SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO? INVESTIGATING CAMBODIAN WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND INVESTMENT IN ADULT ESL PROGRAMS

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Drawing on the work of Norton Peirce, the author argues that traditional views of adult motivation and participation are limited because they do not address the complex relationships among adult learners' identities, the social contexts of their daily lives, the classroom context, and investment in learning English. By focusing on the lived experiences of four Cambodian women, this research suggests the value of investigating the variety and commonality of adult experience within a single ethnolinguistic group. The findings go beyond social identity to address issues of cultural identity relevant to understanding participation in adult English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) programs. This analysis shows how shifting identities of these women at home and as current or future workers, and the ways these identities are connected to the work of the classroom, have much to do with their investment in participating in particular adult ESL programs.

When I was an adult ESL teacher, I was painfully aware that more than anything I had control over in my classroom, what influenced teaching and learning the most was whether students were able to come to class. This was described to me by a more experienced teacher as students "voting with their feet." What I did not notice then, but have come to see as problematic, is the implication that coming or not coming to class is an individual decision that has to do with individual students' interests in the course and their motivations to attend. Drawing on Norton Peirce's (1995) theory of investment, I will use case studies of four Cambodian women to show how conceptualizing motivation as located inside individuals limits adult

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The author wishes to thank the editors and two anonymous reviewers for feedback on earlier versions of this article.

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ADULT EDUCATION QUARTERLY, Vol. 53 No. 1, November 2002 9-26
DOI: 10.1177/074171302237201

ESL programs' opportunities to support and nurture the investment of their students.

In this study, the central question is not, Why are some adult ESL learners motivated to participate while others are not? Instead, the question is, How do the multiple identities of students, the social contexts of their lives in the United States, and the classroom context shape their investment in participating in adult education programs? This shift has important implications for adult education because it provides a framework that defines adult learner participation not as a problem of individual motivation or limitations in "the basic reasons that lead learners to participate" (Beder & Valentine, 1990, p. 79) but in the interaction between who learners are, which identities are acknowledged and recruited in and out of the classroom, and the potential "return on investment" (Norton Peirce, 1995) from participating in an adult ESL classroom.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

One of the key questions that adult education researchers have attempted to answer is, Why do some adults participate while others do not? In their review of the literature on participation, Wikelund, Reder, and Hart-Landsberg (1992) described most such studies as descriptive in nature with an emphasis on the sociodemographic factors of people who participate and drop out of adult education programs as well as those students' reasons for attending class. In this work, as well as in the U.S. National Evaluation of Adult Education Programs (Young, Morgan, Fitzgerald, & Fleischman, 1993, 1994), the focus has been on understanding participation in general rather than the participation of particular people within particular social and educational contexts, with particular purposes for learning as they play particular and multiple roles in their daily lives.

A central element of the previous literature on adult education participation has been the motivations and goals of students (Skilton-Sylvester & Carlo, 1998; Young et al., 1993, 1994). Beder and Valentine (1990) stated,

> Most participation theory assumes that adult education is a voluntary activity in which learners engage to meet their needs and goals. Critical to such formulations is the concept of motivation, implicitly defined as the basic reasons which lead learners to participate. (p. 79)

In a more recent review of the literature on motivation (Bergin & LaFave, 1998), the construct of motivation is expanded beyond thinking about "a diversity of motivational orientations" to thinking in terms of Motivation Systems Theory (MST) (Ford, 1992). Within this perspective, motivation is seen as including goals, emotions, and personal agency beliefs for individuals. Ford explained that "each component is necessary, but none are sufficient for the activation of strong motivational patterns" (p. 80). Bergin and LaFave (1998) went on to explain that although these

elements are internal processes, context is very important in this conceptualization and that goals are created not in isolation but as an interaction among "the individual, the culture, and persons in the culture" (p. 328).

Although these characterizations of motivation highlight the multiple motivations of any group or individual, and in the case of MST include both culture and context, motivation is still viewed as something that is primarily an internal process. Although MST includes a discussion of culture and context, they are viewed as separate variables that individuals interact with but remain separate from. In contrast, the notion of investment (Norton Peirce, 1995, 2000) builds on the idea that who we are is inextricably linked to culture and context and that people, cultures, and contexts are always in a state of change and influencing each other.[1] These differences, although slight at the surface, suggest quite distinct theoretical and methodological orientations (Rex, Green, Dixon, & the Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group, 1998).

As I will show in the four case studies, these women were not motivated or nonmotivated people, but their interest in and ability to come to class shifted across time and space as they took on different roles and identities in and out of the classroom. Norton Peirce (1995, 2000) has proposed that we think in terms of investment instead of motivation. Understanding the learning of English involves paying attention to the multiple and sometimes conflicting identities of learners and how shifts in identities, within particular contexts, shape the level of investment in learning the language. Within this framework, Norton Peirce (2000, p. 5) defined identity as "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future." Thinking in terms of investment makes it possible to eliminate "artificial distinctions between the language learner and the language learning context" (p. 10), a common way of discussing motivation in relation to second language acquisition. It is also important to note that this concept of investment is not equivalent to the idea of instrumental motivation as it has been thought of in relation to language acquisition. As Norton Peirce (2000) wrote,

> The conception of instrumental motivation presupposes a unitary, fixed, and ahistorical language learner who desires access to material resources that are the privilege of target language speakers. The notion of investment, on the other hand, conceives of the language learner as having a complex social history and multiple desires . . . when learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with target language speakers, but they are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. (pp. 10-11)

A deep understanding of the complex identities of adult ESL learners within particular roles, then, can be invaluable to understanding the multiple desires that lead to participation in an adult ESL program.

Knowing generally that family roles, especially as spouses and parents, and roles as current or future workers are central to the participation of adult ESL stu-

dents does not help us understand the myriad different ways that these roles influence participation or which aspects of students' lives outside of the classroom are most important in adult learners' decisions about attending or not attending class. As Rockhill (1982) stated,

> The passage from broad assertions—e.g., that age and education predict participation—to individual cases must be made to understand how factors such as age and education are interpreted and experienced *in the lives of different people* [italics added]. Otherwise, there is no way to explain how they act as barriers for some and not others; nor is it possible to differentiate how they operate, symbolically or functionally. (p. 6)

The case studies that follow allow for this kind of analysis of the ways family and work intersect with participation "in the lives of different people." They illustrate how straightforward equations about predicting participation are problematic because they fail to address the ways that the realities of students' lives intersect with decisions to learn English and/or go to class.

Whereas Norton Peirce's study looked at the moments when an adult learners' investment in learning English (and claiming the right to speak outside of class) became more intense because of a particular identity (e.g., mother, multilingual citizen), my research explores the moments when Cambodian women's investment in coming to class (to speak and learn English) shifted in relation to particular roles and identities (e.g., wife, worker, sister). As the article looks closely at these students' identities as family members and/or current or future workers, it will also look at the ways that teachers in these two centers, and the programs as a whole, paid attention to the multiple identities of students outside of the classroom.

I have chosen to focus on identities rather than roles, even though roles are being discussed as a central aspect of adult literacy pedagogy (Stein, 2000) and literacy pedagogy in general (New London Group, 1996). It is true that roles are the starting point; as Norton Peirce (1995, 2000) proposed, roles are "sites for identity formation." However, looking at roles keeps the analysis of adult ESL participation one step removed from the particular ways that individual people act in the world, how they understand who they are, and how their individual identities within these roles shape their participation in educational programs.

Several researchers have called for more focus on the particular and varied experiences of bilingual immigrant women (Carmack, 1992; Frye, 1999; Horsman, 1990; Martin-Jones, 2000; Ng, 1981). Although a majority of learners at the programs investigated in this study were women, little attention was paid to the particular needs of female learners in program development. For example, just as Horsman (1990) and Skilton-Sylvester and Carlo (1998) found, female learners were often coming to class in part because of the social interaction it allowed, with language learning being an equal or secondary concern as they saw classroom participation as some much needed time for themselves.

It is important not to think of these Cambodian women building lives in Philadelphia in simplistic cultural terms either as Cambodians or as "biculturals" (Ledgerwood, Ebihara, & Mortland, 1994). Their experiences as refugees have colored their experiences and their identities as Cambodians living in America. In addition to thinking about the realities of refugee life and the liminality and loss of control that living in a refugee camp engenders (Long, 1993), the fact that so many of these women's relatives were killed because they were educated also needs to be seen as a part of their orientation and possible ambivalence toward participation in educational programs. Finally, Smith-Hefner (1990, 1999) has suggested that the particular form of Buddhism practiced by many Cambodians includes a very distinct view of a person's role in making things happen. To American ears, this idea that we are working to find our own path, but not necessarily to meet particular individual goals or choose that path, can seem somewhat fatalistic, but is an important part of understanding possible explanations of Cambodian learners' participation and nonparticipation in adult ESL programs.

As Rockhill (1982) proposed, to investigate participation "in the lives of different people," it is important to examine these lives with as much complexity as possible. This requires investigating not only particular social identities within the family and the workplace but also paying attention to the ways that those identities are gendered and connected to their lives as members of a particular cultural and ethnic group (DiLeonardo, 1984; Skilton-Sylvester, 1997).

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

This study is grounded in an interpretive tradition and utilizes ethnographic methods to investigate the experiences of four Cambodian women who were participants in two urban adult ESL programs. These four ethnographic case studies of Cambodian women call into question our ability to understand adult ESL students in general, as well as further underscore the need to understand adult ESL student participation in particular classroom contexts. Although there is significant agreement that language learners develop communicative competence primarily outside of the classroom by using language in authentic communication, there is also good reason to look inside the classroom, particularly when adult immigrant learners' primary opportunity to use English is in the classroom. As one of the teachers in this study said, "Most students don't speak English outside of the classroom and so the only opportunity for them to use the language is in the classroom" (adult ESL teacher, personal communication, October 13, 1994).

My focus on Cambodian women in a study of participation in adult ESL programs does not merely have to do with an interest in adult learners from this particular ethnolinguistic background but also with the ways that they represent groups whose experiences are not reflected in generalizations about adult ESL students in the United States. The National Evaluation of Adult Education Programs (NEAEP)

(Fitzgerald, 1995) described the current adult ESL population as mostly Spanish-speaking, foreign-born, urban dwellers who state that they read well or very well in their native language. Approximately half of those in the NEAEP study were working while studying English and had graduated from high school (compared to 17% of the Adult Basic Education [ABE]/Adult Secondary Education [ASE] population). Of these, 11% had been public assistance recipients during the preceding year (Fitzgerald, 1995, p. 4). Among the Cambodian women I have encountered in my research, there are several ways in which this national profile was in direct contrast to their experiences as newcomers to the United States and participants in adult ESL programs. For example, they spoke an Asian language rather than Spanish, few would say that they read well or very well in their native language, most were not currently in the labor force, almost all had 3 or fewer years of schooling before coming to the United States, and a majority received some form of public assistance.

Data Sources

The data for this article were collected as part of two larger projects, one a 3-year ethnographic study that investigated literacies, identities, and educational policies in the lives of Cambodian women and girls in Philadelphia in home and classroom contexts (Skilton-Sylvester, 1997) and another that looked closely at the goals of adult ESL learners in Philadelphia (Skilton-Sylvester & Carlo, 1998). The data on which this article is based come from 4 months of participant observation in two classrooms at two adult learning centers in Philadelphia, in-depth interviews[2] with each of four female Cambodian learners (two from each site) and their classmates, and yearlong small-group tutoring sessions and informal discussions with the two pairs of learners at each site to investigate more deeply their experiences of learning English in the United States and their participation in these two adult ESL programs. In addition, the teachers of each class and the administrators of each program were interviewed.

The four focal women were selected based on (a) their identities as Cambodian refugees who arrived in Philadelphia as adults, (b) their consistent attendance in these classrooms, and (c) their interest in engaging in additional tutoring outside of the formal classroom context. As shown in Table 1, this group of adult ESL learners was both similar and different in terms of marital status, work situation, and educational background.

The four women—Lang, Sundara, Soka, and Ming[3]—attended two quite different adult ESL programs in Philadelphia in two quite different sections of the city. Sundara and Soka attended a program at a center for Southeast Asian refugees called SACA, located in a neighborhood that was predominantly African American. This program offered one adult ESL class four mornings each week and had one teacher. The students in this class came from varied language backgrounds—Khmer, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Haitian—but a large percentage of the students

TABLE 1
Characteristics of Focal Women During Fieldwork Period

	Family Situation	*Employment Status*	*Prior Education*
Lang	Became engaged at the end of fieldwork period	Working	Six years of schooling in Cambodia
Sundara	Married with two elementary-age children	Not working	Three years of schooling in Cambodia
Soka	Married with two elementary-age children	Not working	Three years of schooling in Cambodia
Ming	Married	Started working at the end of fieldwork period	Graduated from high school in Cambodia

were Cambodian and spoke Khmer. Lang and Ming attended a much larger program in another part of the city called the Community Center, located in one of the most diverse parts of the city. This program had several different classes running at different times, at different levels, and with different teachers. These particular students attended the evening program and were in the same classroom during the fieldwork period. Although the class was quite diverse, the teacher was himself Cambodian.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using inductive analytic strategies, or what LeCompte and Schensul (1999) called "analysis from the bottom-up." The formal interviews of these four women were analyzed as part of a set of 100 interviews done with adult ESL learners at three Philadelphia learning sites (Skilton-Sylvester & Carlo, 1998) to address their goals for attending classes. In addition to the coding of these interviews, the field notes of classroom observation, small-group tutoring with the researcher, and informal interviews were also coded inductively with an eye toward the particular roles students played outside of the classroom. To ensure triangulation of data sources, student writing, site documents, and teacher and administrator interviews were also analyzed.

FINDINGS

In analyzing the data, it became clear that four sets of roles—and their particular identities within those roles—were central to these women's participation in these adult ESL programs: their roles as spouses, mothers, sisters and/or daughters, and workers. What follows is a look at how the particular identities that each woman took up within these roles and the ways that these identities were addressed in the classroom influenced their participation in these adult ESL programs.

Identities as Spouses in Relation to Participation

Research on immigrant women and language development has often discussed the ways that increased language skills can disrupt the dynamic for men and women as spouses in families (Carmack, 1992; Rockhill, 1993; Tollefson, 1991). Although all of the focal women in this study were married during the fieldwork period, the ways that their identities as wives influenced their participation in programs were strikingly different. For Lang, who was engaged during the fieldwork period, her marriage meant potentially ending her work as a cashier at the family restaurant. In effect, her new identity as wife became more important than her old role as worker in the family business. Because it was work-related language needs that brought her to class, getting married was tied to ending participation because she would no longer be working in this job, not because her husband opposed it. For Sundara, her identity as wife seemed irrelevant to her participation. When class met in the morning, her husband worked and her children were in school; her role as student was relatively separate from her role as spouse. Her identity as a mother was much more of a facilitator and barrier to her participation (see next section).

Soka and Ming's roles and identities as wives had a much more direct impact on their participation in these adult ESL programs. Although Soka began her class with almost no previous English instruction and said almost nothing during the first 6 months of class, she made quick progress and worked independently on further developing her English literacy skills outside of class. Her husband also had limited English skills and did not attend class with her, although he went with her on the first day. Her teacher explained why she thinks he stopped coming as follows:

> She came with her husband on the first day last year. And they came together; neither one of them spoke any English, but her husband was totally lost. . . . He lasted about two days. I haven't seen him since. And my sense is that in that family, they've decided that she would be the language learner . . . that will be her job. I'm not sure what he's doing, what his role is, but she's a learner. She learns English with a vengeance. (adult ESL teacher, personal communication, October 13, 1994)

Here it is the support from her husband, the sense that her identity in the family is to be an English learner, and the ways that her role as learner complement her roles in her family that help make participation in this program a reality for her. Indeed, her identity as a spouse seems to be—at least in part—an impetus for her English language learning.

Thus far, the identities that surround the role of wife for these learners have been quite different in all three of these cases. None of them fits the general assumption that men are threatened by women's language learning and become a barrier to their participation (Frye, 1999; Rockhill, 1993). Ming, however, fits this more generalized profile of the ways in which being a wife can be a barrier to participation. Ming would often discuss her isolation and how happy she was among friends at the community college or in the adult ESL program. She explained to me early on that she

wanted to work with her husband in his beverage business but that he wanted her to learn English for 2 years before she started working. A few years later, he began to see that her time in literacy classes was expanding her social interaction and abruptly decided that she should work in a sewing shop in Chinatown for 10 hours a day, 6 days a week. Although part of this decision had to do with expanding the financial resources of the family, she explained his decision to me in this way, "My husband doesn't want me to go to school. Maybe I will find a boyfriend. . . . He doesn't want me to learn English because maybe I will run away" (Ming, personal communication, October 13, 1995). In this couple more than in others, the wife's growing literacy development was seen as a threat and she is unable to maintain her identity as a student alongside her identity as a wife.

In addition to the various identities of these women as spouses/girlfriends and how this influenced their investment in learning English in the classroom, it is important to make note of the ways that classrooms responded to these identities. In the case of SACA, the teacher knew about the families of students, had visited some of their homes, and had information about the spouse relationships of her students. In addition, she regularly chose family issues as a topic of discussion in the classroom, and on at least one occasion, a female student asked about the laws governing divorce in the United States. In the classroom at the community center, the teacher was himself from Cambodia. This was very helpful to both Lang and Ming as a linguistic resource, and they would often stay after class to discuss aspects of the course, language learning strategies, and how to navigate U.S. bureaucracies. However, my data show that part of Ming's husband's concern about her "running away" came from realizing that her teacher was a young, unmarried Cambodian man and the fact that the teacher had called her home when she missed a few sessions. The pedagogical and linguistic connections from having a Cambodian teacher were strong and quite positive to these students, but this fact also had a paradoxically negative effect on Ming's participation in relation to her identity as a wife.

Identities as Mothers in Relation to Participation: Sundara and Soka

Two of the focal women in this article—Lang and Ming—were not parents during the fieldwork period. The two others—Sundara and Soka—were each mothers of school-aged children. In this way, they mirror what Skilton-Sylvester and Carlo (1998) found concerning immigrant women who are able to participate in educational programs: either they do not have children or their children are in school (and classes for the adults happen while children are in school).

Although Sundara and Soka live in the same neighborhood, attend the same class, walk their children to school before the adult ESL class starts, and see their children as a key reason why learning English is important to them, their identities as mothers mean different things for their learning of English. For Sundara, wanting to learn English has to do with making a better life for her children in a way that

seems primarily symbolic. It is based on a belief that if she learns English, her children's lives will be better. Because she had a son who was often sick, her role as mother acted not only as a powerful force in terms of her decision to participate but also in terms of a barrier to participation in the classroom. When Sundara would miss class for a few weeks because her son was sick, the teacher would call, find out about the child's health, and invite her back when he went back to school. In this way, the potential barriers to participation that were a part of her identity as mother were offset by the ongoing relationship she had with her teacher.

In contrast to Sundara, Soka's identity as a mother had a more direct and specific impact on her children and on her language learning in the classroom. As was mentioned earlier, Soka and her husband had decided she would be the adult English language learner in the family. In this family, it seems that English literacy has become part of the female domain in that it is associated with children doing homework. The fact that Soka and her children regularly have homework and that they work on it together each evening creates a family space for English language and literacy. This was also the case among the Cambodian women I tutored in another part of the city. Their children were often a part of our tutoring sessions, and English literacy development was seen not only as a school activity but also as a family activity. Soka was not only committed to supporting the English literacy development of her children but also their Khmer language development. During the time that I got to know her through one-on-one tutoring and observations of her adult ESL class, her teacher visited her home to document the literacy practices of the home. In a class assignment written about her observations, the teacher had the following to say about the role of Khmer literacy in her life:

> Recreational reading in Soka's family does not always occur in English nor does it always involve print. Soka often tells her children the stories about Cambodia that her mother told her when she was a little girl. She also reads the Khmer textbooks that she brought to the United States from Thailand and sings songs to her children. Soka reports that [her daughter] exhibits the most interest in these literacy events, sitting close to her mother and asking many, many questions. Although this interaction makes her happy, Soka is ambivalent about answering her daughter's questions: "Some I say her and some I don't say. I want [her] speak English, study English. I don't want speak Cambodian, understand old stories" . . . Although Cambodian literacy remains socially significant in Soka's family, she downplays its significance in an effort to encourage her children's English language and literacy development. (adult ESL teacher, 1995, p. 23)

Here, it is possible to say that Soka's identity as a bilingual mother was very connected to both English and Khmer language and literacy development in her family and that her role as mother was a big part of her investment in learning English.

In thinking about Sundara and Soka's identities as mothers in relation to the classroom context they both attended at SACA, it is possible to see several ways that these identities were incorporated. First, adult learners who were mothers

would often bring their children to class if there was a school holiday but the adult ESL class was meeting anyway. In addition, the teacher regularly called students, including Sundara, when they had been absent. In Sundara's case, this meant knowing about her son's frequent illnesses and continuing to invite her back to class when he was well. In addition, because the curriculum was organized around learner's reasons for learning English, the teacher came to see how often students would say they were learning English for their kids. This made it possible for her to incorporate issues around parenting in another culture into the curriculum. In addition, the fact that this class met in the morning meant that mothers of school-age children (such as Sundara and Soka) could come to class and take care of their children's needs.

Identities as Sisters, Daughters, and Nonmothers in Relation to Participation: Lang and Ming

In looking at Lang and Ming and their identities as family members outside the husband-wife relationship, what stands out first are the ways in which Ming's separation from her extended family made her feel isolated and without many choices when her husband became threatened by her attendance in the adult ESL classroom. In Lang's case, her connection to her family provided a positive opportunity for her to work (as they owned a family restaurant). Because conversational English for interacting with customers at work was her initial reason for attending class, her role as family member indirectly had much to do with her initial interest in attending class. There are two main ways that her identities as sister and daughter influenced her ability to participate in this adult ESL program. First, her sister-in-law (who also worked at the restaurant) had a baby, so Lang took over several additional responsibilities at the restaurant. These new responsibilities often made it difficult for her to come to class in the evening when the dinner rush was happening. Also, Lang's family moved to a neighborhood that was farther away from the Community Center, so she could no longer walk to class. At times, she was able to get a ride from her brother, but he was so busy at the restaurant in the evening that he was often unable to give her a ride. As a daughter, she needed to move with her family, but this made her unable to take transportation needs into her own hands. Even after she got her driver's license, there was no car available for her to use for getting to class.

In both of these adult ESL classrooms, it was rare for identities as sisters and or/daughters to be acknowledged. In part, this was because many students were no longer living within their families of origin and had often started families of their own. For many Cambodians, part of the reason for this lack of other family connections had to do with the genocide in Cambodia when many family members were killed. Both Lang and Ming lived with the next-older generation in their homes during the fieldwork period—Lang with both of her parents and Ming with her mother-in-law. For Lang, her identity as a sister and daughter had much to do with her participation

in class but very little to do with the curriculum of the program or the image that teachers and program administrators had of their students. In addition, programs often assumed many of their female students were mothers. In the case of this classroom, in which the curriculum was not centered on the experiences and goals of the students, it is unlikely that the teacher knew which of his students were mothers and which were not. The fact that these two women were not mothers meant that some of the discourse of the classroom (concerning helping children with homework, and so forth) was not at all connected to their identities. In addition, the fact that the class met from 7 to 9 p.m. made it much more difficult for those who were mothers to attend.

Working Identities in Relation to Participation

Lang's experience of multiple identities is particularly interesting because they all intersect with each other in the context of her work in a family-owned restaurant. Her initial impetus to attend class had to do with her need for oral language skills in acting as a cashier and order-taker as part of the family business. Unlike the other three focal women, this meant she had regular contact with English speakers outside of class. In this way, she was not dependent on the classroom context for English language practice and development. Although she was engaged and not yet married during the fieldwork period, the following excerpt from my field notes shows how her future identity as a wife also had an impact on her sense of herself as a worker and the choices she would have:

> Lang explains that her father does a lot of cooking for himself and the whole family because her mother works at the restaurant. I ask if he likes it and she says, "sometimes yes, sometimes no." I ask if he cooked in Cambodia and she says "No, in Cambodia, women stay at home all the time and do the cooking and take care of the children." I ask her which way seems better and she says "the way in Cambodia because the mother can take care of her sons." I ask if she will work after she gets married and she says "probably, for some money, but if my husband wants me to stay home, I'll stay home. If he wants me to work, I'll work because I live with him." (field notes, January 14, 1995)

Much in the same way that Sundara's children were both a reason and a obstacle to her participation in class, Lang's work was both an impetus for and a barrier to attending class. Her identities as worker and family member often conflicted for several reasons: classes meeting during the dinner rush, new responsibilities at the restaurant because of her sister-in-law's new baby, and challenges because of relying on her brother (one of the cooks) for a ride to school. Ironically, the community center offered classes in the evening so that working adults could attend (based on the assumption that work would happen during the day).

Sundara's future work goals (along with wanting a better life for her children) were also a part of her investment in coming to class. She believed that her limited

English proficiency was the key thing keeping her from a job. During the fieldwork period, she did not work outside of the home. Interestingly, it took a teacher who was committed to understanding the goals and needs of her students to find this out; the director of the organization that hosted the class had told the teacher that students were not interested in workplace issues. As she explained in talking about her students' ability to talk about their goals,

> I was amazed at how specific students were able to be. And also how many of them articulated employment-related goals, because I had been told that students weren't really interested in working, that there was no reason for them to work because they were on welfare. . . . When I was . . . collecting materials, I almost didn't even consider any employment-related stuff. I thought, "Well, I might as well just get some just in case," and I realized that on the basis of this information, not from the students, but from another source, I was sort of censoring what I might bring into the classroom, which is pretty easy to do, I think. (personal communication, adult ESL teacher, October 13, 1994)

In this way, these adult students' identities as "welfare recipients" had made the administrators of the program miss the ways in which being a worker was a desire of many in the program.

For Soka and Ming, identities as workers did not influence their investment in attending an adult ESL program. Soka's primary work was as a mother and a student; she did not work outside of the home and did not articulate this as one of her major goals. As was mentioned earlier, Ming did not work until her husband decided that it was too threatening for her to attend class—it was her identity as wife rather than as a worker that lead to her nonparticipation in the class. Unlike Lang, whose work at the restaurant increased her exposure to English, Ming's work after she stopped attending class was primarily with other women who spoke Khmer and Chinese. Although Skilton-Sylvester and Carlo (1998) found that many women's roles at work involved more contact with English speakers than their male classmates, this was not true for Ming. Even so, there were many other Cambodian women I knew who did not attend class in part because of the demands of working and being a mother and a wife. It seems that when children were in school, this was a prime opportunity to either work or attend class, but being a mother, a worker, and a student was rarely possible.[4]

In thinking about the ways that these two programs addressed learner identities as workers, it is possible to see that at the program level, each had made erroneous assumptions about their students as current or future workers. At SACA, the administration had assumed that students were not interested in working but preferred to stay on welfare. Luckily, the teacher decided to ask the students about this herself and found that many students, including Sundara, were quite interested in thinking about their working lives in relation to learning English. At the Community Center, the assumption was that students were working during the day and could most easily come to class at night (something that did not work well for Lang as a worker or

as a woman who worried about her safety walking at night). Perhaps the biggest issue for Lang, however, was that her particular need to become a better English speaker so she could talk to customers at her job was not addressed at all in the classroom. For the most part, the teacher was the only person who spoke in extended sentences and the students typically participated by responding as a chorus in single words or individual sentences. Certainly, her identity as a worker and as a family member had much to do with her ability to participate, but the fact that the curriculum did not address her primary goals was also a crucial part of her decision to stop attending class.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE

Although Norton Peirce's theoretical work is at the center of this analysis, there are at least two ways that the findings of this article extend her perspective on investment: (a) by privileging not only students' interactions with English speakers as a central indicator of their investment in learning the language but also looking at the ways that their interactions with and participation in institutions in which formal English language learning happens are also crucially connected to the notion of investment and (b) by looking at the ways that what it means to be a Cambodian woman in Philadelphia intersect with what it means to be Soka, Sundara, Lang, and Ming as individuals and as immigrant women in the United States.

First, as I have shown in this article, shifts in identity influence learners' claiming of the "right to speak" outside of the classroom, as Norton Peirce (1995, 2000) has suggested, but also influence their claiming of the right to participate in educational programs that support their language development. My work also requires rethinking the traditional separation between what happens in classrooms and what is real. As Rodby (1992) wrote, "I . . . want to challenge the traditional dichotomy of 'the real world' and education. I want to question the idea that education is a process, not only segregated from, but also subordinate to the real world" (p. 81). Understanding and addressing the long-term participation and investment of adult ESL learners in learning English requires seeing the classroom as a real place where the multiple selves of learners are central to teaching, learning, and program development.

Second, for Norton Peirce (2000), social identity has always been primary in her investigations of investment, and she has shied away from addressing cultural identities because of the threat of overgeneralization. She discusses the ways that separating social from cultural identity can be an unnecessary distinction and that grounding investigations within particular sites of practice makes those distinctions less visible and important. In my work with Cambodian women, I have found that their cultural experiences as Cambodian women who share a language, history, and experience of being transplanted both from and to the same geographic locations have been an integral part of understanding their investment in participating in adult

ESL programs. Although it is important to look for variety and resist easy generalizations, I agree with Eisenhart (2001, p. 20) that "culture, though troubled, is not easy to abandon." This is particularly true because Lang, Sundara, Soka, and Ming's sense of themselves is meaningful in part because of the ways that they see themselves as Cambodian women in Philadelphia.

In addition to these theoretical implications, there are also practical ones. Looking closely at the data about students' multiple and shifting identities outside of the classroom underscores the need to look beyond the general roles that students play and toward their particular identities in designing programs and curricula. Ways of being a mother, a worker, or a wife can be quite different for individual people across time and space, and even more different across people. In creating programs and designing curricula, it is not enough to say "Many of our students are working; we should have classes in the evening" or "Husbands don't like it when their wives attend class." In reviewing the data from the case studies of these four learners, it is clear that family and workplace identities had much to do with adult ESL learners' investment in participation. Of equal importance are the ways that the classroom contexts in which these students were investing tapped into or did not tap into the identities of learners as family members and current or future workers. As Norton Peirce (2000) wrote,

> Whether or not the identities of a learner are recognized as part of the formal language curriculum, the pedagogy that a teacher adopts in the classroom will nevertheless engage the identities of learners in diverse and sometimes contradictory ways . . . unless learners believe that their investments in the target language are an integral and important part of the language curriculum, they may resist the teacher's pedagogy, or possibly even remove themselves from the class entirely. (p. 142)

In the data analyzed for this article, the teacher at SACA was able to regularly draw on students' identities as family members and students, and this had a real impact on Soka and Sundara's ability to continue participating in the classroom. In contrast, the teacher at the community center, although able to connect quite skillfully to his Cambodian students because of his own ethnolinguistic background, did not teach in a way that addressed Ming and Lang's identities as family members and workers. This also had a major impact on their decisions to stop attending class.

At first glance, the recent work from the National Institute for Literacy that has lead to the design of Equipped for the Future (EFF) as a set of guidelines to structure adult education curricula seems like a positive one in that at its foundation, it addresses student role maps in relation to their lives as citizens, parents, and workers (Nash, 2000; Stein, 2000). Although EFF was designed based on input from actual adult learners, the worker and citizen role maps were designed primarily based on expert opinions about what is needed for those roles. Although adult learners had significant input on the parent role map, very few adult ESL learners were included in the process and almost none from Asian language backgrounds. In spite

of the student-generated beginnings of these role maps, as EFF has become more reified, it has lost some of its connection to the actual lived experiences of students in the classrooms in which it is being used.

I have the following two key concerns in relation to the usefulness of the EFF framework in addressing the particular interests, roles, and identities of Lang, Ming, Soka, and Sundara: (a) the role that adult learners and their teachers play as decision makers within the framework and (b) the ways in which the structure of the framework itself can contribute to a reification of a general standard (based on finding commonalties rather than recruiting differences) and a decontextualized perspective on adult learner roles rather than contextualized multidimensional identities.

The findings from this article show the ways that the actual lived experiences of students need to be a key element of curriculum development and pedagogy and that focusing on generalized roles—although perhaps seeming like a step in the right direction—does not necessarily allow for the creation of curriculum and pedagogy in which long-term investment in participation can be nourished. As this study has shown, the dynamic relationship between the language learner and the language learning context in shaping adult ESL participation requires a deep understanding not only of the identities and interests of language learners but also a commitment to developing theory and research that address the day-to-day complexities of adult ESL language learning contexts.

NOTES

1. The literature on the effects of refugee camp life (Long, 1993) indicates that having goals and having control over the means to reach those goals is not something that is often possible within that context. Making goals a central part of a theory of motivation, even if that theory addresses the fact that individuals set those goals within particular cultural contexts, makes an a priori assumption about how one sees the world that is problematic in understanding the reasons why learners participate in adult ESL programs.

2. The interview protocol contains multiple sections, with several open-ended questions that addressed students' reasons for attending class and their goals for learning English. See Skilton-Sylvester and Carlo (1998) for extended discussion of these formal interviews with adult ESL learners in Philadelphia.

3. Pseudonyms are used in lieu of the women's real names.

4. The one exception to this conflict between being a worker, a mother, and a wife was a group of Cambodian women I tutored in South Philadelphia. Each of them had a sewing machine in their apartment and did piecework at home, sewing for the garment industry. In this case, we met for class in one of their homes; they had found a way for their identities as workers, mothers, and students to intersect at home.

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