Sources for a politicised practice of women's personal development education

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Introduction

In this chapter I argue that, in the drive to subvert the gender status quo and bring about gender justice, women's personal development education should not be abandoned. It should, however, be reconstituted and radically politicised, by taking on board feminist poststructuralist insights about the human subject and the social world. Such insights challenge the liberal humanist models of the person which dominate most approaches to adult education, including women's personal development education In turn, these models have much in common with mainstream psychology. In attending to the personal, we need to recognise the restrictive nature of the dominant frameworks which shape our thinking about the personal and the emotional.

The chapter argues that it is essential that we attend to the personal in the search for change, because a focus on structural change alone will not suffice: the intrapersonal emotional responses and changed interpersonal relations which accompany sructural change must also be given attention. This is not to say that structural and material concerns should be abandoned, but that, attended to in isolation, they are inadequate for lasting social change, just as, personal change alone is also inadequate.

Underlying the argument is a critique of liberal humanist views of power, which see it solely as juridical in nature. I assert the value of theories of power which recognise its discursive and dispersed nature, as well as its juridical aspects. A further underpinning argument is the critique of essentialist models of women and of femininity / masculinity. These models are shown to dominate considerations of the personal in women's education.

The chapter concentrates on the theoretical assumptions about the person and about power which are implicit or explicit in dominant feminist approaches to women's education, as well as in the criticisms of personal development education. It does not seek to put forward a blueprint for personal development courses, although I have already outlined a model which shapes my own practice (Ryan, 1997a: Ch 9). Rather, the chapter aims to give practitioners some theoretical tools to examine the assumptions underpinning their own practices. It further encourages theorists and practitioners to question the explanatory power of liberal humanist assumptions aabout the person, and to develop theories adequate for explaining the complexity of subjectivity and gender identity in late modern Irish society.

Context for the development of women's personal development education in Ireland

During the late 1980s and 1990s the women's movement in Ireland has been most evident in the rapid growth of community based women's groups, the consolidation of Women's Studies in Irish universities and growth in women's publishing (Connolly, 1996: 68). In the community women's groups, new forms of structure and organisation have emerged, emphasising non-hierarchical relations, participation and autonomy (see, for example,

Costello, this volume). Collins (1992) considers that these groups resemble the small-group, consciousness raising radical women's sector of the 1970s, although this view is disputed by O'Donovan and Ward (1996). Some of these groups are autonomous, some are highly interconnected and networked with the generic community groups movement and others are connected to the state through its various funding programmes (Connolly, 1996: 68) and through the Home- School- Community Links Scheme. This growth co-exists with the growth in the last decade of interest in personal power, spirituality, counselling, psychotherapy and the life of the emotions, which form part of what Giddens (1991) describes as projects of personal reflexivity.

A strong anti-feminist climate also exists. Inglis (1994) highlights the role of the Roman Catholic church in the backlash, as does Byrne (1995: 13). Wilcox (1991, cited in O'Donovan and Ward, 1996: 16) concludes that Catholicism is a determining factor in people's attitudes to greater gender equality in family roles. O'Dovonan and Ward (ibid) point out that Galligan (1993) has developed this by arguing that while there is a great demand for equality in all aspects of what she terms public life in Ireland, social attitudes and values indicate that there is considerable public pressure on women to achieve equality, while retaining their traditional family roles. O'Donovan and Ward (1996: 17) conclude that 'to argue that women's groups *per se* are inherently part of the feminist movement is akin to arguing that woman, by definition, is feminist'. The writings of some male journalists (for example, Myers, 1997; Waters, 1997; see also Spray, 1997) are evidence that an anti-feminist men's movement has also has begun to manifest itself recently in Ireland.

For the most part the women's groups have concentrated their activities on personal development courses (Daly, 1989a). The criticism has been made that the energy invested in these courses has not gone on to tackle structural changes (Daly, 1989b; Mulvey, 1991, 1995). Inglis (1994) on the other hand, while acknowledging these criticisms and also having a central concern with power, concludes that the groups' concentration on personal development courses is based on felt needs and interests. The next section examines the content of such courses, and the following one outlines some of the debates which surround personal development education in Ireland.

The content of personal development courses
There is no set content for personal development courses. However a typical Stage One course runs for eight to ten weeks for two to two and a half hours one morning a week, for the number of weeks decided on by the facilitator. Topics covered include: reasons for coming to the course and hopes and concerns about it; ground rules; life stories, human rights; feelings; relationships; guided relaxation and visualisation; managing stress; assertiveness; communication skills; setting goals; social analysis; women's health and nutrition; sexuality; education; envisioning 'my ideal world'; affirmation of self and acceptance of praise (Aontas Women's Education Group, 1991; Clancy, 1995; Clarke and Prendiville, 1992; Hayes, 1990).

There is usually a check-in with each woman at the beginning of a session, to see how she has been feeling and what has been going on in her life since the last session. Games, icebreakers and energizers are used. 'Homework' is usually set, in the form of giving oneself a treat during the week between sessions. Self-help is emphasised. The methodology is highly participative and women are encouraged to share only as much information about

themselves as they feel comfortable with. A typical group starts off with twelve to fourteen women. Invariably, a few drop out after a week or two. Clancy (1995) also found that some groups are run on an 'open' basis, with different members attending each week. This was found to be a problem for the development of a sense of collectivity in a group (ibid). When I refer to personal development education from here on in this chapter, I assume closed groups, running for eight to ten weeks, with the same facilitator or co-facilitators throughout.

Women come to personal development courses because they feel a need to make some changes in their lives, usually starting with family life and with a desire to 'get out of the house more'. This was Clancy's (ibid) finding and is my experience. Courtney (1992) interprets the act of participation in most adult education courses as evidence of a desire for change and West's (1996: 25, 26) findings bear out this interpretation. Fagan (1991: 67) describes the community women who attended her social analysis classes as 'searching for an unspecified development'. Personal development courses are part of the distinct process that is adult learning. Adult learning is seen as voluntary, self-directed, practical, participatory, with sharing of experiences and resources, related to individual's self-concept or self-esteem, and possibly anxiety-provoking for the learners. It also attempts to take cognisance of different learning styles (Cranton, 1992: 5 - 7). Of themselves, these qualities do not necessarily make for politicisation of the participants. However, the processes which they involve are widely seen as essential for radical pedagogies which are also providing new or radical content (McDonald, 1989).

Criticisms of personal development education

Many of the analyses and commentaries on personal development assert that women need to 'move beyond' it, since social structures are the 'root causes' of oppression. This is emphasised especially in Mulvey's (1995) report on women's power, which arises out of a conference of women's networks in Ireland, entitled *Women's Power for a Change*. This document provides an overview of current dominant feminist attitudes to women's power and personal development education in Ireland, as the conference was attended by influential activists, policy makers, academics and community leaders. The report documents frustration at the lack of structural change and lack of participation and representation by women in community, regional and state development. It exhibits a belief that a concentration on personal development is preventing women from engaging in structural analysis.

Power is implicitly theorised in this report as being juridical in nature (Foucault, 1979; Young, 1998). In this juridical view, it is assumed that power resides in a central authority of government and law. This notion of power is grounded in a liberal humanist view of society and of the person, which sees the strategy for social change as engagement with the 'public' domain, from which all other change will flow. Such a view of power ignores other sites of oppression and domination, which liberal humanism defines as part of the 'private' domain. It therefore excludes resistance to oppression which takes place in interpersonal relations, and in the discursive domain. A discursive view of power emphasises how different truths and knowledges are constructed, and how some come to dominate. Feminist poststructuralism has recognised the construction of new discourses about women and men to be an important site of activism. Such discursive or cultural activism is regarded as a political and ideological phenomenon which is just as important as challenges to juridical forms of power (Ryan, 1997b; Young, 1998).

The report in question (Mulvey, 1995) notes the reluctance of women to accept the label feminist. It also points out that the priorities of funders mean that women's work is acceptable only if it is 'poverty work' (ibid:17). The role of the Roman Catholic church and religious personnel in facilitating personal development courses is also noted and identified with the failure to address structural issues in personal development. I now examine why current forms of personal development education are failing to challenge the gender status quo.

Why current personal development practices are incapable of tackling the discursive nature of power

Clancy (1995) in a large-scale survey, found that the majority of personal development courses in Ireland are run either by religious personnel or by people with a primary interest in counselling and / or psychology. While several writers and commentators have already identified religion with the maintenance of the gender status quo, there is little published work on the Irish context which makes links between the maintenance of the gender status quo and the predominance of a psychological view of women as essentially different from men. Gardiner (1997: 42) points to the existence of a 'dual culture' or a 'female culture' mentality in Irish political life as evidence of the continued existence of patriarchal social relations.

It is my view that most personal development education being carried out in Ireland is incapable of challenging the gender status quo, because of its roots in psychologies which assume a liberal humanist model of the person. Psychology (including mainstream, human relations and feminist 'difference' psychologies) and the beliefs which they have constructed about a distinct female nature and culture play a strong part in maintaining the gender status quo. Psychological approaches to women's personal development and education are usually seen as a secular challenge to religious perspectives on women's nature. This is particularly so in Ireland, where traditional, old-style Roman Catholicism is widely seen as having contributed to women's oppression. Both religion and psychology, however, share a view of 'woman' which does nothing to challenge existing power arrangements. Mednick (1989: 1122) describes the problem as follows:

> It is my view that the different voice / maximalist view, even though professed by feminists who are not in agreement with the rightwing agenda, nevertheless attained its popularity because it meshed so easily with the pro-family women's nature ideology that has become the dominant public rhetoric ... arguments for women's intrinsic difference, whether innate or deeply socialised, support conservative policies that, in fact, could do little else but maintain the status quo *vis a vis* gender politics.

The report (Mulvey, 1995) which forms the basis for this discussion, does, indeed, draw attention to the strengths which women can bring from personal development into other areas of political activity. But what both the report and the conference fail to do is to distinguish different types of personal development. Courses in personal development in this country are facilitated from a perspective outside the dominant liberal humanist one, in only a tiny minority of cases. This is borne out by Clancy (1995: 117) who, in a large scale survey, found that counselling is the main training undertaken for facilitators. Clancy argues, correctly in my view, that counselling training is capable of treating the symptoms, but not the causes of women's oppression and diverts attention away from inequalities to focus on

individuals. This is not a fault of personal development *per se*. It is a result of the dominance of mainstream psychology practices.

Mulvey (1995: 19) reports that the conference on power concluded with a number of questions for the participants, one of which was 'What is needed for women to move beyond personal development?' This question would have addressed the issue much better, if it had asked what is needed to politicise personal development education for women and prevent it becoming an exercise focused **solely** on personal symptoms, spirituality and individual healing? My immediate answer to this question, shared by Clancy (1995) in her research conclusions, is that we need feminist / politicised facilitators who are able to incorporate social analysis, radical politics and feminism into course content **which is also capable of meeting the felt and expressed needs of many women for a focus on their personal and domestic lives**.

Martin and Mohanty (1988) ask, 'What has home got to do with it?' The answer must be that patriarchy and patriarchal relations are at their most naturalised and normalised in family life and in heterosexual relations. In the particular point in history where we live now in Ireland, and given the strong climate of anti-feminism which co-exists with religious and liberal humanist ideological views of women, home life is very important. The family and heterosexual couple relationships are one of the prime sites for the reproduction of gender difference (Hollway, 1982; 1984; Ryan, 1997a). Moreover, we live in a formally egalitarian liberal democracy, where it is acceptable for women to take on roles outside their homes, in paid work, sport, party politics and many other arenas. But through discourses which position them as essentially domestic and maternal they are still widely considered to be the only sex properly suited to primary childcare.

Issues of domesticity and maternity surface time and again in the personal development courses of my experience (cf Clancy, 1995). Dealing with them is a major challenge to contemporary feminism (Coward, 1993; Hochschild, 1990). 'Moving beyond' personal development is not the solution. Politicising personal development by taking feminist poststructuralism into account is one of the necessary responses to this many-faceted challenge.

Personal development courses are answering a felt need for women who are taking first steps outside their homes. Feminist personal development courses should not be dismissed. Far from being dismissed, they should be encouraged and developed in tandem with juridical endeavours. By themselves, structural and collective change and agitation will not take the place of necessary personal work on emotional investments (which are held by both women and men) in the gender status quo. Structural oppressions are felt at the level of the individual and they construct emotional responses (Lewis, 1993). Work needs to be done at this level always. The greatest danger is that personal change will not be accompanied by political change. But on the other hand, political change in outlook, if not accompanied by emotional politicisation, is of limited effect.

Social movements and pedagogy
While the goal of schooling pedagogy was and is to provide public, unified subjects of a particular kind, left pedagogy and feminist pedagogies and other liberatory or emancipatory pedagogies also had similar aims, even if these were not always explicit. They wanted to

produce politicised subjects of various kinds (Lusted, 1986) Thus, the notion of false consciousness was used by Marxists and by early radical feminists. The implication was that once the veil of ignorance was lifted from the eyes of the working class, or of women, or whoever was the subject of the pedagogy, then they would change their behaviour. This kind of voluntarism relies on a conception of the human subject as primarily rational and therefore capable of making changes through the application of willpower.

On the other hand, pedagogies underpinned by human relations psychology emphasise the need to explore feelings which blocked change, but this approach has been shown to be itself dependant on a view of the subject as primarily rational. Feelings, in this approach, need to be dealt with, but this is ultimately in order to allow the rational part of the person to operate unhindered (cf Hollway, 1989, Ryan, 1997b).

Liberals tend to see subjects as individuals socialised into their appropriate roles. But poststructuralist insights show that people are not passively shaped by active others, including 'social structures'. Rather, they 'actively take up as their own the discourses through which they are shaped' (Davies and Banks, 1992: 3, cited in Jones, 1993: 159). Thus, it is possible to interpret girls and women as actively taking up positions in discourses. Patriarchy is not 'a monolithic force which imposes socialisation on girls ... it produces positions for subjects to enter' (Walkerdine, 1989: 205). And the discourses which provide the available positions or 'ways to be' (subjectivities) shift in contradictory ways. There is no one way in which women or girls, as a group, or as individuals, can be fixed in our understanding (Jones, 1993: 159).

In spite of these insights, which for many feminists produce useful feminist knowledge, a major influence in feminism is the idea that women have special 'female' ways of knowing which coincide with essentially female ways of being. This is also perhaps the most visible and influential face of feminism in the mainstream of everyday life and the media. It results in the portrayal of the female subject as universal and feeling, and in this way as essentially different from men. I agree with Brookes (1992) that it is important to connect being and knowing through a model of education which draws on the everyday experiences of women, but that it will not challenge the gender status quo if it bases itself on a model of essential, pre-social differences.

The Harvard Project on Women's Psychology and Girls' Development, from which a great deal of this difference work emanates, is a project which represents one of the most influential strands of feminist social psychology today (Wilkinson, 1996: 13). Such educational work has been influenced by the work of Chodorow (1978), Gilligan (1982), Brown and Gilligan (1992, 1993) and Taylor, Gilligan and Sullivan (1995). Its most popular manifestation with reference to education is in Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule's (1986) book, *Women's Ways of Knowing*. In the next section, I address some of the assumptions of this widely read and quoted book, and the implications of its theorisation of the female subject (cf Brookes, 1992).

A universal female subject

Drawing on the work of Perry (1970) and positioning themselves against it, Belenky et al use the findings of a study of one hundred and thirty-five women learners to reformulate five stages of women's knowing, from silence, through received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge to, finally, constructed knowledge. Perry's work is a study of developmental theory derived from his analysis of male students attending Harvard University and the ideas in it are still influential. Perry assumes that students move in a linear way, from a basic dualism where the world is viewed in terms of black / white, right / wrong, through to increasingly advanced stages. In the last stage, one is presumed to know that all knowledge is relative and socially constructed. He asserts that 'dualists are rare at Harvard' (1970: 63, cited in Brookes, 1992: 41).

Belenky et al are critical of Perry's assumptions that people learn in a linear manner. They argue that 'women's thinking did not fit so neatly into his categories' (1986: 14), particularly women's experiences of male authority (ibid: 23, 24). However, they build on Perry's scheme when they argue that women's learning can be grouped into 'five major epistemological categories' (ibid: 150). Also problematic is their assumption that women learn differently from men and therefore require a woman-centred education (ibid: 214 - 229).

Any pedagogy which suggests that women's learning is based on essential differences from men is problematic. Theoretically, it is unacceptable, because it assumes that certain kinds of knowledge are indigenous to women and to men. Strategically, it is unacceptable, because it would isolate women in an academic context which is already highly stratified. Politically, it is unacceptable, because it maintains a sex-differences approach and thus maintains male / female dualism (Brookes, 1992: 41). Women can benefit from a safe and supportive learning environment, but to suggest that they need special, separate environments to meet their essentially different needs does not address the need for safety as a political problem. It implies that the problem is located in naturally occurring differences between women and men (ibid). As Lewis (1989: 122) puts it:

> The language in which Belenky and her colleagues locate women's experiences in the academy -- 'newborn', 'child', encouraged to 'think more', turning her into a 'real knower' -- suggests that education for women needs to be focused at some primary level in order to bring us up to par with the already 'grown up' male thinkers who are posed as the norm to which we must aspire. It is easy to see how such an approach might enhance the already prevalent ideology that education for women is a prescription for lowering standards. The terms of the discourse on standards, which the language in *Women's Ways of Knowing* implies, only makes sense within the frames of a phallocentric system where being a man is not only considered to be different from being a woman but also considered to be better.

This categorisation of levels of knowing amounts to a hierarchy of ways of knowing on which the authors ultimately base a model of education that might draw women out of a state of silence. This state of silence is described as a state devoid of 'awareness of mental acts, consciousness, or introspection' (Belenky et al, 1986: 25). The aim is to draw women into a state of constructed knowledge, described as a condition of 'becoming and staying aware of the working of their minds' (ibid: 141). In this state, women can create their 'own' epistemological understandings.

On the face of it, these stages represent an exciting model and the idea of constructed knowledge appears to address the dynamics of the challenge brought to patriarchy by women's education (Lewis, 1989: 120). However, the authors propose to establish the frames of their educational model by connecting teaching with midwifery. They propose, following Ruddick (1980, 1984), to name the discourse through which women's education is to be articulated as '**maternal thinking**' (Belenky et al, 1986: 218, emphasis added). This proposed political strategy will draw a woman's knowledge out into the world.

As a proposed pedagogical strategy, Ruddick's concept of maternal thinking maintains the idea of immutable and natural sex differences and does not address at all the political climate (that is, patriarchal social relations and sexist discourses) in which learners' subjectivities are constructed. This is not to dispute the goodwill of the authors or their genuine concern about 'why so many women students speak so frequently of problems and gaps in their learning and so often doubt their intellectual competence' (ibid: 4). But, because of the lack of a clearly articulated political agenda, the authors inadvertently slip into the language of women's deficiency and thereby fail to address the deeply complex ways in which women's constraints and possibilities are constructed (Lewis, 1989: 121).

Belenky et al do not address women's knowledge as socially and politically organised (cf Grimshaw, 1986), but as something intrinsic to women. What they describe is ideology about women, but they take this as evidence of natural differences between women and men. In doing this, they promote a discourse of male / female dualism. As Brookes (1992: 58) points out, they do not address how an explicit theoretical validation of difference -- an assumption implicit in mainstream curriculum and academic programming -- might further disempower women in an educational system which already is failing to meet their needs, insofar as it is organised to reflect male experience and hence to entrench male power and authority.

Belenky et al use a language of difference to discuss women's educational needs and to propose educational strategies for women. Theoretically, this is a model based on gender difference and which draws in turn on recent directions in the works of Chodorow (1978) and Gilligan (1982). Common to these theorists is the idea that women learn and know differently from men. And in this assumption, which implies that women are naturally different, not that women learn differently because of their experiences of male power and abuse of male power, there is an inherent lack of politicisation. It locates women's problems within the individual, without considering the social conditions which gave rise to these ways of knowing in the first place. These are precisely the effects that personal development education will have also, if it does not move beyond essential-difference models of women and men.

Such models tend to minimise the facts and nature of women's oppression itself as a major contributory factor to women's lives and experiences (Grimshaw, 1986; Maher, 1987; Pollitt, 1995). As Maher (1987: 98) points out, while they can attend to political experience, they overlook the importance of politically conscious resistance experiences and, I would add, the important ways that gender identities are produced in discourses of resistance.

Knowledge production is political activity. Although they do not acknowledge this, Belenky et al have produced knowledge about women which proposes a universal, unitary female subject, existing in a dualistic and therefore hierarchical relation to a unitary male subject. They preclude the possibility of moving out of or of deconstructing or subverting dualism, by their reliance on maternal practices as the vehicle for their pedagogy and by their use of

restrictive educational categorical ways of knowing, which implicitly deny the possibility of generating new knowledge, given different social circumstances.

The theoretical divisions set up in the work of Belenky et al support a dualistic approach to knowledge and the human subject which, far from challenging the status quo, functions to reinforce it. Instead of looking at supposedly naturally occurring differences, pedagogy, if it is to rise to the challenges posed by poststructural feminist insights, needs to investigate how gender difference is **produced**, how difference can be celebrated without resorting to essentialism and how human subjects are organised to know. There is no knowledge which is indigenous to women, or to men. The questions which a feminist poststructuralist pedagogy could ask are centered on the key question of what social conditions organise women and men to learn differently.

Links between an essential differences approach and mainstream psychology
Like Hollway (1991: 31), I am constantly struck by how dominant is the idea among feminist educational practitioners and theorists that there exist natural differences between the genders and that there are naturally different women's and men's ways of knowing. In common with both Hollway (ibid) and Segal (1987), I am disturbed at the dominance of these dualistic ways of thinking about gender and what I see as the negative effects on feminism which follow from them. In published work on pedagogy in Ireland (for example, Byrne, 1995; Byrne, Byrne and Lyons, 1996; Byrne and Lyons, this volume), there is no attention to this idea, although Gardiner (1997) and Mannix (1996) refer to it in the contexts of politics and psychology in Ireland, respectively.

Hollway's and Segal's work gives a convincing account of the extent to which dualistic thinking about femininity and masculinity dominates white Western feminism. This kind of thought depends to a considerable extent on psychological concepts:

> The most accessible feminist writing today is one in which we are likely to read of the separate and special knowledge, emotion, sexuality, thought and morality of women, indeed of a type of separate 'female world' which exists in fundamental opposition to 'male culture', 'male authority', male-stream thought', in opposition to the world of men (Segal, 1987: ix).

Hollway (1991) asks why white Western feminist thought in the 1980s and 1990s has been so psychologised, unlike the socialist feminism of the 1970s. The same questions need to be asked about recent trends in school education and particularly about large sectors of critical adult education's approach in Ireland. Adult education in general, including personal development education, although it defines itself in opposition to regulatory schooling, is still deeply affected by human relations psychology and the dominance of an essentialist model of the female subject which posits it as universal and feeling. I believe that what is significant in accounting for the psychologisation of adult education is

> the closeness of a psychological vision of the world to the dominant popular assumptions of Western culture, since what the two have in common is an outlook which understands the world in terms of the individual. (ibid: 30)

This is especially the case in the way that personal development education approaches gender issues. Psychology plays a part in reproducing and legitimating popular assumptions about

individuals and their femininity or masculinity. It places a particular model of the individual at the centre of its explanatory world, and while it does so it cannot reconceptualise gender issues in terms of the constraints and forces which shape a person and how these may be changed (ibid). While personal development education continues to rely on unitary models of the subject, whether these are unitary and male, or unitary and female, it will not escape the limitations of popular assumptions, legitimated by psychology.

Practitioners of personal development education who are feminist will probably seek a radical political agenda in all areas, including gender issues. But in gender issues feminism is frequently reduced to psychology. If personal development education remains within psychology's terms of reference in the use of the categories 'femininity' and masculinity', it cannot avoid reducing them to natural differences or to cultural differences, even while applying a social analysis. Hollway (1989: 98ff) makes the same point about social psychology, which many feminists claim has set out to combine a social analysis with psychological questions. While some of the evidence in Wilkinson's (1996) collection on feminist social psychology shows that some feminist social psychologists (for example, Stephenson, Kippax and Crawford, 1996) are beginning to overcome these difficulties, it also clear that this is not a widespread theoretical concern.

The challenges for a feminist poststructuralist emancipatory pedagogy
The solution for personal development education is not necessarlily to abandon psychology. One of the reasons that the socialist feminisms of the 1970s became concerned with psychological questions was that feminists operating in consciousness raising groups realised that the personal is political and that change is not simply a matter of economic resources, equal opportunity, correct political intentions and voluntarism. Adult education has taken these lessons on board also. But as long as the reliance on femininity and masculinity remains, the personal will be reduced to the psychological and the individual, losing in the process a vision of the politicised personal and the personal nature of the political. The only difference between such use of femininity and masculinity and the old patriarchal psychology of sex differences is the re-evaluation of femininity as superior. This is not enough to make a political difference in a world of complex social relations characterised by 'shades of grey' rather than clear-cut essential differences (cf Cocks, 1989). As Segal (1987: 5) points out, 'some renowned misogynists are not averse to claiming that women are superior to men. It excuses all sorts of bad behaviour, legitimates double standards and does not disturb the expectations that women will take primary responsibility for caring, feeling and nurturing'.

Personal development education needs a theory of how gender differences are produced, reproduced and subverted. The theoretical focus needs to be on new forms of femininity and masculinity, on politicised subjectivities formed in the struggle to challenge the gender status quo. It is not enough to focus on women and men as they are, because gender is produced through difference, in relations. Hollway's work (1982, 1984a, 1989) has shown how gender difference is produced in adult social relations. Her focus on relations makes it possible to define the question in terms of the production of differences between genders, rather than in terms of a psychology of women or of men. Focusing on sex differences leads to comparison, but does not fundamentally challenge the categories male and female. A production-of-differences approach is not about comparison. 'It is explanatory rather than descriptive, relational rather than comparative, emancipatory rather than normative and dynamic rather than static' (Hollway, 1991: 32).

Including a psychology of women in adult education has historically been seen as radical in the face of a mainstream psychology which tended to take the male as the norm against which women were to be measured and most often seen as deficient. This explains the enormous popularity of the work of Gilligan (1982), Brown and Gilligan (1992) and Belenky et al (1986). These ideas need to be seen in the historical context in which they first became popular. Chodorow, on whom they draw, has developed her tinnking in recent years, (for example, Chodorow, 1994), yet the popularity of the earlier explanations remains, because their explanations are so close to dominant beliefs about women and men and the differences between them.

The insights produced by feminist poststructuralism mean that these explanations and approaches are no longer satisfactory. These insights have shown that people are not seamlessly socialised into masculinity or femininity. Femininity and masculinity are social constructions to which women and men relate in differing and problematic ways throughout life. A feminist psychology of the **production** of gender difference looks at how women and men relate to these categories and can theorise change and resistance to change in terms of power and in terms of conscious or unconscious investments or interests in gender differentiated positions in discourses (see, for example, Hollway, 1984, 1994; Connell, 1995; Ryan, 1997a).

The challenge for a feminist poststructuralist personal development facilitator is to counter the dominance of feminist essential difference psychology in order to create a changed conceptual framework for practices concerning gender. Producing knowledge about women's and men's psychologies is based on many diverse interests. A feminist poststructuralist interest militates against the production of dominant, monopolising knowledge such as has been characteristic, until recently, of psychological knowledge about women or black people or working class children (Mama, 1995; Hollway, 1991; Walkerdine; 1989).

I quote Hollway on a final point about a feminism which accepts the production of gender differences:

> It recognises that there are systematic, though not invariable nor determined, differences between women and men at the psychological level which despite access to material equality are not going to disappear overnight. Ignoring these differences would not be in the interests of feminism any more than it is to reduce them to women's biology. The challenge is to be able to explain them, both in terms of their tenacious hold over a person's psyche and in terms of the undoubted scope which is available to everyone to exceed and transgress the limits of their psyche and actions imposed by gender difference. (Hollway, 1991: 33)

Change, in the feminist poststructuralist framework, is not a simple escape from constraint to liberation. There is no reaching a final realm of freedom, at the end of some linear progression which does not exist (Martin and Mohanty, 1988: 201). There is no final analysis, 'because change has to do with the transgression of boundaries which are carefully and tenaciously drawn around identity. Connections have to be made at levels other than the abstract political one' (ibid). Seeing how the personal is political is crucial but it is not enough. The highly intimate and particular nature of the political has to be acknowledged and explored also. This is where earlier consciousness raising practices often left women without support. Having identified the connections between personal and political, women often felt guilty if they did not immediately throw off the aspects of their lives which they had

identified as oppressive. Very often, people's feelings remained in some way unaddressed by becoming critically and politically literate: 'they are the parts which feminism has failed to reach -- yet' (Gill and Walker, 1993: 69). Coward (1993) gives the title 'our treacherous hearts' to the result of feminism's failure to deal with feelings and personal needs.

Conclusion

Feminism has provided discourses and language for recognising women's oppression, and a desire to see feminism in action, but it has not displaced other, more dominant, discourses, within which desires are also constructed, and which probably go further back in time for most people, feminism being largely an adult politicisation process. This has produced many areas of contradiction for women, including women who do not label themselves feminist but who are all nevertheless affected by feminism's discourses in recent decades. If liberal humanist and religious discourses are not challenged within personal development, these contradictions will be interpreted as evidence that essential femininity and maternity exist after all and that women should accept them. Personal development courses are places where people explore feelings and desires. They need to be actively colonised by feminists acting outside of liberal humanist and religious discourses, because otherwise they will have anti-feminist effects.

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