boxed in, suffocated, unconnected. It seemed sometimes that the wide world of adult education had been confined to those four walls, an odd perspective really, given the nature of the field. Some of the women, though, felt differently. Helen pointed out to me upon reading my description that she thought the room was subterranean, womb-like, protective, comforting - it was like "coming home" to use Bateson's metaphor.¹

I set about pushing the tables to the outside of the room, arranging a circle of six chairs around a floor mike. Next, I put out the donuts I'd brought to quell the hunger pains.

"So you should be all set up," the com/media guy told me. "I've tested everything and it works. If you have any problems, just call com/media and someone will come down to help you."

¹ Mary Catharine Bateson, *Peripheral Visions: Learning Along the Way* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994).

"Great, thanks." I vaguely remember my sense of anticipation and anxiety. It was August 17. By September 30, I had held the learning circles, transcribed the tapes, written the candidacy exam, finished my work commitments with the Faculty of Continuing Education, rented my condo (after an unsuccessful attempt at selling), researched and confirmed a mover, looked after the endless paperwork that accompanies a move to the US and packed the contents of my condo. How in the world did I ever get all of it done? I really don't remember.

I do remember looking forward to meeting with this group of women. They were special to me. I had sent out invitations to all core course instructors in the CACE program at Calgary (ironically they were all women), seven in total, and five had agreed to participate. These women had started out as colleagues - I had met them through my master's classes or through the various jobs I'd had in adult education in Calgary. Some of them I had hired during my two years as director, some had been hired by the previous director. I sometimes felt like an imposter as director of that program. I loved the job, I loved the learners in the program, and I felt privileged to work with such competent and committed instructors, but I never felt 100% confident about my programming and leadership abilities. Was it the nature of the administrator's beast or my own ongoing struggles with self-esteem? I do not know.

I do know that as far as I was concerned they were more than just colleagues. They had become my friends and my doctoral research coincided with saying goodbye to them, so the learning circle was a bittersweet mix of celebration and anticipation of what awaited me in Buffalo. I missed them and everything about CACE while I was away. That is why writing up the dissertation had become so tough I think; it had become the goodbye and mourning to CACE I hadn't done.

Here I was back in Calgary, listening to their voices, reading their words in the transcripts, flashing back to the anticipation I had felt when we had done the learning circles. But I was not really part of CACE anymore and I was not in my new life in Buffalo either. I was hanging around on the edges, not sure who I was or where I belonged. I have never experienced a "job" so deeply and mourned its loss for so long.

They started arriving and gathered around the coffee and goodies, gossiping about the faculty and catching up on each other's news. At one point, one of them (I can't remember who) asked me if I was taping their conversation because she saw me fiddling with the TV monitor. Not yet, I assured her. Good, I would not want anyone to hear these conversations, she said laughing. Too bad I did not tape that part. It is probably exactly the kind of conversation that would shed light on the various contradictions in which all of us carried out our learning and teaching lives.

"Okay, I think we're set up from what I checked. I could hear voices and so on." I laughed, partly a nervous one as the "research" was to begin, partly a laugh that connected me with the group. *"You've all got the information I sent you. Let me give you a quick update before we begin. When I first thought about this research a month ago, I was going to work in depth with the group of CACE core course instructors to look at not just your own training and development, but what you've learned about the topic by facilitating others through teaching in CACE. Then, when I got into the literature and started preparing for my candidacy, I realized that there was a huge gap in the literature - the adult educator's voice. No one talks about the adult educator's life world and how that's going to affect how the adult educator perceives and experiences her own training and development."*

"Because of that and because I'm moving to Buffalo I

expanded my research proposal to include adult educators from a variety of contexts. I thought this would give me an opportunity to look at both Canadian and American issues. *My research question is 'How do adult educators view their own training and development?'*"

Now, I need to digress here a bit from the learning circle. In fact, I have ended up with an adaptation of my original plan to work in depth with CACE instructors, not the one that suggested I would hold circles with a number of adult educators. Why? Well, number one, nobody came to the learning circles I'd set up in Calgary (outside of the CACE instructors, that is); number two, my committee at the candidacy exam suggested I simply work with the transcripts I had; number three, there's no way I would have engaged ANYBODY in learning circles in Buffalo; and, number four, I came to be particularly interested in what we all had to say about our graduate experiences. My research, therefore, has somewhat settled itself around "How do women experience their graduate work in adult education?" As feminist poststructuralists point out, research is carried out by an embodied subjective individual who experiences a multitude of contradictory discourses at any one time. No kidding. How was I to know all of this when I naively typed up my research proposal?

"Any questions with that?"

"So your question is how do we view our own training and development. *That's a really wide open question.* So that could include everything, *the feelings we've had, experiences, the learning we've had, just everything...*" PJ observed.

"Yup," I said.

"OK"

"*But you're using the trigger questions as the guiding into that maze,*" Helen pointed out.

"Right and that might evolve as we go through. We

might decide at the end of the session that these trigger statements don't work. *So I see it very much as an evolution. Like, these trigger comments may not be appropriate to all the groups I meet with and so I'll be constantly changing them as I go along.*"

I have to digress again. There is a tone to the conversation in the tape and my own recollection of that part of the conversation that is not apparent in the transcript. This leads me to question the grip that the traditional scientific paradigm has on everyone. Here was a group of women who had finished their master's degrees in adult education and taken at least two courses in research methods. Now, I know that my research courses did not address the postmodern perspective and I would hazard a guess that none of the other participants had been exposed to that either. So there we were, fully indoctrinated in some pretty traditional notions of science, knowledge, how "proper" research is done and so on. Are we doing this the right way? seems to be the tone. Are you sure you can let things evolve? Don't you have to know exactly what you are doing and plan for things, control for things? At the moment this discussion took place, I was certainly starting to question my announcement of letting things evolve. Even though qualitative researchers talk about the evolving nature of doing research, the manner in which one is expected to represent knowledge and check its "validity, reliability" is anything but. The REAL PROCESS behind dissertations and research reports is masked by the omniscient, absent, detached narrator.

There is hardly one right way to do and write up research, I say now with confidence. What might have happened for all of us if discussions of the postmodern had been part of our master's degree? What would have happened if our professors had encouraged such exploration in how we completed our assignments, for example? It seems to me that

the problem with the scientific method is that it also translates to that same sort of detached practice in the classroom, which allows professors to hide themselves behind the voice of science.

"And," I continued, "I will be using this learning circle with you to write up my candidacy exam. It will be like a mini thesis. I will weave the learning circle discussion and comments into a lit review of the topic. And then, I will hold more learning circles and you might be part of that too."

"So are we going to teleconference with you in Buffalo?" Nahanni asked. Everyone laughed.

"I'm not sure how that's going to work. I'm going to try to get the learning circles done here before I leave. The other thing that's going to have to happen is some sort of checking. Part of validity in qualitative studies is sending back what I've written and saying to people, is this accurate and so on?" I replied. As I write this, I think, that is the traditional view of validity; I refer you back to the section "De-constructing Language" for postmodern notions of validity.

"Don't count on getting a flight paid to Buffalo," Helen said laughing.

"I hadn't fantasized that at all, Helen," Nahanni replied laughing. There was more laughter from the group.

"It may turn out that I have to come back a few times. I certainly have to come back to defend it." No kidding I would have to come back, but I did not think it would be so quickly and permanently. I had not even unpacked the farewell gifts in Buffalo and I was in my car again driving back to Calgary.

Once Around the Circle

"Now, okay, you've all participated in learning circles except PJ, right?" I said, looking at PJ who sat beside me in the circle. Everyone nodded and muttered yes. "So just a few comments about learning circles. BJ Roddick² has written an excellent article about them in the Alberta Association for Continuing Education (AACE) Journal, if you want to follow up on that. Their roots are in Native talking circles and the idea is that whoever has the stick, or stone, or whatever, has the floor, so to speak. And people speak in order then, according to how the stone is passed. Learning circles collect our wisdom that may have been forgotten - people who may not have had a voice have one because the circle is structured in this way. Recently, it has emerged as a form of collective research. So the idea behind a learning circle is that you use trigger comments and take a symbolic item, and this is going to be mine," I said as I took off the necklace I was wearing.

"I was hoping," Carley said.

"Yes, Carley gave me this," I replied. "So the idea is you hold this as you're speaking and then when you finish you pass it on. You always have the right to pass and as we're going through the learning circle no one else interrupts or gives advice. At the end of the learning circle we will do a general discussion that looks at the themes, contradictions maybe. Is that enough of a background, PJ?"

"Are we going around the circle a certain number of times?" PJ asked.

"We'll do two passes around the circle and then we'll do a general discussion," I replied. "Carley, you'll have to

² B. J. Roddick, "Learning Circles for Lifelong Learning Connections" *Journal of the Alberta Association for Continuing Education* 21 (1993), 107 - 120. See also George Por, *Talking Stick Circle L01110* (LEARNING-ORG@WORLD.STD.COM, May 8, 1995).

tell me again what this necklace is... a wind goddess?"

"I was hoping that somebody here might know. I think it was called Spirit of Wind Woman but then I thought maybe it was called Spirit Woman so I'm not sure. It's raku and was made by a potter on Salt Spring Island." Carley replied.

"What is raku?" asked Helen.

"It's a type of Japanese pottery." Carley replied.

"Okay, I'll start the first circle," I continued. "The question is 'When I look back on my participation in adult education graduate work, I learned the most when...' I was thinking about this and it's the wrong wording. It's not really a matter of learning more or less. It's a matter of significant learning. A couple of things struck me - doing assignments that were related to my consulting. I did a business plan for my own consulting. Doing it forced me to do something that I ordinarily wouldn't have done and really tested my abilities. I wouldn't have probably taken a really good look at what I was doing as an adult educator, as an entrepreneur. That was infinitely worthwhile and a good use of my time and it was because the instructor [male] was open to me doing that." I find this an odd statement today. The instructor was open to me doing that? Why shouldn't he be? There is a sense somehow that the instructor gave me permission for the very thing that was most necessary for my own learning and growth.

Also, talking about it in that way places the power in his hands, not mine. What if I had said I changed the assignment to meet my needs? How much more powerful I become in that statement. I am reminded of the paternal/maternal discourse that can be present in classrooms; it can position us as children who seek permission because we cannot make adequate judgements on our own. If we continue to use language in this way, we continue to seek permission and risk denial, instead of being clear about our needs from the start.

"And the other thing," I continued, "is *what I learned from each of the people in my class as I progressed through my graduate program. That was a different kind of learning. I don't know how. I'm still thinking about how that relates to me as an adult educator.*" I know what I was thinking when I said that. I certainly had fond memories of some people in my classes who had become good friends, but the truth was there were a whole lot of other people who absolutely pushed my buttons and I dreaded being around them or in groups with them. I am not sure why I did not say that then. Perhaps because of the adult education discourse which applauds the value of the small group method? Perhaps because of the discourse that it is not nice for women to speak badly of others? Perhaps because of the spiritual discourse that whatever you say of another is judgment and your own projection? That your best teachers are those who push your buttons?

"*I'm going to say ditto about the assignments,*" PJ said laughing as she took the raku necklace from me. "*In terms of group members, just the thought that triggered in me is sometimes I don't remember what people say exactly but I remember how people are. One of the people in our class was a really strong feminist and I had never been exposed, REALLY paid attention to feminist issues and you know I was going 'what, what.'*" I wonder what was behind the what, what. PJ's tone of voice on the tape is a combination of surprise, shock, disbelief at hearing about feminist issues? I am reminded of my own exposure to feminism in a master's class I took. It shook up my world and I started to get angry, and feel quite overwhelmed and depressed about my lot in life as a woman. Was this kind of feminism really all that liberating? "*So how people are has always influenced me - their strong feelings about things, how methodical they are about things, how thoughtful they are about things.*

"But another significant time," PJ continued "was when

there's an assignment that's really interesting and fun. Not literature searches and stuff. I mean we did that so many times." They were endless. As I pointed out in my candidacy exam,³ the heavy bias in graduate work toward reading and regurgitating what the experts have said reinforces the research practice gap, and leaves most of us feeling like what we know (both as individuals and collectively) does not count or is not as valid or good as what has been published. If we are serious about meeting the multiple and diverse learning needs of an ever changing society, then we better start creating space in our curricula for learners to explore what THEY know, as well as what THE EXPERTS know.

PJ's comment about having fun also breaks down some other educational dualisms. Even though most of us do recall fun times in our education as powerful learning opportunities, the literature certainly does not reflect this. Aside from Melamed's⁴ excellent article on play, I found nothing in the literature to link fun/play and graduate work. The official educational discourse seems to be "this is serious stuff here."

PJ continued *"I remember taking a qualitative research class and Kathy and I researched Electric Avenue. We hit the bars three nights in a row and you know wrote about it, and observed. Sometimes I think my observation skills aren't great and so it was an opportunity to really try to develop those skills and to see how qualitative research can be done. And it was just so much fun to do it. And then we looked at each other's journals and Kathy had done - I mean*

³ Tammy Dewar, "Learning Circles as Catalyst: Exploring Adult Educators' Training and Development" *Unpublished Paper* (Calgary, 1994).

⁴ Lanie Melamed, "The Role of Play in Adult Learning" in David Boud and Virginia Griffin, eds., *Appreciating Adults Learning: From the Learner's Perspective* (London: Kogan Page, 1987).

we had seen this, you know, same thing but her side of the elephant was very different from my side of the elephant. So anyhow, I found some of the assignments that were very interesting and fun and sort of taught me something so different from any of my other experiences, that's when there was significant learning for me." PJ passed the raku necklace to Nahanni.

What a powerful example of the situated subjectivity of people, especially when they engage in research. Seeing the same thing but coming up with completely different versions. Who is right? The validity obsession collapses in upon itself and becomes, as Lather⁵ says, a validity of transgression - multiple, partial and endlessly deferred. To get at validity in the case of PJ and Kathy, they would need to explore and clarify what discourses frame their own view of what happened at Electric Avenue. It is not really a matter of better or worse observational skills.

"I guess the most significant learning," Nahanni began slowly, "for me in the graduate work I did came in probably the last year. It seemed I took so long to get through the program that sometimes the significance of it I think was lost from one year to the next." Nahanni chuckled. A number of people, PJ, Elizabeth, nodded furiously. This is the reality of adults, and perhaps particularly women, who engage in a part-time graduate program. For three of the women in the group, their graduate experiences coincided with their experiences of childbirth and becoming mothers of small children. For all of us, it coincided with a hundred other things related to adult life - children in the teen years, divorce, job loss, relationships starting/ending, promotions, and so on. I wonder how much more powerful our learning experiences would have been in the program if it

⁵ Patricia Lather, *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy with/in the Postmodern* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

had been designed around those realities, instead of just alluded to in a detached manner in classes which dealt with characteristics of adult learners. "There is life" and then "there is studying life" and they are distinct and separate, seems to be the discourse.

"I was doing my last course which was an independent study and I was doing it with [male professor]. And it was an opportunity for me to say this is what I want to learn, this is what I want to do and I just need someone to supervise me and [male professor] was gracious enough to kind of buy into that," Nahanni continued. As I said earlier, how much more powerful do we become if we say "I adapted the course to suit my needs."

"And then that led to another significant learning time. [Male professor] was looking for an extra participant for a research project and I just happened to be there. It was a group of women interestingly enough, and we met over a period of three to four months and did all sorts of learning style inventories. Then we really sat and talked about what learning was like for us. We kept a learning journal and it was just for the first time in my life I think I was able to make a connection between the way I learn and have it affirmed and validated. Because I think all through my undergraduate time I had done well academically but I always felt," Nahanni let out a sigh and paused for a bit, "I think I always felt that there was something not, something was missing. Or I was just lucky that I was getting through academically or I mean I had all sorts of reasons for why I was succeeding when it really didn't feel right. Well, I think I've come to knowing why it didn't feel right and it was because it was based on a model I really couldn't relate to as a woman.

"So for me, it was a real affirming experience. I came out of the self-directed learning project realizing that this had great personal relevancy for me. I think this

is a theme I'm hearing in other stories. And that it affirmed me as a learner. So I finished the last year with more confidence in my abilities and it was all serendipitous. I mean all these things kind of sifted down together and serendipity has played a big, big part in my development all throughout. I found the journal of that experience and reread it and realized that one of the pieces that had been missing was some of the self affirmation and so once I had that, it seemed that everything else got a lot easier." Nahanni passed the necklace to Carley.

Nahanni's words are a powerful example of the lingering effects of an educational process that has been standardized and universalized to a point of dangerous conformity and voicelessness. Whose needs does this system meet? Even though there has been a discourse operating for some time about the "learning skills"⁶ all of us need to develop, exploring our learning is not a central part of our education.

She also brings up some troubling issues around gender and learning. There is ample research today about women and education and learning.⁷ Whenever I've presented this

⁶ See for example the Conference Board of Canada *Learn Well, Living Well* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 1988); and the Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development, "Adult Learning: Access Through Innovation" *Draft White Paper* (Edmonton: Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development, 1994).

⁷ See Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinch, Nancy Rule Goldberger and Jill Mattuck Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); Sharon Benson, Judith Fretz, Shuguin Jiao and Kim Kennett, "When Silence isn't Golden: Four Female Graduate Students' Experience of Academic Discourse" *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education* (Vancouver: Simon Fraser University at Harbour Center, 1994); Roberta M. Hall et al., *The Classroom Climate: A Chilly One for Women?* (Washington: Association of American Colleges, undated); M. Lewis and R.I. Simon, "A Discourse Intended for Her: Learning and Teaching with Patriarchy" in J. Gaskell and A. McLaren, eds., *Women and Education* (2nd edition) (Calgary:

information to groups of learners in the CACE program, I get a multitude of reactions, as I indicated earlier. I also had one male professor point out to me that the competitive, hierarchical academic environment can strip anyone, regardless of gender, of their sense of self and voice. What was the model that Nahanni could not relate to as a woman? Would it be a model that some men would not relate to as well? What are the effects of a feminist discourse for both men and women? What are the long range effects for people when they position their experiences as "gendered"? What are the effects when they do not position their experiences as "gendered"?

Carley paused a long time before she spoke. "I, ah," Carley paused again and spoke very softly, "started thinking about things by relating significant learning to assignments and I want to come back to that, but you've triggered something else I hadn't thought about. And that's that when I started the program and serendipity played a part as did Helen in this." She looked over to Helen who was smiling. "I had started a master's program about eight years earlier in EDCI, in the teaching of writing and I had taken a couple of courses and I got to the point where I had to do a year of residency. And I hummed and hawed and hummed and hawed and ultimately didn't pursue it. Fate took a hand and [husband] lost his job and I ended up going to work instead of going to school.

"So," Carley paused again, "the initial summer institute [in the adult education master's] was for me an incredible sense of coming home. That this was the right program, finally the right place, the right people, the right, you know, and I think I have to say that that colored everything from then on. That that was the comfort, the excitement, the this is right, I'm where I want to be

finally."

I find Carley's words "coming home", "right place" and "colored everything from then on" interesting. What does home conjure up in her statement? Safety, connection, security, comfort? That is a very different sense than Nahanni's feeling that something was missing in most of her own educational history.

"And then, being in the program was in a lot of ways a roller coaster. Like, I think the - some of the learning wasn't positive," she laughed as did a few others, "maybe ultimately became positive, but wasn't always that way. But I felt in classes often that I sat back and tried to process things and wasn't quick enough or wasn't, it wasn't happening on the spot and it wasn't until I got away by myself and I started working on a paper or started to read on my own that the pennies started to fall into place. So, I had some very good experiences by myself in the library at Scurfield discovering all those wonderful business journals that made the link to - I mean I came out of lots of academic settings. The other learning came from sitting by myself in front of a word processor and trying to make some sense out of all of this." She passed the raku necklace on to Helen.

Carley's comments "wasn't quick enough, tried to process things" allude to an educational discourse that values group discussion and quick responses, and discourages or is uncomfortable with silence.^{*} How often do we create a space in classes for people to think about instead of talk about their learning? What would happen if we devoted as

^{*} The majority of the literature on instructional techniques and facilitation, for example, focuses on engaging individuals in "talk". Exceptions include a short piece on the quiet meeting by Jerold Apps, *Mastering the Teaching of Adults* (Malabar: Krieger, 1991); and Jack Mezirow and associates, *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990).

much time to the thinking as the talking? How would things change for Carley if she said "I needed more time to think" instead of "I wasn't quick enough?"

"Well, I would certainly have to echo the themes that have already been mentioned," Helen began. "I guess I learned the most when I was able to apply what it was I was doing to the work setting and it's getting to sound like a cliché, but it's true. I always wanted to know what the experts said but nobody else seemed to share that so the master's program gave me a secret opportunity to relate things to what I was doing at work. I could write assignments and I could go back and actually work on the assignment at work and it was like a freebie. And I had just moved into an administrative position from the classroom and so some of the classes moved me into a different track of adult education - distinctions around supervision, evaluation, and coaching.

"So it was that constant integration of being able to work at my assignments at work and then to bring my work to the classroom. So, for me and I guess through that I discovered that my knowledge was probably not just as valid but it had some merit as opposed to the experts. The experts had written it all down. I hadn't but I was doing a lot of those things so it was nice to know that I wasn't coming to the hallowed halls for wisdom to be handed down to me. That I had been doing some of those things and I could continue to do them." Helen passed the necklace to Elizabeth.

Helen's comments echo observations already made about practical assignments, and acknowledging and validating the knowledge adult learners bring to a class. Helen also alludes to earlier comments about the feminist contribution to poststructuralism, the retention of practice with the

development of theory.⁹ A fascinating line, however, is "the experts had written it all down. I hadn't but I was doing a lot of those things" because it points to another educational (indeed social science) discourse. What's written down and published is valid and more legitimate than what one knows to be true for oneself. This places tremendous power in the hands of researchers, writers, editors and publishers. What about the value of the spoken word - is the knowledge generated as a result of a conversation between two practitioners not valid? But, as already discussed, only certain types of knowledge make it to print. Scientific standards for writing have dictated what knowledge looks like.¹⁰ What if we assumed that the goal of graduate classes was to construct knowledge instead of receiving already constructed knowledge?

"I like learning circles cause I can always be going yeah, yeah that's right," Elizabeth said laughing. "So, for me when Nahanni said it took me so darn long. Here I am in my fourth year finishing up my master's thinking god, it feels like it's taken me so long." She laughed again.

"It took me six," Nahanni said.

"Oh good, I feel better," said Elizabeth.

"And I was five," PJ said.

"I finished my course work in the first two years and now in my fourth year I'm seriously getting down to writing my thesis and so when I look back at, as a graduate student and also as being in, finishing the graduate experience, I guess I learned lots of things." In fact, Elizabeth will defend her thesis this April, 1996. As she pointed out in

⁹ Colleen A. Capper, (1992) "Multiparadigm Perspectives of Administration: Informing Theory and Practice," in *Proceedings: Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association*, (1992).

¹⁰ As mentioned previously, see Laurel Richardson, *Writing Strategies: Reaching Diverse Audiences* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1990).

the written responses, life has this way of interfering.

"One of the things I learned a lot from was like Calliope and PJ and everybody has mentioned is from the assignments because I started as well consulting the same time I started my master's in adult ed. I had a program planning course and I had to do a train the trainer workshop and so I got this great train the trainer manual with this excellent rationalization that I learned a ton from and that I feel like I could even market because it was so well thought out because of the class. So I learned a lot from some of the assignments.

"The other thing that I found very contradictory is that here were all these people teaching me adult education who never used any practices of adult education. It's like you get into a university setting and you do things a certain way regardless of what you know. I mean here they're talking about needs assessments and being interactive and and I thought so," Elizabeth laughed, "let's see some of it and I saw nothing."

Elizabeth points out the contradictory discourses operating in adult education graduate work. On the one hand, the adult education literature is full of examples of adult learning¹¹ and on the other hand, most professors seem to operate as if all of that knowledge does not apply to a graduate program in an academic setting. As I have had several professors tell me, "This is not adult education." That is an absurd statement to me now. Back then I think I accepted it and I know I did not challenge the professors. The discourse seems to be "it's all right to not walk the talk in a university setting." Why is that, I wonder? Is this still because of the grip the scientific method has on

¹¹ See Sharan Merriam and Rosemary Caffarella, *Learning in Adulthood* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991) for a summary of the literature; and Sharan Merriam "An Update on Adult Learning Theory" *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 57 (Spring 1993).

both our research and practice? Or is it because the official discourse in academia is publish or perish, a more powerful discourse than the adult education discourse?

"So," Elizabeth continued, *"I guess what I learned partly from that was not to do that, that I would always walk the talk which I feel good about because in my teaching people have always said that I model what I preach which makes me feel really good."* So here is a different discourse. Here is the potential to lessen the research/practice gap. Here is the imaginary narrative¹² that feminist poststructuralists talk about. Why has Elizabeth made a conscious effort to practice what she preaches when some professors have not? What accounts for this? What discourse informs her decision? Is she able to do this because she is marginal anyway as both a woman and a continuing education instructor? Would she still walk the talk if she were a professor in a graduate program?

"Some of the ways that I was treated as a graduate student weren't always very affirming, assignments were sometimes handed back with a grade with no comments, no feedback. I really hated being caught up in the whole grade thing, but they were important. I handed in three binders for this train the trainer thing and only a - great, sixty out of sixty - but no comments. It really hurt me. So in some ways, I've learned a ton but I felt like sometimes it was in spite of what the instructors did. It was very much because of what I ended up learning on my own and from a lot of the other participants."

This is a discourse that few adult educators question and even fewer discuss openly. What about evaluation? What about the grading discourse that all of us know in our

¹² Bronwyn Davies, "Women's Subjectivity and Feminist Stories" in *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1992).

hearts can be a futile attempt to get a handle on assessing learning? Certain branches of adult education, for example the radical tradition as exemplified by Freire¹³, suggest that there is no such thing as an objective or neutral education. Brookfield¹⁴ further suggests that we, as educators, subject ourselves to the same sorts of evaluation criteria we use with our learners and open things up for negotiation, but I think there is more to it than that.

Evaluation of learning is another example of the modernist attempt to quantify, objectify and order the world hierarchically, a leftover residue that has yet to be truly challenged in most institutions. What kind of new discourse do we need to create?

"I've also missed a lot of camaraderie because we moved and I had to finish my degree at a distance," Elizabeth continued. "My first semester when I was a full-time student was wonderful, even with a six month old baby, it was great to be immersed with other people and learning from their experiences. *I guess I also learned that I don't like learning by myself, in isolation. I learn more in a class and talking, even if it's to listen to myself talk. I figure out what I want to say, like now.*" Elizabeth laughed again and passed the necklace to me.

Twice Around the Circle

"*Actually I do have just two quick things to add based on what people have said,*" I began, starting the second turn around the circle. "*The other significant part of coming into the graduate program for me was discovering adult ed*

¹³ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

¹⁴ Stephen Brookfield, *The Skillful Teacher* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990).

because when I came in my first class, I had been working at the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC) and I think I saw one article that somebody gave me at AADAC on adult, I don't even know what it was, adult learning principles, maybe, something like that. And I thought this is kind of neat, you know, and so when I came the first summer, it was so eye-opening or whatever to see, well to get into the literature and find out that yes, there's a field and yes, people have written about this and it's not just something that people do.

"And the other thing that I'd like to pick up on that was mentioned was the knowledge being validated. I guess one of my biggest fears when I came in too was I'm sure I don't know much here and I actually was unemployed by the time I came to my first summer," I laughed. I was going through a crisis about what could I possibly know?" I passed the raku necklace to PJ.

Now here is one of my own contradictions. Reading the literature CAN be empowering as I pointed out. It can be exciting to discover the field of adult education because it is such a marginal field that if one is not at a university one likely does not know it exists. The other point, however, is the validation of my own knowledge as a person. That was important too. We need to create a discourse that accommodates these seemingly disparate and contradictory perspectives.

"I had these all so cut and dried," PJ began laughing. "But just picking up on a few things. Elizabeth, I react the same way when I have a professor who has been a really good role model. I learn from somebody taking the time to read my paper and provide criticism. I had one professor who was the most abysmal professor in the classroom, who modeled everything you would never want to see in an adult educator, outraged the whole class, etc., etc. I was outraged for about twelve out of thirteen classes but to his

credit he did read my paper and," PJ paused, "I got one of the lowest marks in my whole graduate program from him, but he criticized my paper, he gave me some honest feedback and I learned from that.

"So, you know, for me I learned that I value other people's feedback and I also learned that it's very important for me now when I mark papers that I take time with people's papers and I respect that somebody has put a lot of energy and time into it and I honor that. And so I give it back to them because I know how it's felt to have put my guts into something and have it totally ignored and so I learned from that as well." As with Elizabeth, PJ is quite clear about not exposing her learners to the same sort of disregard that she has been.

Nahanni took the necklace from PJ and replied, "We all must have that sense of outrage or something. I still remember the classic and I won't mention his name. He's been around many, many times at the university. He used to always assign 10 articles that you were to read..."

"Oh we don't know who this is," Carley replied. Everyone burst out laughing. In fact, all of us, save one, had taken our degrees from the University of Calgary and knew exactly to whom Nahanni was referring. We laughed now but I remember feeling the outrage Nahanni describes. What kind of academic discourse is operating that it allowed such a practice to continue unquestioned? Nahanni referred to this discourse in one of her written responses to me, described in "Writing Women II." She once spoke up about an incident that happened during her graduate work and the backlash silenced her once more. Nahanni's experience points to a discourse of power, silence and fear that sometimes operates in academia; the marginal female students have no voice in this discourse.

"My goodness," Nahanni continued, "Ten articles that you research and write about and then you get it back and

everyone gets the same mark and there is not any, any indication, no dog-earedness, no dirty coffee stains anywhere, that he has looked at it and I just remember feeling so ripped off," Nahanni was laughing again. A number of us were giggling, nodding our heads, agreeing, "and just I thought, you know, it's just such a farce to assign something if you're not going to take the time. So ditto with what PJ's saying.

"I guess the company of learners is what I was hearing you talk about Elizabeth and this is really significant for me too in learning. I've learned in terms of being a self-directed learner. I really need to have learners that assist me with that and that's one of the ways I learn by talking and sharing experiences with other people. That's what was so positive about the summer institutes - the collegiality and company of learners. I am still in contact with a number of people from the summer institutes.

"I guess in terms of what I'm hearing too is the integration of experience and learning and how important that is I think for all of us. I think for me it goes to another level where we were talking about received knowledge versus connected knowledge or whatever the other term is that Belenkey¹⁵ talks about. The fact that we get away from from having knowledge given to us to creating our own knowledge base and are being validated and validating one another for that. Another reason I really like learning circles is because I think it's a really effective technique for doing that." Nahanni raises the issue, once again, about the importance of knowledge construction in the classroom.

"You have made me feel so much better about when I have papers to mark on the kitchen table," Carley began quickly, taking the necklace from Nahanni. "I spill coffee, the cat

¹⁵ Belenkey et al., 1986.

walks all over it with muddy paws." Everyone burst out laughing. "I'm always writing little explanatory apologetic notes." We burst out laughing again. "So thanks, I'm feeling a little more positive."

"You're welcome." Nahanni replied chuckling.

"I picked up on the aspect of learning from the cohort group and from other people in the program, whether it's people that you do projects with or whether it's just going for coffee and rehashing the class but it's more along the informal kinds of things rather than the formal discussion in the classroom. It's also in," Carley paused searching for words, "I would say my need to rehash things, to get a - often there would be a discomfort or a dissatisfaction with something and through talking it through coming to a better understanding or acceptance of or integration of. So, whether that's like a form of critical reflection but it's, it seems that talking with others is a really crucial part of that." Carley paused again. "Maybe that's arriving at new knowledge or the reframing of the experience." She handed the necklace to Helen.

"It's one of the things that I was hearing," Helen began, "and also that I had experienced was the self-directed aspect of the learning and that while there were courses and objectives, I don't remember what they were. I really didn't care what they were because there was enough latitude that you could then set your own objectives pretty much and be self-directed. And I think that was refreshing and it harkens back to my talking about expert knowledge. That you're always, in our, in our former tradition, you always had to read and regurgitate what other people said but you could finally have the opportunity to be self-directed and while I had been previously, I had never been given that kind of opportunity to really experience what self-directed meant. So I think that hooks into the directions we were able to take." Both Carley's and Helen's

comments, again, point to the importance of knowledge construction in the classroom.

Elizabeth took the necklace from Helen and quickly started speaking, "One thing that comes to my mind as we're talking about this and I guess it comes from my mind a lot is the gender differences and I wonder 'cause of course we're all women here, if if men, you know, to bring in that other factor. Do men say the same things? Are they, you know, do they get most of their learning from the connectedness and the relationships and the discussions with other people and their peers or do they see it much more "yup, ticked that course off, got that requirement done" and it's more . . . I guess in a way that men tend to think a very hierarchical thing. "Yeah, just about done" and not as much reflection and that might be a biased way of looking at it I guess. I tend to get," Elizabeth laughed. "The way I think about men and the way they think is very structured," Elizabeth laughed again, "and not as maybe rich as the things we're bringing out. And I just wonder if that, if that would be bias in our particular sample here." Elizabeth paused here. "Plus I think for me, as I said, I really like learning circles and, and this is really good for me at this point too because embarking on my thesis, quitting my job, and really getting down to things. It's good for me to hear other people's experiences. It helps me think I might make it through." Elizabeth chuckled again. "Perhaps."

Both Elizabeth and Nahanni specifically mention the importance of learning circles as a method to help people with the relational aspect of learning. They also allude to the notion that learning circles, ultimately, are used to recover and construct knowledge.

Elizabeth also initiates a conversation about gender issues. It becomes quite apparent that of all the topics raised in the learning circle, this one was the most

awkward, and did not really receive any sort of consensus, as did some of the other issues raised by the group. It points to the very heart of feminist poststructuralism - that we cannot understand our classrooms through the holy trinity of gender, race, and class alone. It is more complex than that.

Circling Around Themes and Contradictions

"Thank you. I'm just going to check my tape," I said to the group.

"I just can't help interjecting." Nahanni began. "The reason Calliope invited us all being women is that she really wanted the richness." Nahanni laughed and a few others chuckled. "She knew she would have to fish if she did it with men."

"And that's the thing. I wonder you know what would men think?" Elizabeth questioned.

"We only had about one per class anyway," Helen commented.

"Well, that's the thing. We're a female dominated profession which doesn't help." Elizabeth continued.

"Oh, it helps a lot," someone said laughing.

"Well, I mean it doesn't help you get a sense of what their experience might be," Elizabeth continued.

"Might it be more appropriate to debrief that question now that we're into it instead of waiting?" I interrupted the conversation after making sure my tape was still running. There was general agreement.

"Probably, because it's fresh. How do you debrief it?" Helen asked.

"Well, we can start anywhere but we can start by identifying themes and contradictions," I replied, getting up to write on the flip chart behind me. "And I think one of the contradictions or questions that you've brought up is

the gender thing."

"Well the contradiction in gender though often took the form of being taught by male professors," Carley pointed out.

Everyone nodded and there was a round of uh-hums.

"Overwhelmingly," Nahanni commented.

"and mainly female students in the classes," I added.

"And it's interesting," PJ began, "because the feminist in the class was really upset one time because she thought one of the males in our class was dominating and we had a female professor. The feminist said he was really dominating the conversation, he's getting her attention more than any of us are and she was very aware of that gender. Well, you know, she saw it as a real monopoly, that there was a real gender issue going on as opposed to just a student and a professor. Again, I was just 'oh, come on' you know but that's what she saw, so you know, I would have a big question mark there, but I know that that came up in our class one time."

I jumped in saying, "Well, you know what that brings up for me is the whole way that somebody's personal style very much influences what happens in the classroom discussion. At the end of it, someone will say 'well that was a great discussion' and somebody else will say 'well no, that wasn't' and even though we all talked about the significance of the group and how important the connections were there were times when I also felt like 'ooh, I don't know if I want to be here.'"

"I think that's a contradiction and I think it sort of piggybacks onto the group thing and the self-directed learning," commented Carley. "Wanting..."

"the connectedness on the one hand versus the separation," added Helen. Everyone was nodding and agreeing.

"And what you were talking about - kind of reflective observation and going away from it, leaving the group to

process," Nahanni said. Again, there was a general agreement.

"And needing both. Not one or the other," Carley clarified.

PJ started in a questioning tone, "This isn't a theme that I mentioned but it's a thought just triggered and it's a gender issue I think. There's another friend of mine who's taken some classes from a female professor and I had three. We have found that the female professors have higher expectations of us as students. We've had a much harder work load, like a greater work load and more books to read, more papers to write and everything. And I have found that in at least three of mine. I think I've had about four female professors and three out of four were harder task masters than the males."

"That's interesting," Carley said.

"And we were wondering," PJ continued, "if there's sort of a need within - if the females have felt that they had to work so much harder to be female professors and, therefore, they pushed the female students or students overall but we were predominately a female class."

"My experience would have been we had one female professor and that was [female professor 1]," Carley began. "She was not the hardest." A number of people agreed as they knew this professor as well. There was a bit of a pause. "She was maybe the best."

"Your water has just about spilled several times," Helen said to PJ.

"Thank you," PJ said laughing, checking the glass of water at her feet. If memory serves me, she eventually did spill the glass of water - another moment of levity!

"She was really accommodating and very - she got us doing things in groups and very interactive. She walked the talk whereas a lot of others didn't," Carley continued.

"I think [female professor 2] walks the talk too,"

Nahanni added. There were a number of ah-hums.

"That was certainly a theme. People walking the talk. The importance of it." I suggested.

"or lack of in some cases," Elizabeth added.

"Well, I guess another theme," PJ began slowly. "might be the respect that our professors show to us in terms of giving credit to our knowledge, providing constructive criticism for the work that we do, walking the talk etc. To me that's a respect for your students - honoring your students in the knowledge and experience and all of that."

[Female professor 1] never gave us our papers back," Carley pointed out.

"We, our whole class was really upset about that because we mailed them to her and we never got them back." PJ added.

"She gave her all while she was there but when she left she left." Carley observed, to which a few of us responded with laughs.

"That was very disappointing because we had all set her up, you know, that she was on a pedestal and then, boom, no one got their papers back and boy the criticism was solid. You know, because of that." PJ commented. As with the professor who did not mark the article reviews, this professor did not even return the papers. I, too, was in this professor's class. Notice how Nahanni used outrage to describe the male professor and here the language is disappointment, being upset, criticism. I know that I did not complain about this professor and doubted that anyone else did. Again, why were we silent?

This is the end of the comments related to gender issues, which I find to be the most fascinating of anything said in the learning circles. There were few female professors in the program, but those that were appear to have been heavily scrutinized. Gendered interpretations of events are both embraced and rejected. Stereotypes of both

men and women are present in the conversation. And how each of us frames our discussion of these events and how we use language to describe them and position ourselves within the discourse, will then, in turn, determine our own power.

"The other theme is the relevance and personal application of the learning." Helen suggested.

Elizabeth joined in, *"I think that's the real difference between a graduate degree and an undergraduate. I mean in the undergraduate you never really have a chance to make things relevant. You just hope that you're going to like it when you get out."*

"And together with that there's an empowering like you feel empowered to be able to do that, you feel free," Carley added.

"Nobody really talked about any kind of content in any kind of specific way. Like you said," I pointed out turning to Helen, *"it didn't even really matter - I don't remember what the course objectives were but as long as it was relevant to where I happened to be at the time."*

"Contradiction would be the form of evaluation, like no exams until you get to the end," Carley said laughing. Others joined in. *"And then..."*

"But is that a contradiction of what we discussed in the learning circle," Helen questioned.

"No, it's a contradiction of the education, isn't it?" Carley pointed out. There was a bit of a pause. *"Wasn't it nice having no exams though?"* Carley replied. A number of us nodded and said yes. Carley's comments reinforce the notions of evaluation raised earlier. Of what purpose were a set of exams when the entire program had been without them?

"The other thing that came up a couple of times was serendipity," I pointed out. There were a number of uh-hums followed by a pause.

"I liked your comment that you brought out from

Boshier's¹⁶ work - that he said that everyone comes in from the back door - is there really a front door? And I think that's true. I mean my undergraduate degree is very unrelated to what I do now." Elizabeth pointed out.

"Serendipity both in ending up in the program as well as then what shape the learning takes," I suggested.

"Why you're there," Carley added.

"I've been listening to Deepak Chopra¹⁷ in the van for a long time. It's like there's no - it's serendipity but it's cosmic consciousness that shapes it all so it really," Nahanni said.

"The universe takes care." Elizabeth finished her sentence. "I'm waiting for the universe to take care of things. I love Deepak Chopra - he's so good." Everyone burst out laughing.

"Company of learners isn't there." Carley suggested. "Or learning community or whatever." Everyone nodded. There was a long pause.

I think it's appropriate that the discussion of our graduate experiences ends with these two observations - cosmic consciousness and learning community. If I were to bring any kind of closure to what we were saying as a group about our graduate experience overall, it would be just that. A celebration of community and acknowledgement of the divine. If I were to point out what the Cartesian scientific method has missed in its insistence on an objective and distanced stance to knowledge, it would also be just that - community and acknowledgement of the divine.

¹⁶ Roger Boshier, "Conceptual Framework for Analyzing the Training of Trainers and Adult Educators" *Convergence*, 18(3-4) (1985).

¹⁷ See for example Deepak Chopra, *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind* (New York: Harmony Books, 1993) or *Creating Affluence* (San Rafael: New World Library, 1993).

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Returning to Real Life - March, 1996

Transforming Research

Life has this way of interfering with our best-made plans, Elizabeth wrote of the challenges inherent in completing a graduate degree. I would definitely echo those comments. In the time between giving the rough draft of my dissertation to my advisor and research participants on March 4, 1996 and meeting with the research participants one last time on March 13 and 17, 1996, real life has pulled me away from writing. Putting one's life on hold while writing a dissertation only ensures that when one finally ventures back to real life, there will be tremendous seduction and incentive to stay there.

I have been avoiding this concluding chapter for almost two weeks and, finally last night in an ironic twist, real life led me back to the final task. I have been participating in a class called "Teaching Online", facilitated by Rob Higgins of Cybercorp, since February 1, 1996, a class entirely delivered through the Internet and World Wide Web (WWW). There are over thirty-five participants in this class from all over the world and I have been meeting and working with them in "cyberspace" for two months. This includes asynchronous email conversations and synchronous conversations using MOO's.¹

¹ For a full explanation of the application of computer mediated communication to education, see Higgins, 1991. For the purposes of this paper, the following is an excerpt from Higgins, 1995:

MUD refers to all the Multi-User online interactive environments including MUSH, MUCK, MUSE, MOO, WOO, and HOO-CHEE-KOO, as well as the TinyMUDs and TinyMUSHs.

A MUD is a computer program and database residing on a computer system that may be accessed through local terminals, local dialup modems, and network connections. The three

I was chatting with my final assignment partner, Jim Clauson from Harriman, Tennessee about "research" last night in the synchronous MOO. We finished our conversation through asynchronous email.²

Subject: Research and Research
To: CLAUSON_JR@A1.RSCC.CC.TN.US (Jim Clauson)
Date: Mon, 25 Mar 96 0:40:21 MST
From: "Tammy Dewar" <tddewar@acs.ucalgary.ca>
MIME-Version: 1.0

Jim,

It occurred to me halfway through our MOO conversation that we may be using the same word to refer to two different things....

When I hear the word research, I think of the "scientific method" as sanctioned by academics, and a process used in the completion of a dissertation and thereafter, if you are so inclined, to establish a reputation in the academic world. In that context, research means getting full consent from people, running research

primary functions of the MUD program are to facilitate the exchange of typewritten communications among all participants who are connected at any one time, to draw upon a database of resources that describe a virtual environment (eg: a room or a dungeon containing objects such as furniture or weapons), and to interpret and respond to commands that allow the participants to move around in their shared environment and to interact with or use the objects found there.

² While the protocol of quoting from various listserves is still in transition, some distinction has been made between public and private lists. Public lists are those that can be accessed by anyone through the WWW, and standard practice is that one can quote from those, provided full reference is used. I followed this protocol in Chapter Six. The listserve used in this Teaching Online class is considered private and, therefore, permission must be gained from individual authors before quoting. Jim Clauson very graciously allowed me to quote our conversation.

proposals by ethics committees, a theoretical framework to guide the study and so on.

I think you may be using research in a practitioner's sense - the everyday use - meaning if I want to find out about something I "research" it - I explore, ask questions, and so on, and I'm not necessarily interested in writing it up and submitting it to journals and going through that whole hoofarah. I just want to learn about something and to do that I "research or find out stuff".

If we are just interested in finding out about stuff in our final assignment, learning from one another, gathering information and in general "researching" for our own learning purposes, we might be better to stay away from the word research and use some of the ones I've mentioned above. What we're saying, then, is we are researching for our learning and not to record it to be published as "the truth or knowledge" in some kind of journal.

If we want to eventually publish some of what we find out through this module, then we have to think about all of the issues I've raised above.

Does this make sense? How were you using the word?

Tammy

Date: Mon, 25 Mar 1996 03:23:51 -0400 (EDT)
 From: Jim Clauson <CLAUSON_JR@A1.RSCC.CC.TN.US>
 Subject: RE: Research and Research
 To: Tammy Dewar <tddevar@acs.ucalgary.ca>
 Posting-Date: Mon, 25 Mar 1996 03:31:00 -0400 (EDT)

Tam,

I am allergic to hoofarah!!!

I have neither the time, nor the patience to do *true* research. I have not and probably will not pursue a PhD - based mostly on that aversion to BS. (but I bet you already

knew that...)

Research to me is studying and analyzing. I deplore papers that cite and cite and cite - that (to me) is compilation.

My idea of research is synthesis or construction, not reduction or destruction. If we worked with this stuff and came up with some "findings" that we could apply in a course great. I am not concerned about control groups, consent forms, yadda-yadda-yadda...

OK? ;-)

BTW - what the #\$\$^&* is hoofarah?

CyberQ-Guy out.

Subject: RE: Research and Research

To: CLAUSON_JR@A1.RSCC.CC.TN.US (Jim Clauson)

Date: Mon, 25 Mar 96 2:21:05 MST

From: "Tammy Dewar" <tddevar@acs.ucalgary.ca>

MIME-Version: 1.0

Hi Jim:

> Tam,

>

> I am allergic to hoofarah!!!

I figured - so am I, kind of....

>

> I have neither the time, nor the patience to do *true*

> research. I have not and probably will not pursue a PhD -

> based mostly on that aversion to BS. (but I bet you

>already knew that...)

>

Well, yes, and that's what I said too when I finished my master's and here I am a few years later, not sure at all how I got here, and agreeing with you that maybe some of the

process was indeed BS (somewhat depressing on the eve of handing it in though - I've worked pretty hard for a piece of BS paper ;-))

> Research to me is studying and analyzing. I deplore
> papers that cite and cite and cite - that (to me) is
> compilation.

Yes, I agree - I call it regurgitation.

> My idea of research is synthesis or construction, not
> reduction or destruction. If we worked with this stuff and
> came up with some "findings" that we could apply in a
> course great. I am not concerned about control groups,
> consent forms, yadda-yadda-yadda...

While I agree I don't want to be concerned about all the BS part of research, I think we should be concerned about the human part. And that is, if we do plan on using this info at some date to write about, we have a responsibility to let people know that their comments may be used. If we are only concerned in applying what we learn for ourselves, then it's not necessary to do so.

> > OK? ;-) >

Yup, no problem. When you used the word research (I think in the mission statement and our assignment outline?) my frame of reference was the "traditional research" because that's what I've been immersed in. And I thought that's how you were using the term.....

> By the way (BTW) - what the #\$\$^&* is hoofarah? >

It's a word I made up. It sounds great (I like saying it!)

and it just means stuff, stuff no one wants to do, hoop jumping, hassles, in general, a production, etc., etc.

Tammy

BTW, "true research" is not any more valid than what we are doing. It's just been held up as valid by the groups in power. Most marginal people don't have access to this rather contrived and artificial sense of research and knowledge. The Internet is going to completely turn the academic world upside down and, indeed, how we do research and what we come to call "knowledge".³ Knowledge will no longer be controlled by the elite, it will be constructed by everyone as needed because technology will allow us to do this - can't wait....

I woke up this morning thinking about our conversation and realized how much I have been influenced by "doing research" in an officially sanctioned way, that is, completing a doctoral program. I have always considered myself an adult education practitioner "researching" to meet the ever changing and challenging demands of my practice, a reflective practitioner.⁴ Here I was engaged in a dialogue

³ Others do support this view. Again I refer to R. Higgin's, 1991 work, "...computer supported media offer interactivity among humans and machines. Therefore, humans can be more than gatherers of knowledge on a global scale; we can also share, explore, and construct knowledge universally." As he says of the scholarship issue,

As we . . . enter a post-typographic culture, we will see the traditional methods and results of scholarship redefined. Through the establishment of information networks and knowledge pathways made possible by the microcomputer and telematic systems, we will have the potential to extend and refine intellectual discourse in a manner that has never been possible before.

⁴ See Donald Schon, 1983 and 1987.

with another adult education practitioner, and I was perceived as the "academic", trying to clarify terms, theoretical perspectives, and proper guidelines concerning engagement in a research project. I was speaking the traditional scientific discourse that I have spent this entire dissertation calling into question.

But not entirely, because embedded in my own reply to Jim was the BTW at the end of the note, the contradictory discourse of feminist poststructuralism, one which seeks the retention of practice with the development of theory. Jim had pointed out the problem of doing "true" research - it is so far removed from practice as to be unusable at all. And this is when I realized how I have changed as a result of "doing research" in the manner in which I have. I doubt I would have taken such a strong stand about the nature and validity of knowledge had I not completed a feminist poststructuralist study, even though in my heart I think I have always believed this, as Jim does as well I sense. I have found my voice, or perhaps, I have recovered the various voices and am integrating them. The traditional voice of science is still part of my experience, but other voices find their way into my speech. It is a new story I create, an imaginary narrative, to refer back to Davies language.⁵

Richardson⁶ says of her experience as a feminist poststructuralist researcher that it, too, has changed her life. It has had a transformative effect on the deeper,

⁵ Bronwyn Davies, "Women's Subjectivity and Feminist Stories" in *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience*. (Newbury Park: Sage, 1992).

⁶ Laurel Richardson, "The Consequences of Poetic Representation" in *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience*, eds., C. Ellis and M. Flaherty. (Newbury Park: Sage, 1992).

more spiritual parts of herself; has allowed her to integrate her various selves - the poet and the sociologist; and to step into the shoes of the other and see things in different ways. She summarizes:

I take pleasure in feeling I am a sociological revolutionist in community with others who are questioning how and for whom we write sociology. My feminist mission has intensified. I desire to problematize sociology's concepts and methods by grounding sociology in lived experiences; to write sociology as "windows on lived experience." I struggle now with ways to unite people's subjective experiences with my sociological utterances. I strive for forms in which sociology can be an effective and affecting discourse, a nonalienating practice.⁷

Replace the word sociologist with adult educator and my sentiments are captured exactly. I, too, want to strive for forms in which adult education can be an effective and affecting discourse, a nonalienating practice.

Returning to the Circle

"I guess I would have a similar reaction to what PJ and Nahanni have just said," Elizabeth commented as she received the pink friendship stone from Nahanni. We were sitting in my living room, the four of us, on March 17 participating in one last learning circle about their feedback on my dissertation. Nahanni and PJ had both commented on the risk I had taken to speak authentically in the dissertation, but wondered if it would be legitimately acknowledged and recognized. *"Because, of course, I'm writing my thesis now,"* Elizabeth continued, *"and I kept comparing yours to*

⁷ Laurel Richardson, "The Consequences of Poetic Representation" in *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience*, eds., C. Ellis and M. Flaherty. (Newbury Park: Sage, 1992), 136.

mine. Mine is so damn boring," Elizabeth laughed. Her laugh left me very sad. Elizabeth, like everyone else in this study, is an inspiring and committed adult educator who is anything but boring.

"Mine is your traditional academic research thesis and it was painful to do and I hated every minute of it. You regurgitate all of this crap and I thought, you know, does this really add to anything? Who the heck cares? In terms of what we see as legitimate and what we see as not legitimate - is it legitimate to regurgitate a bunch of crap?" Elizabeth was visibly upset and angry. "And it bugs me how hard women have to work to have their perspective accepted. It's an uphill battle. If a man did this type of work, it would be legitimate because it's from them," she pointed out.

Thus the four of us started down a path of conversation that stretched over three hours, a conversation characterized by the contradictory discourses in which each of us found ourselves, and the struggles we faced trying to live authentically, even as white privileged women.

Nahanni summarized our conversation very well when she said, "I'm just going to comment on some of the themes that I saw in your writing and from hearing the stories today. Anger is certainly a recurring theme and getting at the root of it and being able to talk about it is important for me.

"Authenticity versus credibility, and truth-telling versus duplicity were competing discourses I heard throughout the dissertation. I realized that so much of my life with women has been centered around disclosure, but not always with truth-telling. It's just the historian's choice of what to tell and what to omit and much of my life particularly around my family story has been omitting things. So now, more and more, I feel validated and affirmed enough to tell more truth-telling.

"Another theme was recovering our voices and how we

construct our own knowledge. That is really a big one for me, because looking back on my master's program, I'm just now coming to grips with the fact that much of academia is really a paperchase and being silent a lot of the time. That's why we were silent about [male professor] and others who did not measure up to the critical standards of teaching adults. The only time I wasn't silent in my degree, I was severely disciplined, so the messages were very clear. If you want to get through, you play by our rules or you don't play the game."

We struggle as women (and perhaps men do as well?) to have our experiences and voices accepted, validated, and legitimated in a patriarchal society. As PJ said at one point, "I read *Women's Ways of Knowing*⁸ and realized how much I didn't value my own voice. We are conditioned since we are babies to listen to an external voice. No wonder we find it so hard to validate ourselves when we live in a world that gives us stickers and stars and A's. I'm coming to believe that it doesn't matter what anyone else says - it's good enough what I say about myself."

Exactly, I think. That is the point of my research. This is the point of feminist poststructuralism. As Heilbrun says:

I do not believe that new stories will find their way into texts if they do not begin in oral exchanges among women in groups hearing and talking to one another. As long as women are isolated from the other, not allowed to offer other women the personal accounts of their lives, they will not be part of any narrative of their own.⁹

⁸ Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinch, Nancy Rule Goldberger and Jill Mattuck Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*. (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

⁹ Carol Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life*. (New York: Ballantine, 1988), 46.

That is the power of the learning circle. This group of women, myself included, began this journey in a learning circle, telling our stories. My responsibility as the "researcher" is to make sure those authentic voices made it to the text.

An Imaginary Narrative

"You know, I have to tell you this story," Helen began as both Carley and I looked up from the meals we were finishing, and leaned closer to hear her story. I had chosen a noisy restaurant to meet Carley and Helen on March 13. We'd laughed about my choice, Helen pointing out that it was really quite appropriate, given the nature of my dissertation. *"That's what life does,"* she had said, *"turns up the music on us."*

"So I can't wait to hear the story," I'd replied. "After this great discussion, I can't imagine that there's anything more to say." We had just spent two hours discussing their reaction to the rough draft of my dissertation and covered every imaginable topic. We started with grandchildren, moved to the nature of knowledge and research, and discussed the various discourses that informed our lives as women and adult educators. Both Helen and Carley had been supportive of my work, commending me on taking the risk (and pointing out the risk I'd foisted on my committee as well), and persevering in something when there were few role models to follow.

We'd spent a fair amount of time discussing Helen's own doctoral work at an American university and the financial, emotional and economic stress she was living with while trying to jump through the many required hoops. She said that reading my dissertation was *"the lightbulb going on because we [meaning women completing doctoral work] have had*

to diminish the importance of self in everything. You just do it because somebody somewhere said so. And you suddenly get to a point where you know it's not right. I'm sorry but all we're doing is paying for what someone else's version of knowledge happens to be." She was distressed about her own work upon reading mine, and I was distressed for her. Her comments strengthened my own conviction to the approach I had taken, but I felt badly that she was being forced to complete the most important work of her life in such an alienating manner.

"Well, I flew to Edmonton last week for a work related project which involved the rural population in Alberta," Helen began her story, "and just after we took off from the Calgary airport, I looked down at the land and saw this blanket of snow that covered it. Then I looked over at the mountains and was struck by the coldness of the scene, the mountains in the background and this white, cold, uniform blanket of snow that disguised everything that lay beneath it.

"It occurred to me that that's what being a researcher can be like, looking down at things from above, only seeing the uniform white snow, the snow which disguises everyone's beauty, voices, lives. If a farmer or artist or poet looked down, though, they might see something different because they know the beauty and diversity is there. So the challenge as a researcher is to wait for the snow to melt, to see what's really there."

"Life is trying to find out what we're really seeing and what we're not," Carley added. "That's part of the learning, part of the challenge."

"Well, it captures my tension with my work. I mean, who's looking down on the land - the farmer, the artist, the poet, or the researcher?"

"That's beautiful, Helen, very powerful, a great ending for tonight's conversation," Carley said. "I just want to

say that I feel a really happy, healthy sense of wholeness to our discussion tonight. It feels joyous and hopeful and respectful, respecting and holistic. I think that a lot of discussions don't have those qualities, and why should I be satisfied with discussions that are less than this? So, thank you, both of you."

"Thank you," I'd said to Carley then.

Thank you, I say to all of the research participants now, for sharing your stories with me so openly. Perhaps we will no longer have to disguise ourselves underneath that blanket of snow. Perhaps a space has finally been created and we can be everything - farmer, artist, poet, researcher.

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APPENDIX A
CONSENT FORM

Tammy D. Dewar, a doctoral candidate in education, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, is studying how adult educators view their training and development. This research study has important implications for both the theory and practice of adult education. Your participation in the study is voluntary.

I, _____ do hereby agree to participate in a learning circle about my views on the training and development of adult educators. I understand that all of the information I give will be held in the strictest confidence. My name will NOT be used when summarizing the data. If, in the highly unlikely event, the researcher wishes to release my name or to use any identifiable records for teaching, publication, or presentation at scientific meetings, my written permission will be required for her to do so.

I would like the following pseudonym to be used when I (or my comments) are referred to in the above written work

_____.

Date: _____ Signature: _____