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Motivation in adult education: a problem solver or a euphemism for direction and control?

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Adults' motivation to participate in continued education is of immediate interest, as lifelong learning is now considered as the solution to the pressing problems of increased levels of unemployment, not least among unskilled workers. Many theories concerning motivation and adult education maintain that individuals are innately motivated to learn, and conclude that motivation problems result from various dispositional, situational and structural impediments. If such barriers are removed, adults will be naturally motivated to educate themselves.

This article argues against these theories and maintains that motivation should not be regarded as something residing within the individual. It is rather a construct of those who see it lacking in others. A critical reading of the literature shows how motivation theory stigmatizes people held 'unmotivated' in that the theories ascribe motivation problems to the individual, while assuming the basis upon which the problem is formulated for granted, and making those who formulate the problem invisible. Instead of a problem solver, motivation becomes a euphemism for direction and control. This article suggests that motivation should be seen as a relational concept, rather than as residing within the individual.

Adults' motivation, or lack of this, is best understood in relation to those who formulate the problem. Instead of asking what motivates adults to study, research should focus on *who states that this is a problem, and why, and the reasons for this conclusion*. This approach makes the operations of power visible, and demonstrates how the discourse of lifelong learning, as a necessary political response to economic and technological determinism, constructs adults as inadequate.

Introduction

This article springs from a question frequently asked by educators, policymakers and employers, namely: '*What motivates adults to take part in and complete courses in continued education and competence development?*' This question is posed as the call for adult education, or the more frequently used term, lifelong learning, is gaining ground today, both in Sweden and many other industrialized countries. Lifelong learning is seen as the solution to several urgent problems. Governments realize the need for more skilled and educated adults, as the labour market for unskilled labour is shifting to low-cost countries, and the resulting high levels of unemployment erode the tax base and challenge welfare systems. Industry calls for a labour force having the latest and updated levels of competence. Politicians regard education as a solution to what they see as democracy problems, as evidenced by decreasing participation in party politics. Education is supposed to foster active and democratic citizenship, in spite of the fact that party membership, at least in Sweden, seems to be decreasing as the general level of education increases. As people undergoing any sort of education are not regarded as unemployed in the official statistics, it is also a means of keeping open unemployment figures low. Educators, finally, call for education as a means for personal growth and development and for the building of the good society (Gustavsson 2002).

But learners do not always come into the educational system in the numbers required. Sweden recently implemented an ambitious, five-year adult education programme, aimed at raising the level of education among adults who have not completed their comprehensive and/or secondary education. The project was generally successful, but some groups seemed to be very difficult to motivate to participate, particularly men in rural areas, immigrants and other groups (Paldanius 2002; Nordström and Bengtsson-Sandberg 2004). Trade unions reported difficulties in persuading their members to participate in the adult education initiative, and difficulties in recruiting their members in other competence development programmes, both within formal education and job-related training (Höög 1999, 2001). Small-business owners seemed reluctant to invest in education for both themselves and their employees. Short-term profitability is prioritized before long-term competitiveness (Fleischer 2004). If one assumes that education can solve all the problems raised, the vital question posed is therefore to identify and determine what motivates people to participate in further education.

The obvious way of seeking an answer to this question would, of course, be to ask the individuals concerned what it is that motivates them to participate in, or abstain from, continued education. However, such a study would be at risk of taking it for granted that there is such an entity as motivation – an entity that is easily identified and explained, and that interviewees are also able to verbalize and explain. This article suggests another route. Instead of asking people about their motivation, it tries to determine what the concept of motivation is all about. Based on an extensive literature study concerning motivation, and motivation and adult learning (Ahl 2004a), this article questions and critiques the motivation concept, and suggests an alternative way of looking at motivation in adult education.

The article begins with a discussion of concept definitions, and a brief historical overview of how social science has conceptualized motivation. Building on this, the next section discusses how the motivation concept is reflected in theories about adult education. As the literature review gave reason for questioning, the following section challenges the conceptualization of motivation as something residing within the individual and resulting in behavioural patterns. If this is not so, how should social science approach motivation theory? The next part suggests an alternative way of regarding motivation theory, namely the Foucauldian perspective that motivation theory constitutes a body of knowledge that has power effects, i.e., it determines what is right or wrong, and it positions people and actions in certain ways. Using this perspective, the following section discusses how motivation theory constructs the adult learner as deficient and inadequate. The last section concludes that motivation is a construct of those who find it wanting in others. It suggests an alternative way of conceptualizing motivation, namely as a relational concept, and proposes a different direction for future motivation research.

What is motivation?
A search in encyclopaedias shows that the word 'motivation' comes from the Latin term '*motivus*', which means 'a moving cause'. Research on motivation is concerned with the overall question, 'What creates human action', writes Franken (1994). When looking for more precise scientific definitions, however, one finds a large variety. Some suggestions are offered below:

*how dispositions lead to action through the interaction of biological,
learned and cognitive processes. (Franken 1994: 19)*

*(1) what energizes human behaviours; (2) what directs or channels such
behaviour; (3) how this behaviour is maintained or sustained. (Björklund
2001: 4; Porter et al. 2003: 1)*

*the process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained.
(Pintrich
and Schunk 2002: 5)*

*inner needs causing certain (potential) behaviour. (Nationalencyklopedin,
1989–96)*

*a process governing choices made by persons or lower organisms among
alternative forms of voluntary activity. (Vroom 1995: 7)*

These definitions conceptualize motivation either as dispositions, as energy and
direction, as something instigated by goals, as based in needs or as a process governing
choices. Common for these conceptualizations is that motivation is seen as
something residing primarily within the individual, and therefore possible to
research by focusing on individuals. Motivation theory, moreover, seems to require
a theory of the human species, as different motivation theories make different
assumptions about human nature. My review of the literature concerning motivation
identified six different outlooks on people, as shown below in table 1.
Theories that specifically examine motivation in adult education are usually
based on general motivation theories. As this article's critique of adult education
and motivation is better understood if one has an appreciation of the general theories,
I begin with a brief historical overview. I also note some of the criticism levelled
against these theories.

Table 1. Classical motivation theories.

Humans as	are motivated by:
1. Economic/rational	Rewards and punishments
2. Social	Social norms, groups
3. Psycho-biological	Instincts and drives
4. Learning	Stimuli and/or rewards
5. Need-driven	Inner needs
6. Cognitive	Cognitive maps

1. Economic human

Library databases reveal that motivation was mainly of concern for philosophers and economists until approximately the turn of the previous century. The theory of human beings as rational decision makers is one of the earliest theories of humans and their motivation, dating back to Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (Smith 1776/2000). This theory states that humans act rationally and in their own self-interest. They choose the alternative that gives them the highest economic returns. Motivating someone, according to this theory, is fairly straightforward – one only has to offer more money (or other rewards that may be valued) than someone else.

Economists have used the theory of the rational decision maker to build theoretical economic models of human behaviour. Within industry it has been used to design motivation schemes for workers. One of the most well known is perhaps Frederick Taylor and his *Scientific Management* (1911), where both employers and workers were said to benefit financially and otherwise from far-reaching specialization and division of labour with piecework remuneration methods. In education, most reward systems take it for granted that students act rationally in order to obtain good grades and other rewards, and to avoid punishments for undesired behaviour.

Nobel Laureate Herbert Simon (1971) showed, however, that it may not be that simple. His critique focused on the conception of humans as always acting rationally. This requires, according to Simon, that: (a) one always has access to complete information; (b) one is always able to make a decision; (c) the consequences of any decision can always be estimated; (d) the consequences may be rank ordered; (e)

the preference order is consistent over time; (f) one always chooses the best; and (g) one makes the same choice when the situation is repeated. It was not hard for Simon to show that these prerequisites are hardly ever present. Simon proposed that one satisfies instead of optimizes, and makes decisions based on rules of thumb (see also Lindblom 1959; Brunsson 1985).

March and Olsen (1989) argued that accounts of rational action are better seen as justifications for actions already taken, rather than as signs of rational planning. They claim that people act according to norms, values and identity conceptions. Accounts of rational action serve the purpose of giving the action meaning and of justifying it. In a culture that values rationality, it makes perfect sense to present oneself as a rational actor. Rationality is here reinterpreted as the norm that governs the action to present ones actions as rational, rather than something governing action.

The other part of the theory, the one about always acting in one's self-interest, is equally open to critique. Adam Smith, who was a moral philosopher and not an economist as we know economists today, wrote in his less well known book, *The theory of moral sentiments* (Smith 1759), that prudence was only one of the moral virtues. The equally important virtues of courage, temperance, justice and love (he skipped hope and faith) affect and moderate self-interest (McCloskey 1996).

2. Social human

Taylor's scientific management increased productivity rates, but there were unforeseen results. Management at the Western Electric Company in Hawthorne, USA, discovered in the early 1920s that operatives worked slower in order to maintain their piecework rate, even if this meant lower wages. Elton Mayo from Harvard University was called in to explain the phenomenon, and to do something about it. One of the largest and perhaps best funded social research projects ever conceived was launched. After some 20,000 interviews and years of experiments, Mayo and his colleagues concluded that other factors, more than just money or physical working conditions, affected work motivation. These were social norms and well functioning groups that satisfied people's social and emotional needs (Mayo 1933).

This research led to the Human Relations School, where humans were perceived as primarily social beings instead of rationally profit-maximizing ones. The school inspired both research and practice for many years to come.

However, the Hawthorne research's positive, humanitarian results can appear somewhat tainted if one examines the circumstances and reasons that initially led to the research, and at how this research was carried out. Ellen O'Connor (1999) shows how Mayo's research was an industry commissioned solution to difficult social, economical and political problems in the USA at that time. There was growing unrest and large strikes among the workers, union activism, bomb attacks on the police force and courts of law, high inflation and a galloping fear of communism. Managers were desperate for a solution, and Mayo's explanation suited them down to the ground. Mayo himself was not much of a one for democracy or worker codetermination. He thought that unrest in the work place had psychological causes, and that these were best controlled through therapy (Mayo 1945).

The impressive number of interviews carried out in the Hawthorne research were called 'clinical interviews' and were actually therapeutic. They were carried out by specially trained counsellors and designed to settle unrest among the workers. As such, they were interventional procedures disguised as research. Mayo's theory that a socially satisfied worker is a productive and happy worker was thus part of a very large programme to control workers. 'Motivation' may here be reinterpreted as exercise of power. However, this critique on the Human Relations School has not received anything approaching the reputation of the school itself. Even today, textbooks write about it as the humanitarian approach that broke the chains of Taylorism, and students are taught the value and ethics of satisfying people's social needs.

3. Psycho-biological human
Theories about human behaviour, based on instincts, came from the Cartesian dualistic understanding of mind and body, and were popular in the early 1900s. In order to explain why humans (who have a mind, which animals were assumed not to have) exhibit behaviour that is nevertheless the same as that of animals, such as drinking, eating and having sex, the term 'instincts' was invented (Franken 1994). Behaviour outside the control of the conscious mind was said to be instinct-driven. The boundary

between instincts and consciously mediated behaviour was radically shifted, however, as Darwin demonstrated humans' relationship to animals. This opened the way for theories about *all* sorts of behaviour as driven by instincts and by emotions tied to these instincts (McDougall 1998/1908).

Instinct theory was replaced by drive theory, as there was an inflation in instincts (Murray 1967). Drives were operationally defined through experiments and could, therefore, be controlled in numbers. Drive theory was combined with homeostasis theory, and psychological drives were said to be a bodily mechanism designed to maintain and restore equilibrium. Secondary rewards, such as social prestige, which one had learnt to associate with a primary drive, could also restore equilibrium according to Hull (cited in Murray, 1967: 17). Drives could therefore be used to explain all behaviour.

Motivating people, according to these theories, becomes a matter of being knowledgeable and aware about which drives can cause a certain behaviour, and using this knowledge in order to motivate the desired behaviour, perhaps by teaching students to associate a desired secondary reward/behaviour with a primary drive. Drive theory is not considered as a main theme in motivation theory today. Alive and well is, however, the conception that human behaviour and animal behaviour have a common ground, and motivation theory still attempts to reach conclusions about human behaviour based on, for example, primate studies. This research approach has been criticized for arguing in circles. Categories that were originally developed to explain human behaviour are used when interpreting and explaining primate behaviour. Primate behaviour is then taken as 'evidence' for certain kinds of human behaviour, such as, for example, 'natural' male dominance or competitive behaviour. Such research results risk being used as a way of legitimizing existing social orders (Haraway 1991).

4. Learning human
The behaviourists agreed with instinct and drive theory in that the body was the right and proper place to study human behaviour, but for different reasons. They said that behaviour does not come from any innate instincts or drives, but that behaviour is learned. They proposed studying behavioural patterns in animals,

however, as animals cannot talk, and are therefore more reliable as research objects than humans. Ideas and thoughts were of no interest, only observable behaviour (Watson 1948/1913). The three famous names associated with early behaviourism were Pavlov, Thorndike and Skinner. Pavlov found that he could get his dogs to associate food with the sound of a bell. After some training, only the bell was needed for the dogs to start salivating. A simple stimuli-response model was constructed, and Pavlov had created a conditioned reflex. Thorndike developed this model when he taught cats to find their way out of a maze by offering them a fish as a reward. This model required no innate reflex as a requirement for learning new behaviour – the presence of a reward was sufficient. Skinner, finally, found in a somewhat sinister experiment that rewarding the animals only occasionally was sufficient. In fact, they increased their efforts if they were only rewarded intermittently (Phillips and Soltis 1998).

According to these theories, people can learn something new if they are exposed to suitable stimuli, or if their desired behaviour is systematically rewarded. This may be translated into motivation terms. If motivation is what causes behaviour, then motivation is, in this case, a stimuli or a reward. As a learning theory it was somewhat limited. Learning something new equals, in this theory, the acquisition of new behaviour, as any mental phenomena or considerations were irrelevant for the behaviourists. New knowledge and new ideas were of no concern, as they were not available for scientific observation. As a motivation theory it is, however, of unabated interest. There is a large body of theories about behaviour modification, which is defined as 'the application of basic research and theory from experimental psychology to influence behaviour for purposes of resolving personal and social problems and enhancing human functioning' (Pinder 1998: 426). There is also a large body of literature on self-motivation, which is based on behaviourist views. These views dominated educational theories until the 1960s.

5. Need-driven human
The most cited of motivation theories is probably Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow 1987). He claimed that behaviour is partially motivated by external factors, but even more so by innate, human needs. These are intrinsic and common for all humans, and of seven different, hierarchically ordered kinds. The 'lowest'

needs were the physiological ones. Then came security, belonging, recognition, cognitive needs, aesthetic needs and finally, the need for self-realization. Maslow concluded that only a fraction of humanity can expect and count on being able to reach self-realization, and that any such individuals are rare.

This theory states that one level of needs must be approximately satisfied before the next becomes active and applicable. When satisfied, it no longer acts as a motivator, which implies a critique of the behaviourists' stimuli-response model. Maslow's theory became important in arguing for changes in the workplace. Unmotivated workers or students will not become more motivated by things that already satisfy their basic needs and requirements. Instead it became important to reorganize work, or educational arrangements, in order to satisfy higher needs (Maslow 2000).

Maslow has been criticized for building a theory based only on clinical observations, and on some close observations of a few friends and famous people that he himself regarded as possibly being self-actualized. The theory is not based on solid, scientific experiments, a fact that he himself admits in the beginning of *Motivation and Personality*. It is, however, still very popular. It is easy to communicate, and is also compatible with the Western 'grand narrative' of development from lower to higher stages (Lyotard 1984). Another reason for its success may be that it elegantly incorporates all previous models.

Unlike Maslow, David McClelland (1961) did not formulate a hierarchy, valid for all, but postulated that there were three basic needs – for affiliation, for achievement and for power – and that these were unevenly distributed in the population, as well as *among* populations. Those with a high need for achievement were those that started enterprises and led economic growth and development. McClelland's concern was to help poor countries develop, and he started training programmes among Indian businessmen to raise their need for achievement, and found the results to be satisfactory (McClelland 1965; McClelland and Winter 1969). However, only males were included in this study. McClelland conducted all his experiments on boys, male college students and grown-up men. Women were important in only one respect – it was their place and function to raise boys having high needs for achievement.

Hyde and Kling (2001) reveal, however, that McClelland and his colleague Atkinson actually included women when they started their studies, but as women did not verify their theory, they were then excluded. Women's need for achievement, unlike men's, did not increase in a competitive situation. McClelland therefore held that women had a completely different psychology from men (McClelland 1961), and concluded that women were wrong, but that his theory was not. Repeated studies show that women's average need for achievement has increased, as has their participation in the work force, and it is today the same as men's (Hyde and Kling 2001). McClelland thus made a mistake when he did not incorporate cultural and social norms in his models – on the other hand, his neglect was probably also the result of cultural and social norms, namely the idea that women raise children and men start companies.

The third most famous name in need based theories is Frederick Herzberg (1966). Based on research carried out among male accountants and engineers he identified needs into two basic categories – to avoid pain and to grow (Herzberg *et al.* 1959). Factors responding to these needs were categorized accordingly. He labelled one category 'hygiene factors'. They included the organization's policy, administration, technical management, salary, supervisor relationships, work conditions, status, job security and the work effects on private life. Decent hygiene factors were necessary to induce a person to go to work in the first place, but they did not motivate good work performance. They only catered to humans' need to avoid pain and discomfort, according to Herzberg. The motivators, on the other hand, were directly attached to the job tasks, and included a sense of achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, promotion, and growth opportunities. These reflected human's basic, existential needs to grow and to develop. Catering to these needs require employers to design jobs with a high degree of responsibility and discretion.

Herzberg builds his theory on a model of the human being as an essentially lonely creature, aware of her coming death, and whose only comfort in life is the belief in her potential to develop into something higher, beyond her current existence. 'This article of psychological faith gives purpose to man's existence,' writes Herzberg (1966: 56). People who did not correspond to the model, as were those who experienced

job satisfaction through social relationships, were discounted and rejected as immature – or women. Maslow came to a similar conclusion – he said that women were strange, as they seemed to regard love, affection and social needs higher than self-realization (Maslow 1987).

The model also requires that any work *can* be organized to provide meaning, and is thus in this sense elitist. Many monotonous jobs fall completely outside this model, and the hygiene factors may be the only factors that can lead to job satisfaction (Vroom 1995: 149). The theory has also, as has Maslow's, been criticized on methodological grounds. The method was said to create the result (Pinder 1998: 37). Herzberg was, however, enormously influential. His two-factor theory laid the ground for contemporary theories about inner and outer motivation (Deci and Ryan 1985) and intrinsic and extrinsic rewards and how these rewards could be balanced to achieve optimal motivation (Frey 1997; Sansone and Harackiewicz 2000; Cameron and Pierce 2002; Frey and Osterloh 2002).

6. Cognitive human
That human beings are thinking creatures is of course not a modern discovery – the theory of the rational actor was based on such a conception – but because of the dominance of behaviourist theory, there was reason to claim this anew. Cognitive scholars maintained that to understand human behaviour, one must also study that which is not directly observable, namely people's thoughts. Common to cognitive theories is the presupposition that people's ideas about how the world is configured influence their behaviour. How these conceptions of reality are created in people's minds is therefore of interest for research.

What is the relevance of cognitive theory for motivation theory? Firstly, it is not one unequivocal reality that affects behaviour, but cognitions of reality. As these vary between individuals, it implies that individual differences become important in motivation theory. A reward may mean something important to one person and yet quite a different thing for another. Secondly, history becomes relevant. How a person cognizes reality today is dependent on how she conceived of it yesterday, and of how she imagines her future.

Influential, early cognitive motivation theories were those of Kurt Lewin (1935) and Victor Vroom (1964/1995), where the authors attempted to create universal models in order to understand human motivation, including factors such as how much a person values a particular outcome, the expectation that the outcome will be achieved, and other forces, called driving forces and restraining forces (such as time, money, family obligations etc.) that may affect a person's behaviour.

Lewin and Vroom have had many followers. Handbooks have been written about how to design optimal reward systems based on these theories (Lawler III 1994) and there are also theories specifically concerning adult education that build on such theories (Rubenson 1977). But there was also criticism. Herbert Simon (1971), for example, had the same objections as he had raised about the theory of the rational actor. The models make unrealistic assumptions about the cognitive capabilities of humans, and they cannot be used in any practical sense – a fact that Vroom willingly admitted in his 1995 edition.

Cognitive theories dominate motivation theory today. Universal models have perhaps been abandoned, but there is a multitude of specific ones, such as selfefficacy theory, equity theory, goal theory, control theory, attribution theory, the theory of reasoned action, or theories of how expectations of one-self and others affect motivation (McGregor 1966, 1968 ; Pinder 1998; Stipek 1998; Dweck 2000; Pintrich & Schunk 2002).

How is motivation conceptualized in adult education theory?
There is a comprehensive literature regarding motivation in education. The theories are largely derivatives of those based in industrial psychology, where most of motivation theory was originally developed, as described above. It is the context and the application that differs. Instead of work motivation, scholars write about study motivation, but they identify the same sort of factors as ingredients in motivation as do the theories related earlier (Stipek 1998; Pintrich and Schunk 2002). The present review, however, does not concern itself with motivation in education generally. Nor does it deal with theories of adult learning (nor learning in general), such as socio-cultural, activity- or situated-learning theory, which may conceptualize motivation differently. These theories deal primarily with the educational or learning

situation, and take it for granted that students/learners are present. Recruitment problems are not considered a main concern.

The present review is limited to the literature on adult education which specifically addresses the question of how to motivate adults to take part in and complete organized further education. This is put forward as a problem by those dealing with adult education policies, and is also the reason why I concentrate on theories focusing on this issue. The review includes a number of texts that specifically address this question (Miller 1967; Boshier 1973; Rubenson 1977; Tough 1979; Cross 1981; Boshier 1985; Cropley 1985; Dufresne-Tasse 1985; Knoll 1985 ; Siebert 1985; Stock 1985; Vulpius 1985; Holmer 1996; Wlodkowski 1999; Dweck 2000; Skaalvik and Finbak 2001).

Included are also theories on how to motivate people to take part in work-based competence development (Ellström *et al.* 1996; Abrahamsson *et al.* 2002). Finally, I have included some well-known texts on participation in adult education and searched specifically for what they have to say about motivation (Husén 1958; Knowles 1980, 1989). As there are many similarities, I will not recount or specify all these, but will discuss their common characteristics.

In connection with the first section, the theories contain building blocks from all the groups, except perhaps drive theory. There is a large cognitive element in the theories – they discuss, for example, people's expectations that a certain education will result in a certain outcome as a determinant of decisions to participate, building directly on Lewin and Vroom (Rubenson 1977; Cross 1981). Dweck (2000) suggests that people's theories about themselves determine their study motivation, and others propose that negative early school experiences resulting in low self-confidence affect their motivation. There are also concepts from behaviourist theory, as well as the theory of the economic actor, in that they discuss the role of short-term rewards, particularly the role of getting a new job or a promotion as a result of education (e.g., Knowles 1980). The social human is present, both in discussions of group norms as determinants for decisions to participate and in the role of the study group in encouraging adults to complete their education successfully (Husén 1958; Wlodkowski 1999).

Far more dominant are, however, need-based theories. Not all, but most theories take it for granted that humans have an intrinsic motivation to learn (e.g., Husén 1958; Knowles 1980; Cross 1981; Cropley 1985;Wlodkowski 1999). They build on a humanist approach, and refer to Herzberg's theory of our need to grow, or Maslow's and Rogers' (1967) theories about humans' innate need for self-realization.

The assumed innate need to learn and to grow is therefore a basic building block. The theories see study motivation as always latent, but it may be hampered temporarily by a variety of factors. The theories therefore try to identify such factors, and in some cases build models of how these factors are related to each other (e.g. Cross 1981; Skaalvik and Finbak 2001). The list of factors varies between the theories, but an overall consolidation of these results in the following list, in which the factors are identified on three levels and labelled as dispositional, situational and structural (or institutional).

Dispositional variables are either personality traits, or personal qualities acquired through upbringing and early school experiences. Theories about dispositional variables rely specifically on need-based motivation theories and state that learners have different needs which must be satisfied, either of a hierarchical, universal type as Maslow's, or of types differently distributed in the population as Herzberg proposed (e.g., Miller 1967). Suggested examples of dispositional barriers are:

- insufficient self-confidence
- insufficient confidence for one's ability to succeed in specific studies (i.e., insufficient self-efficacy)
- negative early school experiences that cause negative expectations of continued education
- identification with a social group in which education is not highly valued.

Situational variables are not as closely tied to a person's psychological make-up, but to a person's life situation. Adult education theory discusses the following variables:

- lack of time
- lack of interest
- lack of concrete, expected results from the studies.

Lack of interest is actually contradictory – people are assumed to be innately interested. The presence of this variable can therefore in turn be explained by one of the other variables. Several authors state that the absence or presence of concrete benefits is of great importance. Even if motivated to learn in a general sense, adults are held to be interested in specific education only if it offers them some concrete, specific benefit (Rubenson 1977).

Several barriers were identified at the institutional or structural level. The theories reviewed discussed the following:

- lack of availability of education opportunities
- lack of information about study opportunities
- absence of childcare arrangements
- lack of study financing
- scheduling problems
- a pedagogy not suited for adults
- social norms that counteract participation in adult education
- lack of job opportunities after completed education
- work organization, where learning at work is discussed.

Once identified, the theory says to remove any or all of these barriers, and motivation will resurface. Politicians are advised to work on the institutional barriers; arrange educational opportunities reflecting the needs of the job market, arrange financing, information and childcare, and provide flexible, ICT-based learning modules to overcome barriers of time and space (see Selwyn *et al.* 2001 for a critique). They are also advised to 'work on attitudes' so that education becomes desirable, and ensure that teaching is performed in such a way as not to scare off people later in life. Employers are advised to reorganize work in order to facilitate developmental learning (Ellström *et al.* 1996, Holmer 1996).

This is, however, not a major part of the advice. The overwhelming majority of the suggestions are pedagogical. Most of the reviewed writers are educators themselves,

and tend to focus on what pedagogy can accomplish in order to enhance motivation. There is great confidence in the ability of a suitable pedagogy to remove obstacles that originate elsewhere. Positive, new study experiences are, for example, held to counteract the bad effects of negative, previous experiences. Good educational experiences are said to be able to raise motivation in spite of obstacles located outside the educational situation (see Husén 1958; Knowles 1980; Dufresne-Tasse 1985; Stock 1985; Vulpius 1985; Hedin and Svensson 1997; Wlodkowski 1999).

The model is a homeostasis model. Initially, there is motivation. This becomes hampered due to various barriers. After removing these barriers motivation re-emerges, and all is well again. The model takes it for granted that it is possible to affect motivation, and hence behaviour, by amending individual, situational or structural barriers. Three assumptions are built into this model: *first*, that such an entity as motivation exists; *second*, that it resides with the individual; and *third*, that motivation causes behaviour. All three assumptions may be questioned, as the following discussion demonstrates.

Does motivation exist? And if so, does it cause behaviour?
Motivation scholars are quick to identify the large variety of definitions on motivation as a problem (Vroom 1995). A more serious problem is, however, the assumption that it is possible to identify, describe and even measure motivation. As Siebert maintains, motivation is a hypothetical construct, which may explain the variety of theories about it:

> *…there is no common concept either of human motivation, or of mutually agreed explanations … This plurality of theories is linked to the fact that motivation is not a clearly given object but a scientific construct. That is why a recognised classification of motives and motivation-directions is lacking. (Siebert 1985: 46)*

The most common method of operationalizing motivation is to build a model of a number of situational and personal variables. The situational variables may sometimes be measured by observation, but the personal variables are usually measured by subjecting respondents to various questions or statements, and asking them to what degree they agree or disagree with the statements, measured on a Likert-type

scale. The questions are intended to measure a psychological *construct,* i.e., something that is assumed to exist by the scientist. The problem with this is that the questions prove the construct. No matter the result obtained – say that one measured 'need for achievement' on a seven grade scale among male recruits, and found it to be on average 5.8 – then one has, by the very act of subjecting the recruits to the questions, created a construct identified as the need for achievement. It may turn out that the recruits are also men who achieve very well, but contrary to common sense, it does not confirm that there is anything such as a need for achievement. For this conclusion to be drawn it would be necessary to demonstrate that the need for achievement came before the actual achievements, and no such thing can be shown in a correlation study.

The existence of inner motivation variables may thus be questioned; moreover, the assumed relationship between motivation and behaviour may also be questioned. Psychologists have conducted systematic analyses of attitude-behaviour research. Attitudes are here defined as 'predispositions to behave in a characteristic manner with respect to specified social objects or classes of such objects' (King and McGuinnies, 1972: 8). In this research, 'attitudes' are used as a comprehensive term, which also includes other psychological constructs researched in a similar manner, for example motivation, or factors in motivation theory, such as value systems, selfefficacy, achievement orientation, social needs, etc. What is valid for attitude research in this case is thus also valid for motivation research. The analyses show that there is very little evidence for a relationship between attitudes and action (Wicker 1969; Abelson 1972; Foxall 1984). It has been suggested that people's statements of their attitudes justify past behaviour rather than indicate future behaviour (Abelson 1972; Payne *et al.* 1992; Pinder 1998: 257). Moreover, the practical reason for attitude research, motivation research being part of this, is the assumption that new information is supposed to influence attitudes that are in turn supposed to influence behaviour, but Abelson's (1972) review of psychological research showed that there was no correspondence between how much new information a person absorbed and any change in attitudes.

If motivation does not exist, or if, at any rate, it is not amenable to new information and does not affect behaviour; it would seem like a waste of time and effort to continue theorizing about it. But the large body of literature on motivation cannot be that easily

dismissed. Motivation is of continued interest for scholars and policy makers, and is also a concept frequently used in everyday language. However, instead of studying what motivation *is*, I suggest that social science study what motivation *does*, using a social constructionist and Foucauldian perspective.

A Foucauldian power/knowledge approach to motivation

Foucault said that knowledge is power, but he did not mean that the more knowledge a person has, the more power she has. Rather, power is inherent in knowledge, or knowledge has 'power implications', as power is exercised rather than possessed (Foucault 1995). In this view, power is exercised by drawing on knowledge that allows one's actions to be presented in an acceptable light, or to define the world or a person in a way which allows one to do the things one wants. For example: a body of knowledge which says that women have no achievement orientation can be used to support a social order where women are not provided any career opportunities. Knowledge that says that adult learners are motivated by short-term rewards may support a provision of short courses catering to the needs of industry at the expense of, for example, adult education for active citizenship (Tobias 2000).

This exercise of power does not have to be done deliberately; in fact, most knowledge is taken for granted and never questioned (Berger and Luckmann 1966). The more it is taken for granted and the more people who draw on the same knowledge, the more powerful it becomes. Knowledge is therefore never neutral. Knowledge orders people and objects, determines what is right and wrong, desirable or not, real or unreal, true or untrue, and thus acts as a way to privilege certain actions and relations, and count others as irrelevant or illegitimate. The body of knowledge about motivation is no exception. It is therefore of interest to discuss the power implications of motivation theory for adult learners.

According to Gergen (1991), knowledge also constitutes the Self, as it is the material from which identity is created (Vygotskij 1966 ; Gergen 1991; Giddens 1991). Different sorts of knowledge will produce different sorts of identities. Motivation theory thus produces certain identities, and it positions adult learners in certain ways. What then, does this body of knowledge about motivation accomplish, and how does it construct the adult learner? Three facets of this are discussed in the following: motivation theory as

privileging a Western understanding of humans; motivation theory as androcentric; and motivation theory as an instrument of power.

Motivation theory as Western and individualistic
Motivation theory privileges a Western, individualistic understanding of humans. The most influential theories privilege the self-actualized individual. Maslow put him literally at the top of the hierarchy, Herzberg privileged self-actualization through work, and McClelland focused on the need for achievement. Anything 'social' was placed further down the ladder and less valued. Maslow put social needs third from bottom in his hierarchy, Herzberg counted social needs to the hygiene factors, and McClelland did not count the need for affinity as contributing to the development of society. Theories of inner and outer motivation privilege the former. These models are presented as universal, but are not consistent with, for example, Eastern understandings of the social web and the place of the individual in this web. In this sense the theories are also colonizing. They impose a Western understanding of the individual in cultures in which this is not appropriate or relevant, thus marginalizing and making other sorts of understanding of the individual invisible.

There is an interesting body of education research that contrasts Western and Eastern understandings. Miller (1997), who researches cultural representation of duty, says that duty has a negative connotation in the West. It is about limitations, and having to do things one does not want to do. The ideal is that a person does things from her own desire. This builds on the West's dualistic view of individual/society, nature/culture and duty/desire. Acting for the benefit of someone else is not compatible with the assumptions of the economic human. Hindus, writes Miller (1997), see no such sharp distinction between the individual and the collective. Acting according to one's *dharma*, i.e., fulfilling one's social duties is simultaneously a way of actualizing oneself. The choice situation between duty and desire simply does not exist. A Western motivation theory such as Deci and Ryan's (1985), in which inner and outer motivation are compared, and where inner motivation is privileged, has no application in the society Miller describes. Similar observations were made by Rohner and Pettengill (1985), who noted that Korean students found controlling parents to be loving, whereas US students had another opinion. Iyengar and Lepper (2002) found that the US students preferred to make choices themselves, whereas the Asian students preferred others to make

choices for them, but inner motivation, measured by standardized tests, increased in both cases. The authors explain that there are different norms for action, and the self is differently constituted in these cultures. The West values independence, whereas the East values affinity and dependence. This means, according to Salili, Chiu and Hong (2001), that student motivation, and the optimum pedagogy, may be completely different in different cultures (see also Dai 2002; Vadeboncoeur and Portes 2002; Salili and Hoosain 2003). Western theories do not always apply – not even in the West. Most of the reviewed motivation theories can be criticized for neglecting or down-playing cultural and social norms and institutional arrangements, thus severely limiting their explanatory power. The theories are undersocialized.

Motivation theory as androcentric

A second observation is that the theories are androcentric. Androcentrism means, literally, the doctrine of male-centeredness; the idea that men's experiences are generalizable to all humans. Not only does motivation theory imply a dichotomy between the individual and the collective, but there is also a man/woman dichotomy, and man is consistently the norm. As most social science theories they are presented as universal, but the great majority of the research is done on men, by men and with men's paid work as the unquestioned standard. As noted earlier, Herzberg, Maslow and McClelland all explained that women were exceptions as they did not fit their models. Women valued affinity and social relationships more highly than the models postulated. The private sphere of life, with homemaking and childcare is, if at all present, at best seen as an obstacle. This is a pattern which can be seen both in the general motivation theory reviewed in the first section and in theories of adult education and motivation. Childcare and duties at home were discussed only as one of the many obstacles to be overcome. The only theorist who explicitly mentioned women's work was McCelland, but there was only one specific task that was deemed of importance, namely raising achievement-oriented sons.

The original Hawthorne experiments were re-read by Acker and van Houten (1974). They found the research reports to be misrepresentative of actual research results. The Hawthorne experiments are in most reports held to show that people who have their social needs satisfied are happier and more productive. This finding

came from a several year-long experiment with six girls (the young women were referred to as girls) in a special assembly room. In this situation, they were completely dependent on management's discretion, and subject to a high degree of paternalistic control. They had little choice but to increase their productivity. Men in similar experiments were not individually selected, but selected as a group, older, less dependent, and they did not increase their productivity. There is no discussion of the gender aspect in the reports. The result reports thus disregarded both gender and power. The conclusion that a socially satisfied worker is a motivated worker is thus highly questionable. One might as well conclude that a closely supervised and controlled worker is a productive worker. This shows the insufficiency of social theory that disregards gender and which takes gender/power relationships for granted (Ahl 2004b).

Motivation theory as an instrument of power
A third observation concerns motivation theory as an instrument of power. Most of motivation theory is framed in a humanist discourse, and seems like a rather benevolent undertaking. When looking more closely at the contexts in which motivation theory has been produced, and for what reasons and for whom, another picture emerges. The main purchaser of motivation theory was industry, and the purpose was to increase productivity and settle worker unrest (O'Connor 1999). Theories about what makes humans tick are useful as instruments to control people, and could explain some of psychology's success. Ellen Herman (1995) describes how psychology has risen from a rather suspect subject in the early 1900s to a discipline reaching far into and influencing in all corners of society. Psychology was used to explain phenomena, such as war (the military was an early employer of psychologists), poverty, racial unrest, unemployment, economic growth, social problems, education problems and even revolutions, in terms of the self. There was something wrong with the make-up of the individual. A model like Maslow's, for example, demonstrates how this works. His model is regarded as a humanist model, but it could well be seen as an elitist model disguised as humanism. The model explicitly states that all human beings have the potential of reaching self-realization, but only a fraction can count on achieving it. Self-realization thus becomes a false promise. If only a few can ever reach it, it constructs the rest of humanity as psychologically insufficient. Moreover, it states that to remedy this insufficiency can only be done by working on

one's self-realization, not by engaging in political or collective action to change social circumstances.

Psychologists, such as Mayo, explained societal problems by psychological causes, and thus legitimated interventions in people's psyches. A need was created for psychological experts to handle this, and a new professional category grew. Herman (1995) writes that psychology was used to legitimate policy. The language of psychology offered a way to present political initiatives as scientific and neutral, or as therapeutic, while at the same time avoiding any discussions of politics and power. Psychology was used as camouflaged direction and control. Individuals were to blame, structures were not. As individuals were seen as problematic – and some more than others – this led to categorization and thereby stigmatization of some of these groups.

How does motivation theory construct the adult learner?

The body of knowledge concerning motivation is here discussed as individualistic, androcentric and as an instrument of power and control. What then, are the power implications for the adult learner of this knowledge? How does it position the adult learner? Most of the theories of motivation in adult education, and most of the practical interest in such theories, concentrate on how to recruit and keep adult learners. This presupposes that there are some people who are not easily recruited – otherwise there would be no need for the theories. The theories postulate that (some) adults have motivation problems. But do they in fact? I would suggest that motivation problems arise in the relationship between the recruiter and those who do not want to be recruited. If the recruiter's interest was not there to begin with, there would be no reason to talk about motivation problems. One could assert that the motivation problem belongs to the recruiter, and not to the prospective recruited.

Such a conclusion is supported by Paldanius (2002), who interviewed a group of people in Sweden who had not accepted offers of continued education. They belonged to exactly the category of uneducated people that the discourse on lifelong learning maintains must raise their level of education for their own and society's benefit. Contrary to theory, however, Paldanius found no latent study motivation that could be released through the elimination of barriers and obstacles.

His respondents were simply not interested. Moreover, they had found no reason to articulate disinterest until Paldanius asked the question. Education was a no-choice. They were much more interested in doing something else. His respondents valued work, family and a stable, well-arranged daily routine. Education was only seen as an alternative, or a necessary evil, if, and only if, it would lead to a guaranteed job opportunity. Education *per se* was not valued, and as his respondents did not have career ambitions in the ordinary sense of the word, they did not perceive any value in education as a career step.

Given the current discourse of globalization and lifelong learning (Brown 1999; Bagnall 2000), this group of people presents a problem for policy makers, researchers and educators, but it is the discourse, and the policy makers, the researchers and the educators who make them a problem. Paldanius writes that this group is in a position characterized by symbolic violence, in that they are first defined by society's institutions and structures, and then presented as a solution to the problem they have become (Paldanius 2002: 297). By the very act of categorizing these unwilling learners they are also stigmatized and marginalized. Seeking to assimilate the uneducated among the educated through lifelong learning programmes, 'heightens awareness of difference and social exclusion' (Edwards *et al.* 2001: 426), denies diversity, and constructs the devalued 'Other'.

The discourse on lifelong learning, and the theories concerning motivation that serve this discourse, therefore construct the unwilling adult learner. The 'unwilling learners' are both the reasons for and the solutions to societal problems, while those who formulate the problems, and the basis for the formulation of the problem, remain invisible. They are made invisible because they represent normality, the ideology in power, and knowledge that is always taken for granted.

This construction of the adult learner is concordant with research findings on how, for example, the techniques of need assessment, curriculum development and examination in the USA create a dependent, disciplined subject and recreate prevailing power regimes (Wilson 1999). It is resonant with how the discourse on lifelong learning in the UK places the responsibility for the smooth functioning of society on the individual instead of on society's structures, thereby distributing

blame on those who do not make it (Martin 2003; Crowther 2004) or, as John Field (2001) argues, governments shed responsibility both downwards to individuals, and upwards to transnational corporations and intergovernmental bodies, thus making the governing invisible. It is also congruent with how Swedish adult education policy, by governance techniques of guidance and risk calculations, tries to make people take the 'right' decisions by 'themselves' and how it excludes those who do not (Fejes 2005a, 2005b).

There are many good arguments for taking a critical stance towards the discourse of lifelong learning, how it is used and how it constructs the adult learner. Motivation theory is an important and integral part of this discourse. However, from a critical scholarly viewpoint, it has so far been neglected. Apart from critically assessing theory, there is also reason to try to assess how motivation theory or everyday understanding of motivation in adult education is reflected in practice. If motivation is a construct of those who see it wanting in others, it not only positions adult learners as deficient but it may also put the adult educator in an impossible hostage position, as an actor who is supposed to deal with the so constructed 'unmotivated adults' in order to fulfil governments' expectations and projections of economic growth. Furthermore, any educational policy that assumes and takes for granted motivation as residing with the individual may be quite inefficient. Perhaps it is not the individual that is 'wrong', but rather that the educational policy is unsuitable. Money spent on trying to solve the unemployment problem by educating those who have no interest in this could possibly be better spent elsewhere. Instead of trying to change people, perhaps policies should be reviewed and reassessed.

Motivation as a relational concept
This article has reviewed motivation theory and found it to be not only a hypothetical construct with questionable empirical support, but also a body of knowledge that privileges a Western, individualistic and androcentric view of humanity, and which marginalizes community, social values and women. It is also heavily under-socialized in that it explains social phenomena by psychological factors, thereby putting the blame for any kind of social problems on individuals, while making policy, discourse, structures and institutions invisible. In this, it categorizes, stigmatizes and marginalizes certain groups of people, adults having a low education being one of

these. The body of knowledge on motivation thus has power implications for the adult learner. Instead of a problem solver, the argument presented here suggests that motivation could be better regarded as a disguised instrument for direction and control.

The point of departure for this article was the question: 'What motivates adults to continue their education?' but resulted and ended in another question, namely: 'Who says that this is a problem, why, and on what grounds?' I would suggest taking the latter question as the point of departure for future research. For this to make sense, however, motivation must be conceptualized in a different way. Instead of regarding it as an entity, residing within the individual, I suggest seeing it as a relational concept. It is hardly possible to speak about motivation without relating it to something – one can be motivated to work, to study, to play, and so on, but never just 'motivated' (unless using it as a synonym for energetic). By using the word 'unmotivated', which is of greater practical interest for educators and policy makers, this becomes even clearer. The person who does not want to study, and therefore does not participate, has no problems, and no need for an explanatory theory, or for a policy to do something about it. It is when someone wants someone *else* to do something and this person does not that the problem arises. The problem then becomes located in the relation between these two. Even when a person has motivation problems that appear quite personal, as for example a person who wants to lose weight but does not go on a diet, the problem may be viewed as relational. This person has internalized a message that he or she weighs too much, from the doctor or, perhaps, from advertising, and has motivation problems in relation to this internalized other. In both cases, motivation is all about discipline and power. It is easier to resist in the first case, when 'the other' is external and identifiable, than in the second case, when the disciplinary power is internalized (Foucault 1995).

Abandoning the search for motivation as essence, and looking at it instead as a relational and discursive concept, opens up new vistas for social science and adult education research. It reveals the operations of power, and shows how the discourse on lifelong learning as a necessary response to economic and technological determinism constructs the adult learner as insufficient or inadequate. It also challenges normality, prevailing ideologies and the assumption that education is the most obvious response to societal problems.

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