

From "I'm not a feminist!" to CASWE President: Reflecting on Space(s), Time(ing), and His(Her)-Story

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For this personal narrative, I have used Applebaum and Boyd's (2000) work on developing a critical sense of dominance to detail my journey of initial resistance to being labeled a feminist, to my growing recognition of power and privilege within educational institutions, to my active role as president of the Canadian Association for the Study of Women in Education (CASWE) for the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE). I illustrate how working within a system does not negate the potential for a critical engagement with hegemonic practice, but can actually position feminists, or associations such as CASWE, in spaces to work authentically towards equity.

Key words: feminism, educational leadership, critical sense of dominance, personal narrative

Dans ce récit personnel, l'auteure se sert des travaux d'Applebaum et Boyd (2000) sur le développement d'un sentiment critique de dominance en vue de décrire son cheminement, depuis sa résistance initiale à l'étiquette de « féministe » à son appréciation grandissante du pouvoir et des privilèges au sein d'établissements d'enseignement et à son rôle actif comme présidente de l'Association canadienne pour l'étude sur les femmes et l'éducation (ACÉFÉ). Elle montre comment le fait de travailler à l'intérieur d'un système n'exclut pas la possibilité d'un engagement critique vis-à-vis d'une pratique hégémonique, mais peut effectivement placer des féministes ou des associations comme l'ACÉFÉ en position favorable pour travailler vraiment à la défense de l'équité.

Mots clés : féminisme, leadership en éducation, sentiment critique de dominance, récit personnel.

Where does one begin an academic, narrative, and personally disclosive paper? Some would say, "At the beginning, of course." Unfortunately, this seemingly practical idea implies a linearity of thought, as if knowledge claims could be pinpointed to a particular instance of time that in themselves are not constituted and shaped by their own historical, social, and contextual constructions. Nevertheless, here is one of my stories: the story of my progression from an educational administrator and graduate student who was horrified at the notion that I might be labeled a feminist, to the president of the Canadian Association for the Study of Women and Education (CASWE), and I proudly wore that title. It is easier to "dive in" to such a story, with the understanding that even beginnings are really an intermediate step towards a place where we choose to end, and the telling of a tale is really a vignette of sorts based on what we choose (or not) to disclose of ourselves, as Patricia Elliot (1997) would suggest. Such is the attempt to shape perceptions that writers engineer with their ability to craft language.

Perhaps part of the many developing intersections make me, "me," but the longer I persist in this strange and wonderful world of higher education, the more I become fascinated by anyone strong enough to assert her (and sometimes, but not often, his) knowledge claims under the quilt of feminism. And yet here I do so, ensuring that while I write, I keep in mind the requirements for writing the article – conformance to *Canadian Journal of Education* (CJE) policy, proper APA formatting, not more than 7000 words, allaying reviewers' concerns, and keeping the article "scholarly," which is more often than not a hegemonic protection of particular epistemological, ontological, methodological, and axiological knowledge claims. All those who are labeled "feminists," however homogenizing that may be, are provided an opportunity to offer insights and creativity, as long as they follow the rules. Even in demarcating the nature of our feminism, we are asked to box ourselves in so that others may label, script, and proscript us appropriately. This claim is not to suggest that some of these rules are of no value or are even unnecessary – but it is to suggest that they have a tendency to become hegemonic devices of inclusion or exclusion that are often uncritiqued. Of course, these ideas are likely not surprising to many who have tried to work "within the system" to critique it, or alternately, have been kept "out of the system" because they have critiqued it.

In this article, I offer the recognition that my space, as suggested by Barbara Applebaum (2001), has often been a privileged one that has cre-

ated paradoxes between my educational administrative background and my understanding of the possibilities of "other" ways of knowing. I have come to accept that I may help to perpetuate hegemonic notions of structure and function which have no doubt influenced my work with CASWE. And yet, paradoxically, the structure and function of CASWE was designed to support alternate ways of knowing. CASWE itself is privileged because it was conceived out of the hegemonic discourse of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) although its discourses offer the strongest critiques within CSSE. Sometimes to critique or change structure, we first must have immediate knowledge and experience with it. In this article, I have utilized the work of Applebaum and Boyd (2000) to suggest that developing a critical sense of dominance can position feminists or associations such as CASWE in spaces to work authentically towards equity while recognizing their own privilege. And so my "scholarly" story-telling begins.

DADDY'S GIRL AND ONE OF THE BOYS

I am the older child of two girls, from a farming family on the Canadian prairies. There is no doubt (based on the stories I have heard my mother and my grandmothers tell) that my dad faced recriminations (mostly from the women in our family) and jokes (mostly from the men in the family) for not having his boy to carry on the legacy of the farm. I could go on to complete a gender analysis of that fact alone, but instead, I focus on another detail of the story because I believe it more clearly represents part of why I am who I am today. Never once did my father (outwardly, at least) suggest that his girls were any less a blessing (notice the Christian intersection) to him than having a boy would have been. In fact, my sister and I were definitely "Daddy's girls," spoiled with all the toys his boy would have likely had. We grew up on motorcycles, snowmobiles, and quad-runners, to the never-ending worry of our mother. We also shoveled grain, missed school to help combine the fields, and spent our summers planting and picking weeds in the 2500 trees Dad decided we needed, rather than going on summer vacations like the rest of the kids our age. Because Mom went to work in the community post office when I was 10 and my sister was 8, we also assumed the regular girl domestic duties of cooking, cleaning, and tending the garden. Her choice to move into the workforce was unusual given the social times because farming was lucrative and most women chose to remain at home, working with their spouses and looking after children. I choose to disclose this part of

my life because it illustrates to me that, although we lived in a middle-class, rural prairie community with traditional understandings of gender roles, we were privileged to practise in our home space a kind of non-essentializing lifestyle, with the result that my sister and I often had more in common with male friends (i.e., we found it more exciting to talk motorcycles, snowmobiling, or farming) than we did with female friends who were (perhaps) more traditionally socialized and who did not always understand our desire to have an independent career. However, I also know that we had to prove we could talk that discourse with the boys, and overtly illustrate our prowess in that world; that was an understood way of living. It is interesting to me that a male (my father) created that space for me out of his own gendered reality in that he had not produced a male heir. In becoming part of that space, I recognize that I became socialized into accepting more readily traditional dominant masculine notions and understandings of the world. My mother's choices also helped to engender in me a desire for and belief in independence and alternate ways of living than what was the norm for most women in the community. As a participant in what I assumed to be a way of living where I could live by my own rules and do anything boys could do, what I missed was an understanding of my position, or as Applebaum (2001) writes, "a critical analysis of the complexity, subtlety and systemic interrelatedness and embeddedness of dominant beliefs, values and standards in western, democratic societies" (p. 55). And yet, in that space I found a sense of excitement, freedom, and opportunity as defined in Western, competitive, and individualistic terms; these attractions still have the power to compel me as a moth to a flame even as I critique them in my scholarly work. I realize now that as a consequence of my upbringing, I was more readily accepted as "one of the boys" - which has led to privileging in other areas of my life, but also, paradoxically, to my understandings of feminism(s).

EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

As Young (1990) suggests, we are all part of the intersections that make up our lives and shape how and with whom we interact. I hail from a rural, Caucasian, middle-class, Christian farming family. In my experiences within this context, those women who were considered successful were often either teachers or nurses because these two professions offered women career opportunities in rural areas that were decently remunerated and that allowed them to remain in their home communi-

ties. It, therefore, should not be surprising that I chose to become a teacher, even if this is a highly gendered career choice. From the outset, however, I knew that one day I wanted to become an administrator. I could not find much support for this ambition in the literature on women and educational administration. Rather, this literature more often suggests women do not have defined career paths, particularly towards administrative positions (Wallin, 2005). I now believe that this career goal had much to do with my family upbringing, whereby academic achievement, social advancement, and working one's way "up the ladder" were considered measures of success, all of which are reflections of the embedded dominance of Western, individualistic beliefs.

My teaching subjects were high-school English and mathematics, a combination that was its own gender paradox. At the time I became a teacher, English departments were usually dominated with female teachers, and mathematics departments, by male teachers. For my first teaching position, I interviewed for a year-long temporary position in a rural school division. In addition to the regular discourse of teaching, I talked farming, laughed at the question from one of the trustees, "You're not half bad lookin' - what will you do when those farm boys come knocking on your door?" - and was successful in getting the job. I worked hard in my first two years, taking on 14 different courses with one 35 minute preparation period every 6 days my first year, and then moving to a larger school for my second year. When I moved to the larger school, the female director at the time let me know I could interview for either the English or the mathematics positions open at the school, but she preferred that I interview for the mathematics position because there were no women in the mathematics department. However, she also transparently stated that the mathematics position had been rife with conflict and the teacher who left had done so in poor circumstances. Here was a woman who created a space for me, illustrating clearly that my decision would be highly gendered, and potentially also conflictual. I chose mathematics. I wanted to "show those guys" I could do the job, as well as please the director in doing so, particularly since my temporary, first-year position would soon be over. Competition and deference to authority . . . feminism couched in a rather masculinized view of the world.

At the end of my second year, the principal (male) came to see me. The principal of my former school (another male) had asked him whether I would interview for the vice-principalship there. Apparently there

had been some bantering back and forth over which one of them should “have” me, but nevertheless, I was approached with the idea that administration could become a reality for me. As I mentioned, I always knew I wanted an administrative position, something I had assumed would be considered at some elusive future date. I did not recognize at the time the privileging that was going on; I believed the opportunity was based solely on merit. I told myself that the school division knew I was a hard worker, that I had made it clear that some day I wanted administration. I would use this as an opportunity to hone my skills in the interview process. Of course I believed in my own ability to accomplish greatness! That is the arrogance that we customarily call confidence. However, I have come to understand that individual initiative and personality are in many ways commodified by cultural and/or political interests and those who most fashionably fit the current hegemony are privileged to enter. Such is the complex interplay of merit and privilege that tend to collide at decision points for social mobility. Even I was surprised when I was offered the position over others who had much more experience, although I had confidence in my ability to do well. And so there existed another instance where males provided me a space of privilege that came with some gendered risks intersected much more so, I believe, with age and lack of experience. The paradox occurred because as a young woman I clearly had a nontraditional career path into administration, yet I received it at least partly because I was privileged by a hierarchical and masculinized system that I fundamentally supported.

GRADUATE STUDIES

I have always loved to learn, but I have also been competitive within myself, wanting another degree, and another degree, until I had conquered the knowledge base of educational administration by achieving a Ph.D. Of course, at some point, as a Ph.D. graduate student, I came to realize how little I really knew – about anything – sometimes even myself. Here was another gendered paradox for me: I recognized that my nontraditional movement as a young woman towards a Ph.D. in educational administration (although as Blackmore and Sachs [2000] note, it is not so unusual any longer in our credentialist and market-driven society) was based at the time highly on understanding of learning as the commodification and acquiring of a hegemonic and relatively exclusive body of knowledge. And yet this understanding certainly did not stop me from wanting to hold that piece of paper in my hands.

Another paradox occurred during the space that the male professors in the educational administration department created when they suggested to me that I should think about completing my dissertation work, not on the career paths of rural educators per se, but on the career paths of women educational administrators in rural school divisions. I resisted those males' suggestions. Strongly. In no way did I need to work on a feminist dissertation or to utilize a feminist framework because I was living proof that circumstances for women had changed and barriers no longer existed for women's career paths into administration. Perfectly sound logic on my part. The idea that I had been sanctioned because I represented and supported a dominant hegemony that actively worked to exclude others never even entered my consciousness. I thought I represented a world where women had conquered active resistance to their entry and success as educational administrators. Yet, I also resisted having others perceive that my dissertation was feminist with its connotation of "radical man-hating," particularly because I did contribute much of my success to the role of supportive males.

I look back on that time now and see, not a naïveté about the world in general, because I recognized that privilege and power were at work. But in areas that mattered to me, that had intrinsic value to my understanding of myself and my place in the world, I preferred to keep my biases intact rather than peel away the scabs to see where my own experiences produced blood. Individualistic orientations to success and/or failure, rather than the recognition of the social, cultural, or political dimensions, were part and parcel of my view of the world. I resisted the suggestion that I might not have been the shaper of my own destiny. And I would never believe that those who had supported me would not have supported any other woman who had leadership capabilities, a belief that corresponds with Applebaum's (2001) illustration of how social injustice is embedded both within social institutions and within individual consciousness. As Cox (2007) suggests, hegemony is "an intersubjective understanding of power and social relations, whereby people in all significant social categories acquiesce in the normality of things as they are" (p. 260). Coercive power is not often necessary except when dominant groups need to make concessions to maintain acquiescence. Gramsci (1971) considers this situation to be "hegemony protected by the armour of coercion" (p. 263). Now, as a teacher of educational administrative graduate students, many of whom are women, I recognize the same resistance to the notion that social structures, as well as individual

consciousnesses shape, or are shaped by, the oppressions that exist in society, including the continued oppression of women in non-traditional work environments. This awareness is evident in the resistance of these women (most of whom are Caucasian, middle class, married, and physically able) to consider that their success, as judged by Western, individualistic standards of wealth, career, and ability to do graduate work, might be due to social privileging and the oppression of those who are not of the dominant majority, rather than individual hard work and commitment. And it is not to say that these women have not been hard working and committed; but it is to suggest that their privileged social positions, like my own, may have benefited them in ways that it did not benefit those educators who represent other categories of identity or meaning. It is a difficult transition for those who represent the dominant group but who grow up with the rhetoric of individualism to accept the implication that their own success may be a reflection of the oppression of others. It is simply less disconcerting for an individual consciousness to deny social injustice, commit to an individualistic perspective, and acquiesce to the normalcy of hegemony.

My dissertation (Wallin, 2001) cannot be described as feminist writing; it simply happened to have as its focus women in educational administrative positions. In my view, feminist writing, more deeply than my own dissertation, problematizes issues of gender with a critical orientation around the cultural norms of femininity and masculinity that have shaped, and even prescribed, the roles of men and women, often with an attendant devaluing of women's contributions. That being said, my dissertation work was the first unveiling to me of the structural and gendered processes at work in educational administration. The participants with whom I worked in my dissertation, although privileged in the sense that they had acquired administrative positions, had done so often at great cost, and after traversing many barriers to their entry and/or current practice. It finally became apparent to me that individualistic notions of success drove the perceptions of most people working in educational administration to the extent that they put blinders on those who had achieved success (because they could not understand why others could not), and created much cynicism for those who had achieved positions by feeling that they had to personally battle a system that was skewed against them. As Applebaum (2001) states, "[f]or those who are marked 'other,' those whose categories of meaning do not conform with dominant norms, the mechanisms of the latter are hardly invisible, yet

the dominant group culture and categories of meaning remain transparent to those inside it" (p. 61). My dissertation work provided me with my first understandings of the extent both of my own privilege and of my own oppression. In this space and time, I first began to internalize, and not just articulate, that my experiences could not be used as the normalizing lens for others. At this point in my scholarly journey, my interest in other ways of knowing and perceiving the world truly began to flower. And so, ironically, the spaces created by males for me led to the opening of spaces for other women to speak to their experiences, and which ultimately began to shape my understandings of feminism(s), privilege, and oppression. This understanding aligns with Applebaum and Boyd's (2000) (as cited in Applebaum, 2001, p. 58) suggestion for the need to develop a critical sense of dominance and one's own role within it by (a) shifting from an individualist perspective to a social group one, (b) moving to an understanding that dominance works through the dominant social group's categories of meaning, and (c) moving from a notion of *power-over* to a notion of *power-to*. Here my CASWE journey begins.

COMING HOME

Five years ago I decided to move home to the prairies from the United States where I had worked as an assistant professor. The move home can be attributed to the space of opportunity that my female predecessor in my current position created for me; she had taken it upon herself to mentor me after we had met at a conference when I was still a graduate student, and she, a new faculty member. This woman, who was on her own journey home, suggested I might be interested in applying for her position. To this day, I recognize her as the first female professor who took a mentoring interest in me; I can never repay the support and encouragement I received from her, although we never worked in the same institution or even on the same project. I have learned in this instance the value of mentoring between women faculty members and graduate students, and that mentoring does not necessarily have to be product-, discipline- or context-driven. Often it takes place in the creation of a space of support and encouragement to be found in informal or formal relationships with others: in conversation, debate, or e-mail.

A more formal space was created when I was contacted by university representatives and asked if I would "help" organize the CASWE Institute to take place after the 2004 CSSE conference in Winnipeg. I immediately indicated that I would be happy to help with the organizing,

not realizing that I had effectively become the CASWE Institute program co-chair with another woman who was also new to the university. As it turned out, CASWE had inadvertently created a space for my co-chair partner and me to struggle with feminist issues, such as the granting of Canadian Research chairs, to support each other in our first year as new assistant professors on campus, to meet other women across the nation who were interested in feminist issues, and to move together through an experience that created a bond between us that remains even as we move in our careers in very different academic areas. My co-chair's strong focus on human rights and my work in administration ultimately led the two of us to centre the CASWE Institute theme on *Sexism in the Academy: Ten Years Later*. We had two primary themes: (a) the ten-year anniversary of CASWE as an organization, and (b) the gender-based challenge to granting research chairs by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). Notwithstanding the literature on the increasing responsibilities and pressures on women in the academy, and their effects (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Blackmore & Sachs, 2000), my co-chair partner and I had a terrific experience organizing the Institute. At the time of our planning, we never realized the ripple effect that our theme caused at the university level – and to the two of us personally. We went along our merry way, organizing what we believed to be a valuable and memorable Institute without thinking that the dominating social and political order of higher education might disapprove of this work. It was not until both of us, at separate times and in different venues, had been warned that such work could threaten our tenure as junior faculty members, that either of us began to see how gendered and political higher education was, and how our individual actions based out of an altruistic desire to do good work to mobilize people on important issues, had the potential to hinder our personal careers. Somehow my dissertation learnings regarding dominant norms had once again remained invisible until I learned of the potential to find myself outside them (Applebaum, 2001). I had a difficult time believing that an administrative structure that had given us the project in the first place would then sanction us as individuals when we worked to expose issues of national import. Yet, the warnings were clear, and based on the personal experiences of others from various institutions. Fortunately, throughout our planning, we had excellent support from CASWE representatives (female), and from the Dean of Education (male). As those who attended the CASWE Institute can attest, the themes remained, the sessions were

excellent, and the feedback was very positive. Still, the experience emphasized for me that those who work with a feminist agenda have to determine carefully how willing they are to work "outside the rules" to achieve their aims. We never actually broke the rules for the Institute – we worked inside the system to provide spaces for others to critique it and to offer alternative ways to behold the world. The paradox occurred when we were congratulated on our courage to fight for the rights of women more often than should be warranted in a system that is supposed to adhere to principles of academic freedom and equity.

PARADOX AND CASWE

After co-chairing the CASWE Institute, the president of the association asked me if I might be interested in becoming president-elect for the coming year. Another space of opportunity! How could I, with my background in educational administration and a burgeoning passion for feminism, not like the idea? CASWE, situated as an association within CSSE, was created with a constitution and an operational mandate. It is structured with an elected executive to provide direction for a general membership; the president sits on the Board of Directors for CSSE. As far as my understanding goes, CASWE was conceived out of the need to provide space for female academics to speak about feminist issues, to mentor women into and in higher education, and to circulate work that often was not accepted in traditional journals or the academy. In this way, CASWE is an interesting mix of structure and fluidity, status quo and critique, traditionalism and non-traditionalism – its own paradox.

Within that paradox, I was privileged to sit as the CASWE president; I have never worked with a more fascinating association. I could likely write many more pages about how I am different from other CASWE members than how I am similar. I could also suggest that I have never worked with a more supportive, nor a more critical and diverse, group of people. I have learned more about feminism and alternative ways of knowing from the CASWE Executive and general membership in that short space of time than I have in all of my other work experiences because members treat CASWE as an association where their voice will matter, and where silencing or being silenced is unacceptable. The support of multiple ways of knowing and being is the norm, which makes accommodating everyone completely impossible, yet a spirit of negotiation, encouragement, and acceptance underlies every action and process within the association. A simple example to illustrate this point is the

development of the CASWE awards for service and graduate work. There was never consensus related to granting awards at all because the worry over perpetuating elitism and individualism was ever-present in the minds of some members. In addition, there is no consensus regarding whether awards should be granted to individuals or groups of individuals, what constitutes methodologies of import, or what constitutes quality of scholarship or topics that should be considered. Discussions remain regarding whether or not CASWE should accept submissions that have women as participants versus submissions that overtly utilize feminist conceptual frameworks. An even more contentious issue in the association relates to whether or not males could be members of CASWE. Some members insisted that CASWE is a space for women to come together to speak to women's issues; others suggest that men should also be part of CASWE to contribute to feminist scholarship and understandings of gender. It is the conflict on the spatial margins that creates CASWE's energy, but instead of being marginalized, as often is the case with discourse that is on the margins of the hegemony of the hierarchy, this conflict is celebrated for what it can offer for new ways of thinking and working.

And here another paradox occurs. As an association developed out of the need for safe spaces, I worry that CASWE may become a "designated space" for women and education so that the more mainstream discourses of other associations do not have to open up spaces of their own to include the "CASWE-ian" voice. I am guilty of this. I am apt to bring my rural education focus into my CASWE papers, but much less apt to bring my women in administration focus into my Canadian Association for the Study of Educational Administration papers. I have used the safe spaces of CASWE for support and validation of feminism, but have resisted in the past bringing the feminist agenda to the less secure spaces of mainstream hegemonic discourses. My experiences and learning have taught me, as Chandra Mohanty (1997) asserts in the *Preface* to Roman and Eyre's (1997) work, that the struggle for difference, in this case the feminist agenda, really is a dangerous one, with the potential to take away the privileging that leads to success in mainstream environments. I trouble the notion of space here because I realize that at the inception of CASWE, as now, there was a need to provide spaces that would work to support the original purposes of CASWE. But the equity discourse has begun to subsume the gender discourse. By this I suggest that gender oppression is often viewed as a non-issue in society by many

men and women whose consciousness have been shaped by Western individualism; that oppression of women is somehow no longer a cause for worry, and in fact, is less apt to occur than other oppressions related to race, class, or ableness. It is more efficient to lump all oppressive intersections under the guise of an equity discourse that detracts attention from any one type of oppression. A perfect case in point is the change of the mandate and name of the *Women's and Equity Issues* portfolio within the Canadian Federation of the Humanities and Social Sciences to *Equity Issues*, under the rhetoric that it is necessary to remove the sense of hierarchy among equity groups. This problem is also apparent in the \$5 million dollar cut to the Status of Women Canada's (SWC) administrative budget, the subsequent move to strike the word *equality* from its mandate, and to disallow the SWC to use federal dollars for advocacy or lobbying. The consequences are potentially damaging because the focus of attention moves deliberately away from paying attention to gender oppression. I worry that gender will continue to receive less support, rather than more, unless the discourse focuses on males as the oppressed, in terms of boys' achievement in schooling, the need to recruit more males in elementary teaching positions, or notions of masculinity in schooling. I am aware and sympathetic to the research on such issues, and many CASWE members work diligently on these topics. However, somehow society was not perceived to be in quite the same crisis situation when these issues faced females. Turn the tables and educational policies and practice change at incredible rates, as does the discourse that is marked by resistance to feminist concerns. This is another example of paradox and privilege, discussed more fully by Pierrette Bouchard, Isabelle Boily, and Marie-Claude Proulx (2003) in their work for the Status of Women Canada. These researchers, who examined the Canadian advocacy discourse on boys and men related to the school drop-out theme, note that the discourse "suggests an ideology that questions women's rights and discredits feminism" (p. 3). The report, which argues that it is important to dispel the social perception that boys are the only ones having trouble in school, outlines recommendations and initiatives to protect the gains made by girls and women.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

So what does my narrative of privilege and paradox have to offer? As we all know, a story without a moral is not considered to be a worthwhile story in and of itself, in the traditional sense of story-telling lore. I realize

that I am a product of my experiences and my relationships: personal and professional. As Young (1990) writes, I have been privileged by the intersections that are represented within me; these intersections have created gendered paradoxes that have, on one hand, influenced me positively as an individual woman, but on the other hand, have the potential to perpetuate dominating discourses and oppressive practices. Working with a feminist agenda is dangerous for me *because of what I have to lose*. And yet, in all my learning about the importance of multiple perspectives, inclusion of voice, and the dangers of essentializing the "other," there is still the individualist in me that refuses to disregard structure and process, and that revels in believing that I am the shaper of my own destiny. In her work on social justice education, Applebaum (2001) advocates for a critical understanding of dominance because without it, even morally upright intentions can prevent feminists from becoming critical of their own dominant social location and its impact on their work. Just as my earlier discussion on rules suggests, it is not the rules or values themselves that are necessarily harmful; it is their potential to become dominantly exclusive. As hegemonic categories of meaning become further and further demarcated as boxes of exclusion, the potential for oppression grows stronger. Instead, Applebaum (2001) advocates for the alternatives of inclusion and reconceptualisation. In her view, we cannot afford not to critique or reconceptualize the categories of meaning, the rules of the system, or the demarcations of knowledge claims because our privileging often blinds us to the oppressions we see only when we find ourselves on the outside of that privilege. Feminist discourses help me to temper my own hegemonic arrogance, thereby helping me see my own positioning. For example, regardless of token measures of universities to acknowledge alternate ways of knowing and working, my success in higher education will be largely defined by tenure and promotion procedures, SSHRC grants, and publications in mainstream journals that remain highly bureaucratic, individualized, and masculinized. As Sandra Acker and Carmen Armenti (2004) suggest, "[d]ominant among academic discourses are those that feature competition, individual achievement, striving for continuous improvement and placing of responsibility for success in one's own hands" (Davies, 2003, p. 4). Yet, the inner devil asks, am I not enjoying the fruits of my labour? Have I really absconded from a feminist agenda if I succeed in a venue in which women have been struggling for decades to achieve success? Is it not feminist to allow a woman to define herself, even if her alignment is

sometimes more masculine in its orientation? Does that mean that a female betrays her gender, or does that simply mean she is another manifestation of her gender? For me, feminism has been about a loss of innocence, for lack of a better term, as I have begun to internalize that my social positioning has accrued as much by privilege (and therefore oppression) as it has by merit. As my Christian background might metaphorically provide, I have eaten of the tree of knowledge, and now see my own nakedness in acquiescence to hegemony. But that knowledge also offers up powerful opportunities for resistance, for change, and for social action. In these intervals I believe feminism is at its most powerful.

For example, there is an interruption of space that occurs when I come to class with my motorcycle helmet, or when people realize I drive a truck, or when I speak with knowledge about farming practices and rural life when others have me pegged as a city girl. Part of this way of being is a celebration of my family upbringing and of my rural background. Yet, in that moment, a redefinition of gender occurs, a break in the traditional discourse that snaps people to new understanding, and a space for alternative viewpoints can be pried open, even if they remain unarticulated. I believe my privileged background can be used for feminist awakenings, as long as I realize and protect against using the power that stems from that privilege to oppress or silence others. I must use the privileges I do have to further a feminist agenda, but realize that the consequences are not always within my individual control. I also have to realize, as Acker and Armenti (2004) suggest, that "[b]ecause women so often have to prove themselves worthy, there is an argument that they have internalized a stronger need to follow the rules" (p. 20). I want to believe that my efforts will prove me worthy, but I don't want to believe that I will compromise myself to do so. I am happy with where I am in life, and I greatly appreciate all the men and women who have supported me along my journey, but that appreciation does not mean that I cannot understand the privileging that I have accrued, and prompts me to work to make the system more socially just. I want to believe that the critique that comes from inside the system is not necessarily one that has betrayed itself, but is one that is charged with political, social, and individual overtones – and not a little bit of excitement.

I view CASWE similarly. CASWE is a product of CSSE's privileged heritage as much as it is a product of the tireless efforts of women who created it as a space for feminist discourse. Yet the space itself has the potential to marginalize women from the discourses of other associa-

tions, just as it may be a means of other associations to marginalize the discourses of CASWE, coloring it as a paradox of feminist troubling and potential marginalization in the same instant. However, “[o]nly by understanding the relationship between dominance and values can we determine what can and should be dismissed and what should be reconceptualized and salvaged” (Applebaum, 2001, p. 67). The strength of CASWE exists in the provision of space itself, in the encouragement and support for feminist work, in mentorship, and in networking opportunities that may cross over into other associations as women who represent CASWE and other associations meet and begin to work across associations to further feminist issues. In this way, CASWE works within the system to critique the system, not entirely estranged from the hegemonic discourses at work in education, and yet unique and valuable because of what it has to offer. Acker and Armenti’s (2004) promotion of Bensimon and Marshall’s (1997) critical feminist policy rubric works well for CASWE in that regard because it

puts a concept of the social construction of gender at the heart of the work, critiques conventional theories that fail to undertake a gender analysis, and infuses both the theoretical and methodological approach with a commitment to making women’s ex-periences more fulfilling and productive. (p. 4)

Perhaps it is for the above reasons that I remain firmly committed to CASWE as a vibrant and necessary association within CSSE. And that is why I see myself embodied in the future of the association because part of the excitement lies in determining the moments of awakening that will occur in the spaces in which CASWE can create for itself, whether those spaces remain within the association, or as they work deliberately to create spaces in venues across associations.

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