



Book Review

The Healing Journey: Intimate Partner Abuse and Its Implications in the Labour Market

DeRiviere, Linda. (2014). Black Point, NS: Fernwood Publishing. ISBN 9781552666548 (paper) CA\$21.00. 176 pages.

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Few studies have focused on women's workforce experiences during and after they leave an abuser. What are the impacts of abuse on women's work, productivity, careers, and aspirations? How does trauma effect their earnings, education, and training opportunities? Linda DeRiviere (2014) tackles these questions and concludes that work precarity, poverty and intimate partner abuse are interconnecting and reinforcing. *The Healing Journey* demonstrates that "intimate partner violence influences women's location in the labour market over their entire working life," while abuse and control can curb women's independence and career advancements long after a separation (p. 16). Women who have experienced abuse are less desirable for employers, argues DeRiviere, and the persistence of mental health and chronic illness directly related to abuse frequently disrupts women's ability to stay employed as well as pursue training and education.

Coordinated by the family violence research centre, RESOLVE, DeRiviere's tri-provincial survey of the prairie provinces collected data in a seven-wave longitudinal study. Results are based on surveys of 414 women who have experienced domestic violence. In addition to statistical analysis, DeRiviere conducted interviews after each wave of the study. DeRiviere hopes her contribution will encourage policy changes that would provide women access to various supports to participate successfully in paid work, including transportation, adequate and stable housing near employment

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opportunities, living wage employment and benefits, and access to affordable high quality childcare (p. 53).

One of DeRiviere's most significant contributions to Violence Against Women (VAW) literature is her discussion about the impacts of mental illness related to abuse on employability. Almost two-thirds of participants reported that mental health struggles undermined their ability to thrive in an already precarious labour market (p. 96). Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a mental illness widely shared among DeRiviere's participants, undermined their information retention, concentration and basic coping skills. The "psychosocial aftermath of violence – the evidence of which manifested in high rates of depression, anxiety and PTSD" are important realities that must be considered before employment (p. 114). Additionally, DeRiviere notes that workfare (work for welfare) policies that include mandatory job placements or vocational training may cause more harm for women impacted by trauma – some women may never be able to work again due to debilitating health effects of trauma (ibid). The physical, emotional and psychological effects of abuse directly impact women's goals for future employment or education – not a lack of ambition, a common misconception amongst social policy makers (p. 116). Responding to the ways employers and state employment policy often resort to victim-blaming for inconsistent work performance, DeRiviere suggests policy reforms to social assistance workfare policies as well as a guaranteed annual income for women who are unable to re-enter the workforce. In other words, social assistance policies must recognize the gendered impacts of violence and facilitate supports and accommodations for abused women.

DeRiviere employs institutional theories of the labour market to explain how individuals who have multiple obstacles to employment or education may not follow a typical career or vocational path. Women who have experienced abuse and trauma, for instance, "become trapped in a particular segment of the labour market" categorized by precarious, low paying, non-unionized, temporary work with limited opportunities for advancement (p. 18). Additionally, human capital theory and segmented labour market theory are used to understand what is required to secure well-paying jobs with benefits (education, training and experience) and the continuum of good and bad jobs in the labour market. DeRiviere notes the weaknesses in human capital theory by demonstrating that increased education and training opportunities do not necessarily remove the barriers that abused women encounter when trying to establish economic independence as, even with these opportunities, they often end up in part-time, non-unionized service sector jobs (p. 66).

Feminist political economic conceptualizations of why and how gender inequality persists in the labour market and in the creation of welfare regimes would have strengthened DeRiviere's discussion of labour market inequalities as well as her critiques of market driven policies (Bezanson & Luxton, 2006; Breikreuz, 2005; Caragata, 2003; Coulter, 2009; Evans, 2007;

Fuller & Vosko, 2008; Gavigan & Chunn, 2007; Little, 2012; McKeen, 2004). DeRiviere notes that market-driven policies “perpetuate the feminization of poverty by segregating women into occupations with low pay” (p. 22). However, the role that neoliberal economizing has played in welfare reforms and its impacts on the VAW sector, specifically cut backs and restrictions on advocacy work for women’s shelters, is absent from the discussion. Drawing on feminist research on VAW and the role of neoliberal policy changes would have strengthened DeRiviere’s critiques of market driven policies such as workfare as a one-size-fits-all program that tries to move people as quickly as possible back into the labour market. Although I agree with DeRiviere’s critique of gender neutral policies, I question why the author does not expose the myriad of other ways neoliberal values and economic reforms have undermined the welfare state and how policies like workfare, which were previously prohibited under the Canadian Assistance Plan, coerce recipients of welfare to work for their benefits. Instead, DeRiviere often inadvertently mimics the discourse that has led to the massive rollbacks of social services. By claiming that welfare reliance is “unproductive,” for instance, DeRiviere adopts the very neoliberal logic that supported the introduction of workfare and recast labour precarity as an individual problem (p. 22). An uncritical assessment of single mothers on welfare as “unproductive” also ignores the social reproduction that occurs in the home, such as cooking, cleaning, caring for children, paying the bills, organizing budgets, and the transmission of societal and cultural norms (Bezanson & Luxton, 2006). It is this unpaid labour that neoliberal welfare policies have neglected in their budget-cutting gender-neutral workfare policies (Little, 2012).

A significant percentage (45.7%) of participants in the study identified as Indigenous women. In the introduction, DeRiviere briefly notes the ongoing impacts of colonization and residential schools on Indigenous women’s self-worth and confidence and how this has shaped their labour market experiences, education achievements and careers goals (p. 20). Yet the intersection of gender, race and colonization is not integrated throughout the text nor is there discussion of how the capitalist labour market and state policy systemically marginalizes and discriminates against racialized and Indigenous peoples (Bannerji, 2000; Dua & Robertson, 1999; Galabuzi, 2006, 2010; INCITE!, 2006; Razack, Smith & Thobani, 2010). DeRiviere states that “women of Aboriginal heritage value their traditional culture in terms of the role of women. The safety of their children, as opposed to employment [or workfare], may be their immediate concern” (p. 23). Although the cultural differences that DeRiviere highlights are crucial to understanding Indigenous women’s experiences of motherhood, absent from this analysis is discussion of the disproportionate rates of Indigenous children removed from mothers fleeing abuse and placed in child welfare agencies and the detrimental consequences this has on Indigenous mothers and their families (Blackstock, 2007). Additionally, DeRiviere’s analysis of labour

market inequalities for racialized abused immigrant women is insufficient. Racial exclusion, marginalization, and discrimination within the labour market are factors that impact racialized immigrant women's ability to secure and maintain good jobs. DeRiviere's neglect of social exclusion and structural racism within capitalist economies problematically assumes that all abused women experience the same barriers within labour markets; however, as anti-racist and feminist political economy scholars have argued, "precarious employment is a highly gendered and racialized phenomenon" (Das Gupta, 2008, p. 143; Vosko, 2000).

Despite DeRiviere's contention that policy must be "grounded in the realities of poverty and violence" and accommodate a "bottom up" approach that appreciates the lived experiences of women survivors, the actual grassroots organizing and advocacy of VAW activists, feminists and survivors is conspicuously absent in *The Healing Journey*. Instead, by directing her findings and recommendations to policy makers and government officials, DeRiviere supports a top-down approach to dealing with the labour problems that arise from intimate partner abuse. If the long-term impacts of abuse incur serious "personal losses" in terms of lifetime employment earnings for abused women, DeRiviere also insists that "the health care, child welfare and justice systems, as well as other social services" are financially burdened (p. 111). Similarly, in chapter 7 DeRiviere presents a micro based analysis of the costs of partner abuse to demonstrate that intimate partner abuse is a public health and social issue. DeRiviere strategically employs market-based arguments to solicit dialogue with policy makers, even though these approaches tend to individualize violence against women and perpetuate the stigma that abused women are a drain on the system. The costs of domestic abuse to the welfare state should never be prioritized over the impacts such abuse has on its survivors.

There is little in this study of the ways VAW activists and workers have developed in-house methods to deal with work precarity amongst survivors or have organized political lobbies to deal with government policies that tend to exacerbate that precarity and fail to appreciate the personal struggles of survivors in their appeals for social assistance (Beres, Crow & Gotell, 2009; Bumiller, 2008; CNWSTH, 2014; Mosher et al., 2004; Ready, 2016). For those of us doing social justice work within the VAW movement this omission is disheartening. DeRiviere's recommendations to policy and government officials are in line with liberal reform strategies including the need to provide a living wage (regardless of sector), social assistance benefits, childcare, transportation, stable housing, and employment and workfare exemptions. These are clear and concrete steps towards supporting survivors of abuse; however, feminists in the VAW sector as well as anti-poverty scholars and activists have long noted the tensions and negotiations that arise between VAW services and the state (Brodie, 1996; Bumiller, 2008; Evans & Wekerle, 1995; OAITH, 1998; Snider 2006). Appealing to governments to reform social assistance to assist those in need has been

limited and frequently undermined under successive conservative and neo-liberal governments. If we want to make meaningful change from the bottom up then we need to engage with the community and the grassroots activists and survivors who are already lobbying, advocating and fighting for and alongside abused women to demand recognition of VAW as a systemic problem, and challenge the state in their gender neutral policies that discount the impacts of violence against women.

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