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11 FEMINISM, EDUCATION AND THE NEW RIGHT

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Recent socialist feminist writings suggest that existing understandings of the New Right have paid inadequate attention to 'the patriarchal basis of the state and society' (Eisenstein, 1987). Gender relations have, yet again, been marginalized in the conceptualizations of contemporary politics. According to ten Tusscher,

... the debate around the New Right has become moribund—stuck in a treadmill of male-defined analyses offering male answers to male questions on what has become the dominant force in contemporary western politics. This gender bias has led to a partial explanation of the New Right—on the left, one couched in economic and class terms—which fails to explain (and indeed lacks the analytical tools to be able to explain) the moral/traditional/familial aspects of the present administration's ideology and politics.
(ten Tusscher, 1986, p. 67)

[...] The starting point for my analysis will be a broadly defined 'sociology of women's education' (MacDonald, 1980). Although some feminist research fits easily within the conventional boundaries of 'sociology', other feminist analyses or projects have contributed to sociological debates from outside the academic discipline. Patriarchal relations within higher education have positioned women as a minority of the academic profession and a majority of those in lower-status academic-related posts. So feminist educational research has been generated in the various niches that women academics have managed to find for themselves not just in sociology or education departments but also in, for example, curriculum studies, adult education, and extra mural studies. Black female sociologists, with a few exceptions, have been excluded from the academic profession and can be found working as education advisers, local authority personnel, and in black feminist collectives. It is essential, therefore, that such feminist authors are not further excluded from the academic arena.

Research on women's educational experiences began to emerge in the United Kingdom in the early 1970s in the context of growing disillusion with the social

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democratic principles underlying education and social policy. The principles of universalism and collectivism had not, it seemed, delivered the promised equality of opportunity to women.

After a slow start at the margins of the sociological world where issues of social class dominated, British sociological research projects and texts on female educational experiences grew in number, and the majority, ironically, were published well after the 1979 election when Mrs Thatcher led the Conservative Party to victory. The next ten years were to witness a phenomenal growth of interest in feminist educational analyses at a time when, paradoxically, the 'pursuit of equality' was increasingly challenged by central government initiatives.

Yet the shift in political discourse and the reality of the new educational era promoted by the Conservative government rarely attracted the attention of feminist academics and teachers. Sometimes it appeared as if the educational processes that feminist researchers identified, and indeed the research agenda itself, existed within a political vacuum, so devoid was gender research of any mention of the political and economic climate of the period. On the whole, the foci of feminist research were the discourses and internal structures of a liberal democratic state shaped by the ideologies of welfarism. Consequently, there seemed to be little preparation for the attack on 'egalitarianism', allegedly brought to an abrupt end (or so claimed the then Secretary of State for Education, Kenneth Baker) by the successful passage of the 1988 Education Reform Act. It is only in the last year (1991/2) that we can see the emergence of a more sustained feminist response to the educational programme of the New Right.

One way to explain this delay in analyzing the significance of the New Right's education policy for women is to consider the relationship that feminist education theory has had to educational policy-making. The relationship between theory and practice is different in the context of gender and education to that in sociological analyses of class or 'race'. Like those committed to 'race' and, to some extent, class equality, feminist academics and sociologists have attempted to engage with broader political liberation movements. However, the issue of gender in education differs in that women are the majority of the teaching profession. Many of the reference points for feminist educationalists, therefore, are to be found not just in the sociological domain but in female teachers' campaigns and initiatives. Thus feminists may have waited to see the impact of the latest round of contemporary reforms on women teachers before responding publicly to these reforms.

[...]

MODERN FEMINISM AND THE CRITIQUE OF SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION POLICY

Feminist analyses of education, in much the same way as the sociology of family and school, can only be understood as an integral part of the political constellations of the postwar period. The coincidence of social democratic reforms and the women's liberation movement of the 1960s generated major contractions and a new agenda for women. The results of such conflict were the development of a sustained critique of the purposes and shape of social policy and practice, as well as an ambivalence towards the role of the state in promoting female rights. Such feminist criticism was further strengthened by its interaction with anti-racist and socialist analyses of state action in this period.

The aims of the postwar settlement were to promote not merely economic growth and, ideally, full employment, but also to try to ensure that all benefited in some way from that prosperity. Promises were made to use schooling to encourage the full development of an individual's abilities and talents and to ensure genuine equality of opportunity (Finch, 1984). Thus the education system was to be used as a major vehicle for social engineering. On the one hand, the welfare state could try to meet individual needs, especially those of the socially disadvantaged, and on the other, it could try to alleviate various social problems within the existing social and economic framework. The main objective was not the transformation of social inequalities or power relations within society, it was essentially the redistribution of resources within it.

With such an agenda, it was not surprising that doubts were consistently and frequently expressed about the strength of the political commitment of politicians, and particularly of educational policy-makers, to the promotion of social equality. The version of social equality being used emphasized equality of access rather than equality of outcome—a much weaker version, therefore, than some would have wished. In the liberal democratic state, open access would ensure that those with merit would succeed in a competitive environment, whilst compensatory programmes might help others to overcome the effects of their disadvantaged social origins (Arnot, 1991).

Contained within the 1944 Education Act, with its promise of education for all, were the possibilities of women's liberation from their domestic destinies, even if little was done actively to ensure that this goal was fulfilled (Burton and Weiner, 1990). Ironically, it was precisely the ensuing expansion of education that 'hurtled a generation (of women) beyond the confines of their mothers' world into the male sphere of public affairs and work', only to discover that no provision had been made to care for their children (Rowbotham, 1986, p. 85). The liberalism which framed social policy remained firmly committed to the division between the public sphere and the private domestic sphere. Also, traditional and unequal gender relations within the family were to be supported rather than challenged by the provisions of the welfare state (Pascall, 1986; Williams, 1989).

As might be expected, current re-evaluations of social democracy in the postwar period are highly critical of the stance adopted by central government on women's issues. In her wonderfully entitled book, *Only Halfway to Paradise*, Elizabeth Wilson (1980), a leading socialist feminist, argues that between 1945 and the late 1960s, women's oppression was not only invisible but women had been silenced by the ideology of equality of opportunity. [...]

By the late 1960s the tensions between women's position in the home and in the labour force were to surface and explode in the second wave of the women's liberation movement. This found expression in a variety of spheres: as Rowbotham (1986) comments, the project became one of extending the definitions of political or economic democracy

... to include domestic inequality, identity, control over sexuality, challenge to cultural representation, community control over state welfare and more equal access to public resources. (Rowbotham, 1986, p. 86)

Rowbotham's retrospective analysis of the 1960s shows how the women's movement drew upon the insights of the American new left and the civil rights, black power and student movements. The idea that the 'personal is political' drove the concept of democracy deep into the personal relations of everyday life, particularly in the areas of sexuality and morality, and the concept of equal rights was exchanged for a demand for 'equality of power'.

Feminist struggles within education were part of this movement, and the range of perspectives found within feminist educational thinking and practice has much in common with the political philosophies that have shaped the women's movement since the 1960s (Eisenstein, 1984). Indeed, in recent years it has become common practice to identify the various tendencies of liberal feminism—radical, socialist and black feminism—in educational analysis (Middleton, 1987; Acker, 1987; Arnot and Weiner, 1987). Lesbian feminism, more developed in the United States, has had a twilight existence in the context of British educational work (see recent contributions in Jones and Mahony, 1989), especially since sexuality has been such a studiously avoided aspect of school life.

Yet despite such similarities, there are also key differences between feminist educational analysis and the work related to mainstream feminist political or sociological theory. The material location of academics and teachers as employees of the state education system has had an impact on the evolution of feminist educational thought. Teachers and academics were partly responsible for the framing of the postwar settlement and for its maintenance. The selection and organization of school curricula were a case in point, left as they were predominantly in the hands of a relatively autonomous education profession rather than under the control of central government.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the principles of social democracy, not

merely those of the women's movement, informed feminist educational theory and practice. Even when, by the 1980s, feminist and sociological analyses became more sophisticated and attempted to identify diverse female needs within education and to remove the more subtle obstacles to individual advancement, one can still find a strong commitment to the tenets of individualism, teacher autonomy, and the use of education as the means of social reform (see, for example, Acker and Warren Piper, 1984; Thompson, 1983; Whyte, 1986).

But the support that educational policy-makers in the postwar period gave to the division between public and private spheres, between employment and family, was always likely to cause major difficulties for feminist educational research. Early analyses of the official ideology for girls' education, contained within, for example, the Crowther (1959), Newsom (1963) and Plowden (1967) Reports, often assumed a homogeneity of female interests, notably with regard to domesticity (Wolpe, 1976); moreover, such analyses revealed an androcentric bias in their concepts of vocationalism, meritocracy and access to higher education. The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) (1981) confirmed that not only was there no evidence of 'discomfort' about gender issues in these reports, but that the 'political arithmetic' of social democracy had failed even to 'count in' women. Similarly, Wickham (1987) showed how state training policy, particularly in relation to skilled occupations, had been designed by men and for men.

Such government approaches to women's education and training set an agenda for the development of female educational studies. The initial concerns, quite naturally, were to make women's education visible to policy-makers and to analyse the ways in which female pupils and students might be prevented from developing their full potential and from participating in the whole range of educational and training opportunities (see, for example, Byrne, 1978; Delamont, 1980).

Increasingly, however, feminist critiques of social democracy bit deeper and deeper, challenging the liberal philosophy at the heart of educational policy and the specific sets of relations constructed within the liberal democratic state and its institutional arrangements. This more-radical thrust to analyses of gender and education in the late 1970s and early 1980s can be summarized in terms of four themes, as detailed below.

The reproduction of public and private spheres

As Pascall (1986, p. 103) notes,

Educational institutions stand at the junction of private and public worlds, mediating between the family and paid employment ... There is thus an ambiguity at the heart of girls' education.

Evidence for the continued existence of the low status of female occupations, the ghettoization of female workers into a narrow range of jobs and

training routes, the persistence of women's low-paid part-time employment and lack of promotion prospects (Holland, 1981) provided an implicit, if not explicit, starting point for those concerned with contemporary forms of gender differentiation in education. Research focused, therefore, on discrimination in curriculum provision, option choice mechanisms, the ideological content of school tests, and the channelling of female and male pupils into certain curricular and, hence, occupational routes (see, among others, Deem, 1980; Whyld, 1983).

The fact that 'schooling faces two ways' (CCCS, 1981) was also of key importance to feminists, particularly after the so-called domestic labour debate of the 1960s and 1970s highlighted the relationship between capitalism and the family. That women's political and economic destinies were so closely tied in with their position in the domestic sphere and its patriarchal relations was evident from the historical shaping of the schoolgirls' curriculum (see, for example, Dyhouse, 1978; Purvis, 1987). Feminist sociologists revealed the continuity of that tradition and identified the ways in which the contemporary school curriculum continued to reproduce 'female domestic ideology' within and across class boundaries.

Patterns of gender differentiation and hierarchy found in school provision were interpreted as key to the continuing 'reproduction' of patriarchal relations in the family and in employment (see, for example, Wolpe, 1977; MacDonald, 1980). Women were being prepared, albeit often indirectly, for a range of low-status economic positions within the dual labour market, for unpaid domestic labour, and for membership of a reserve army of labour. Ideologically, girls of different social classes were being subjected (often in different and somewhat contradictory ways) to an education that was as oppressive as it was exploitative.

By the 1980s, this analysis was both criticized and developed by black feminist researchers. Carby (1982), Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe (1985), Phoenix (1987) and Amos and Parmar (1987), among others, focused attention on the ideological impact of imperialism and of institutional racism—most evident in the racial segregation of the labour market and the historical shaping of the structure and culture of black families. They drew attention to the need to integrate into the analysis of private and public spheres the impact of racial as well as class and gendered discourses and divisions.

The illusions of both the neutrality of school knowledge and schools' ability to deliver equality of opportunity to different groups of girls through a liberal education were seriously challenged by such research. Female education was repeatedly shown to lend support, in a different way from that of male education, to a patriarchal, racially and class-divided society. According to Whitty (1985), such research succeeded in contesting the view that class relations were of primary and, indeed, sole importance in shaping educational provision. Further, it 'helped to make the cruder forms of neo-Marxist theory inadequate to an understanding of contemporary social relations' (Whitty, 1985, p. 55).

Gender relations and the organization of schooling

Whilst the official ideology of female education and curriculum policy was challenged by such research, feminist sociological analyses of the organizational features of schooling raised serious doubts about the co-educational and comprehensive principles that had shaped educational planning since the 1960s. Feminists had been alerted to the dangers of co-education by R.R. Dale's (1969; 1971; 1974) assessment of the value of single-sex and mixed schools. His findings focused on the academic advantages for boys of co-education and identified only social advantages for girls in the creation of a 'healthy' heterosexual environment in which both sexes played different but complementary roles. Further, the HMI report (DES, 1975) on curriculum differentiation in primary education and in the tripartite system of secondary schools suggested that gender differences were being promoted, if not as a positive goal, then as a matter of convention. Research evidence on the curriculum and organization of the newly introduced mixed comprehensive schools also revealed that such gender patterning was being reinforced rather than challenged (Arnot, 1983).

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, numerous small-scale research projects on girls' experiences, taken together, constituted a substantial critique of school organization within comprehensive secondary schools. Although research on gender interaction in classrooms, teaching styles, modes of assessment and teachers' expectations rarely referred to educational policy as such, the research could be said to represent a form of policy evaluation (for overviews of this work, see Deem, 1980; Weiner and Arnot, 1987). It challenged the principle of universalism and asked if girls really were receiving the same education as boys. Moreover, in documenting the continued inequalities between male and female education, it challenged the principle of comprehensivization.

Increasingly, gender relations in education were also being subjected to more sustained and detailed inquiry. The diversity of gender cultures found in schools was demonstrated in studies of, for example, different types of primary schools (Clarricoates, 1978), private and state secondary schools (Connell *et al.*, 1982), and the experiences of different ethnic groups (see, among others, Brah and Minhas, 1985). Sociological and feminist research on gender in schools offered fascinating insights into the hidden organization of educational experiences: for instance, at the age of four, male pupils were locked in sexual power struggles with female teachers, having already learned to use the language of sexual abuse (Walkerdine, 1987); within secondary classrooms, male and female pupils of different ethnic groups were united in experiencing hostile racist confrontations with teachers (Wright, 1987); in different subjects, male and female students were active participants in the 'feminization' or 'masculinization' of both their own identities and educational knowledge (Kelly, 1985).

In light of such evidence, Middleton (1990) argues that liberal education, with its stress on the rationally autonomous individual, appears to have

benefited male pupils more than female pupils, despite the successful performance of some girls in formal school-leaving certificates at 16. It was precisely in the spaces created by concepts such as freedom of choice, teacher autonomy and child-centred education that sexism was repeatedly found unchallenged and often thought 'natural' (Arnot, 1991). Feminist research had begun to challenge many dearly held assumptions. For example, it challenged the view that progressive child-centred education would extend girls' development in their early years and that coeducation would make comprehensive secondary schools beneficial to girls. Similarly, teachers' policy of 'non-intervention' in gendered practices and relations (documented in classrooms in infant schools, and in secondary and further education by, among others, Walkerdine, 1987, and Stanworth, 1983) were also being held in question by such feminist analyses.

The effect of social democratic reforms on girls' education had been shown to be uneven. On the one hand, many girls—particularly those from the middle classes—had benefited academically from the opportunities provided by the introduction of comprehensive schools, the raising of the school-leaving age and the expansion of tertiary education. On the other hand, traditional female course choices and the low proportion of working-class and black female students achieving the necessary qualifications for entry to further and higher education raised serious doubts about the long-term effects of girls' school experiences on their self-esteem, their ambitions and their prospects. The whole organization of schooling (from staffing patterns to classroom interaction) had been rendered deeply problematic.

Gender and the concept of power

Theories of power in the sociology of education are located at the centre of critiques of social democratic education policy. The relation between capital and labour provided the guiding theme for radical critiques of liberal education in the late 1970s (Bowles and Gintis, 1978; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Apple, 1982; Giroux, 1983). [. . .]

Socialist feminist research contributed to the theoretical debates and policy analyses, notably by offering ethnographic studies of working-class and black girls' responses to schooling (see, among others, Anyon, 1983; Griffin, 1985). This research challenged Willis' (1977) analysis—his celebration and romanticization of white working-class male culture despite its explicit racism and sexism (McRobbie, 1978, 1980). The social relations of schooling, and in particular the 'correspondence principle', have now been shown to be gendered relations (Valli, 1986).

Perhaps the most critical analyses of power relations in schooling have concerned sexual relations. Here, the dominance of heterosexuality has been found, for example, in the school curriculum (most markedly in topics dealing directly with personal relations) and in the treatment of lesbian and gay pupils and staff. Research on gender dynamics in schools suggests that male dominance

has a considerable impact on girls. The language of sexual abuse, physical harassment and the male colonization of the space of the school (Mahony, 1985; Jones and Mahony, 1989) shape girls' negotiation of the academic ethos of the school as well as their confidence in their own abilities. Their experiences at school affect their entry not just into the labour market but also into the marriage and sexual markets (Griffin, 1985).

The identification of these sets of social relations and of female pupils' and teachers' struggles within education reveal the hegemonic role of state schools in sustaining patriarchal as well as race and class structures. By the 1980s such research, although diverse and even at times contradictory, had demonstrated that at the very least no simple concept of equality of opportunity, especially one based upon freedom of choice, could be effective as a means of transforming this web of power relations within schooling.

Gender politics and the 'partnership'

Feminist studies of educational policy-making have drawn on the direct experience of teachers and academics working within a range of contexts (Whyte *et al.*, 1985). Teachers, advisers, researchers and lecturers have written about their experiences of setting up equal opportunities/sex equality policies and initiatives. Their analyses have focused on, among other things, the strengths and weaknesses of 'bottom up' or 'top down' approaches to promoting educational reform, the difficulties of deciding between strategies of coercion versus consent, and the marginalization of women's concerns. Other collective projects such as those of action research and teacher research have attempted to break down the hierarchies between academics and researchers and between teachers and taught, in the name of social justice (cf. Weiner, 1989; Weiner and Arnot, 1987). The lessons learnt through such projects have revealed the possibilities and limits of democratic educational reform within the existing social structure.

Pluralism, a guiding thread within liberal democracy, has also been challenged by feminist research and practice. From a feminist perspective the process involved in educational policy-making is seen less as the result of democratic and consensual politics and more as the result of the exercise of male power. [. . .] Increasingly, feminist researchers have revealed the ways in which knowledge, whether contained in educational policy documents or in the school curriculum, has been shaped by (white) men, and often in male interests.

[. . .] Moreover, the relations between teachers and the state within social democracy have been shown to have been affected by the feminization of the teaching profession. The debate about teacher professionalism and the proletarianization of teachers is now no longer possible without some recognition of the politics of gender (see, for example, Lawn and Grace, 1987; Acker, 1989). Promoting change within the alleged 'partnership' between central and local government and teachers in the postwar period has, therefore, been shown to be circumscribed by patriarchal relations in education.

FEMINIST CRITIQUES OF THE NEW RIGHT AND EDUCATIONAL REFORM

Despite the consistent growth of feminist research throughout the 1980s, any initial unity seemed to have been lost by the end of the decade. [...]

The existence of different feminist approaches might appear challenging, suggesting that the time was ripe for a sustained theoretical debate on gender. For feminists, however, the disarray and fragmentation and 'miserable welter of conflict' in the women's movement was deeply depressing, not least in relation to the emergence of Thatcherism (Loach, 1987).

[...] Increasingly, radical 'egalitarian' approaches had drawn apart from liberal perspectives, with the former more closely associated with the politics of municipal socialism and women's campaigns for sex equality, rather than with mainstream equal rights initiatives promoted by central government agencies (for example, the Women into Science and Engineering Year organized by the Women's National Commission and the EOC) (see Weiner and Arnot, 1987; Arnot, 1991).

There was also conflict within the 'egalitarian' movement – between radical and socialist feminism on the one hand, and groups of an ever more sectarian character within the Left, on the other hand. This made it difficult, in effect, to identify the communality of women's experiences across the divisions of class, race, sexuality and disability—and even more difficult to frame a unified political constituency. Implicit in many of the discussions on gender was the assumption that there were 'hierarchies of oppression'. 'Identity politics', or what Parmar (1989) called the 'politics of difference', limited the ability of feminists to frame a coherent political strategy. In the educational world, feminist analyses, whether radical or liberal, were more and more often being identified as white, middle-class and heterosexual in orientation (see, for example, Carby, 1982; Brah, 1988; Phoenix, 1987; Connell, 1987).

Ideological disarray in feminist educational thought, therefore, cannot be solely attributed to Conservative government policy, especially since the initial impact of Thatcherism was felt more in the context of economic and family policy, rather than in education policy (Pascall, 1986; Williams, 1989). The recession and cuts in local government budgets had affected women, particularly their post-school opportunities (Deem, 1981; David, 1983a, b). However, schools still retained a reasonable level of autonomy over the curriculum, and local authorities still had sufficient finance to invest in equality initiatives, if the political will was there. If anything, the early 1980s was a time of relative excitement and possibility for those committed to sex equality. Local government (chiefly in Labour-controlled metropolitan authorities) and the teacher unions were being used as a means of fighting sex and race discrimination, but they also served as sites of political opposition to the Conservative government (Arnot, 1991).

Even though such egalitarian approaches and campaigning were unlikely to have any major impact on the state education system as a whole (Dale and Foster, 1986), it would have been naive to have imagined that they would have no political impact. Such developments, along with comparable endeavours in the area of 'race', were regarded as subversive by a central government influenced by the radical right (Klein, 1989; Davies, Holland and Minhas, 1990).

Patriarchal structures, particularly heterosexual monogamous marriage as the stable institutional form, had been threatened by the egalitarianism and the libertarianism in the women's movement. Feminist campaigns for more state intervention in family life and personal liberty had threatened the distinctions between public and private worlds sustained by a liberal democratic state. Patriarchy, not just the capitalist economy, was already in crisis (ten Tusscher, 1986; Eisenstein, 1987).

Not surprisingly, feminist demands for equality were seen by members of the New Right as 'ideological extravagances' and as part of the 'forces in contemporary society which are deeply inimical' to the family (Centre for Policy Studies, quoted in Campbell, 1987, p. 170). Demands for sex equality were especially blamed for the rise in the divorce rate and single parenthood.

In retrospect, it seems extraordinary how little concern was shown in feminist educational writing about the build up of this Conservative opposition. However, two factors might explain the seeming lack of interest. First, the legacy of social democracy as the main target of sociology of education proved hard to break in all aspects of the discipline. Secondly, in contrast to Reagan's government in the United States which supported an aggressive Moral Right political movement (Dworkin, 1983), the first Thatcher government made few explicit 'anti-feminist' statements. It did not directly attack the women's movement, repeal anti-discrimination legislation or shut down the Equal Opportunities Commission or the Commission for Racial Equality as some expected it would (David, 1983a). Initially, Thatcher's government remained 'officially neutral' on issues such as abortion, divorce and homosexual rights (Segal, 1983).

David (1983a, b; 1985) and Segal (1983) revealed the more subtle forms of anti-feminism used by the Thatcher government in its first period of office. The initial implications of Thatcherism could apparently be found in a family ideology and policy that emphasized 'Victorian values', in particular the bourgeois family form of the male wage earner and the dependent wife and mother. The much-quoted outburst of Patrick Jenkin in 1979 (later to be Social Services Minister), that 'If the Good Lord had intended us to have equal rights to go out to work, he wouldn't have created men and women' (quoted in Gardiner, 1983, p. 195) was put a little more delicately but no less conservatively by a 1986 Institute of Economic Affairs report when it commented: 'Men will expect to specialise in market work and women will expect to specialise in household work' (quoted in Williams, 1989, p. 120).

Underlying the notion that a 'woman's place is in the home' was the assumption that biological and natural instincts determined both the sexual division of labour within the family and the separation between the private and public spheres. For Roger Scruton, a leading neo-conservative educationist, the family was therefore a 'natural form':

The family . . . is a small social unit which shares with civil society the singular quality of being non-contractual, of arising (both for the children and the parents) not out of choice but out of natural necessity.

(Scruton, quoted in Williams, 1989, p. 119)

It is generally recognized that the family occupied a privileged place in New Right ideology. However, the sheer range of functions that the family should perform within contemporary society revealed more about the attempts of the Conservative Party to hold together various tendencies within its own organization, than any deep understanding about the actual shifts in contemporary family life (David, 1983a; Campbell, 1987). On the one hand, the family was responsible for the 'defence of the individual against socialism and excessive state power'; on the other hand, it was the basis of private property and the location of the consumer responsible for the management of his/her financial affairs. Then again, the family was the 'centre of affections', 'the transmitter of traditions' and the necessary condition of authority. Such functions transcended all allegiances of class, indeed of history itself (Campbell, 1987).

In the context of this vision of family life, the concept of parenthood, actively promoted by the Black Papers (quoted in CCCS, 1981) in their discussion of education reform, became the symbol not just of the economic values of consumerism: parenthood represented, for neo-conservatives such as Scruton, the political and moral values of hierarchy, authority and loyalty (Williams, 1989).

Because of this role as guardian of social stability within an aggressively competitive economy, family life, it seemed, had to be supported by the state. Paradoxically, 'the family had to be maximized in order to minimize the state'. By rehabilitating the family, arguably the government could break down the 'scrounger welfare state' and through a 'moral crusade' counter the effects of permissiveness that grew out of the 1960s (Campbell, 1987, p. 166).

Such ideology concerning the family, incoherent as it seems, has been interpreted by feminists as a significant attack on women's position in the employment sector and in the family. This was hardly surprising, given that cuts in state welfare provision made it more likely that women would be left to cater for young children, the aged, the mentally ill and the unemployed members of the household. If this dismantling of the welfare state assumed rather than asserted the need for women to remain at home, educational policies emphasizing the values of a patriarchal family life were given the responsibility of actively promoting traditional sexual divisions. Early statements by Conservative politicians suggested that all children would be

encouraged to receive an education in moral values and in parental responsibilities (David, 1983a, b)—thus girls would be prepared for the role of wife, mother and carer, and boys would learn the role of head of household and main wage earner.

Fears were expressed that this rekindled interest in moral education was the thin edge of the wedge. It represented the first attempt 'to rescind equal opportunities policies . . . and to replace them with specific policies which promote sex difference' (David, 1983b). Added to other attacks on women's rights, particularly in terms of sexuality and employment, this educational approach was interpreted as an effort to restore patriarchal values.

According to ten Tusscher (1986), the New Right's concern to link monetarism and moralism was an attempt to tackle the dual crises of the capitalist economy and patriarchy and to reunite their interests. [. . .] Yet the patriarchal ideology of the New Right, when applied to policy, was not unproblematic. It generated considerable contradictions, especially in relation to women (Gardiner, 1983; Segal, 1983; Campbell, 1987; Wilson, 1987), and was also not very effective. The impact of the women's movement in the country—even if disorganized—had changed public opinion sufficiently to be able to curtail the extent to which the New Right could promote traditional values, particularly those surrounding women's domesticity. Segal (1983) argues that the Conservative government was held back by the 'continual vigour and success of feminism in mobilizing support for women's rights and equality'. Moreover, changes in women's employment since the Second World War had encouraged middle-class career women—some of whom could be found as Conservative Party members—to fight against any simple equation between women and motherhood, excessive moralizing, restrictions on sexual freedom or even cut backs in child benefits (Campbell, 1987).

In the event, despite harsh social policies, women did not go back *en masse* to their homes, instead they continued to carry the dual burden of being wives and workers (Wilson, 1987). The early educational initiatives were also less than successful. Curricular reforms that encouraged traditional parenting roles were hard to implement within a decentralized system. Education for parenthood and sex education were unlikely vehicles for such a 'moral crusade' since these courses were not mandatory. As Wolpe observed:

The implications of a third term of Thatcherism in the field of sex education are not straightforward . . . Moral values are seen to have declined and there are moves to combat this . . . What is not clear is whether the way to combat this will be through the provision of sex education, given the opposition to its inclusion in the school curriculum in some quarters.

(Wolpe, 1987, p. 45)

Ironically, new legislation had made sex education the responsibility of school governing bodies, and they could choose to remove such a

controversial topic. Courses on family living were also likely to be optional and have the low status ascribed to non-examined subjects. Far more significant to this programme of moral 'clean up' was the legislation against 'promoting homosexuality' through section 28, although here again the impact on schools nationally was not likely to be great since few local authorities had developed policies on sexuality.

RETHINKING WOMEN'S RIGHTS

It has become increasingly clear from recent feminist analyses that the Conservative government, despite its emphasis upon traditional family structures, still wished to be seen as committed, at least in rhetoric, to a version of equality of opportunity and equal rights. Conservative women themselves sustained notions of being equal to men 'in the sight of God' (Campbell, 1987). Neo-liberals, in particular, encouraged the notion of individual liberty, especially economic freedom in the marketplace and political freedom from coercion and excessive state control. Hayek and Friedman, often quoted as leading theorists of monetarism, saw such freedom being provided by an autonomous and private family unit (equated with women's role) and being found within the public sphere (equated with male activity). The assumption of such gender differences led feminist critics to conclude that logically 'the promise of liberty can only apply to men'. Individualism, property ownership and consumerism were men-only concepts (Segal, 1983, p. 119) even if, as Ferdinand Mount, right-wing author of *The Subversive Family* (1982), argued, 'women's rights to equality are unassailable because women are human beings' (quoted in Williams, 1989, p. 119).

The solution to this contradiction could not necessarily be found by expelling women from the marketplace, not least because capital still required female waged labour. Instead, the notion of competitive individualism could be selectively applied to men and women who had no family responsibilities (David, 1983), or alternatively to women who had already fulfilled their role as home maker and could now play the role of paid worker. Indeed, as Mrs Thatcher herself argued in 1982:

It is of course true that women of our generation are often still comparatively young by the time our children are grown up and therefore we have an opportunity further to develop our own talents . . . For many that experience can enhance their lives and enlarge their interests.

(Quoted in Wilson, 1987, p. 295)

Such statements from Mrs Thatcher represent for Wilson (1987) an insight into the ways in which the Conservative Party sought to represent itself as 'the modern party':

The party that welcomes and harnesses change and is committed to an attack on the 'old fashioned' dogmas of trades unions and an assortment of blinkered ideologies—Fabians, Marxists, feminists and the like—whose

time is past and who have got fatally out of step with the world we live in.
(Wilson, 1987, p. 205)

The 'modernizing tendencies' within Conservative Party policy were also to find somewhat confused expression within the various education reforms of the 1980s. Cuts in state funds (particularly in adult education, in subjects such as the arts and humanities, in discretionary grants for further education) threatened educational and training opportunities for women (Deem, 1981). Also, the failure to fund pre-school education (and even moves to reduce the existing provision of such education in some localities) restricted considerably the chances that married women had to fulfil that 'second role' as paid workers in anything other than part-time and low-paid employment. The DES under Thatcher's government also continued its largely indifferent stance to issues of sex equality, even though the HMI were able to offer explicit but not very strong support to those concerned about female educational experiences and achievement (Acker, 1986; Orr, 1985). Political complacency and inadequate support for gender issues in education seemed to be the main criticisms made by feminists when analyzing central government policy in the 1980s (Arnot, 1987).

Strangely enough, the concept of equal rights in Conservative Party thinking emerged most obviously in relation to the so-called 'new vocationalism' which attempted to restructure and 'modernize' the economy through direct state intervention. [. . .] The Manpower Services Commission (now known as the Training Agency), in contrast to the DES, appeared to take more interest in equal opportunities issues. Although it largely ignored the extent of gender differentiation in its youth training schemes and as a result dismally failed to break down sexual divisions (Fawcett Society, 1985; Wickham, 1987), its attempt to ensure that all Technical and Vocational Educational Initiatives (TVEI) in secondary schools tackled equal opportunities between the sexes could be interpreted as a significant attempt to 'reshape' gender relations in education.

The promotion of equal opportunities within such vocational initiatives, according to Weiner (1989a), had economic as well as political benefits, especially with regard to the needs of the capitalist economy for a 'free (that is, unsegmented) labour market' and 'a flexible work force, undifferentiated by sex'. In other words,

Liberal/progressive ideas concerning freedom for girls and women to move upwards in educational and occupational hierarchies have become synonymous with 'liberal', 'laissez faire' ideas about labour market freedom.
(Weiner, 1989a, p. 121)

Ironically, the funding criteria which made it compulsory that all TVEI projects promote equal opportunities came to represent one of the most progressive aspects of the initiatives, even though help and support from

the MSC/Training Agency were thin on the ground. A full evaluation of the strategies adopted by TVEI to promote equal opportunities was even commissioned and published (Bridgwood and Betteridge, 1989). In practice, the experience gained by schools suggested that equal opportunities could not be based on principles of individualism and free choice. Increasingly, schools were developing their own form of a common compulsory curriculum. They were also pushed into challenging (although slowly at first) the gendered nature of school knowledge, the naming of subjects and the occupational associations of particular courses (Millman and Weiner, 1987).

Perhaps this experience, together with a long history of calls from the Left and from feminists such as Byrne (1985) for a common curriculum to tackle social inequality, prepared the ground for a muted response to the introduction of the National Curriculum. But also, ideological disunity, the lack of consistent committed political support (Loach, 1987) and, possibly, an over-emphasis on personal politics (Rowbotham, 1986) might have weakened feminist campaigns. In the event, despite years of academic research and policy development in schools and colleges, feminist opposition to the Education Reform Act was neither public nor organized. When responses to the Education Reform Bill (GERBIL) were collected, the voices of women were not heard (Haviland, 1989). Apart from within those organizations in which women had struggled successfully (for example, NUT, NATE), feminist educational concerns ironically were represented by the Equal Opportunities Commission (already becoming more partisan in its appointments).

The absence of a coherent feminist response either by sociologists or by women's education groups and networks might also be explained by the confusion over the likely effects of the legislation. The impact of a combination of centralized control of the curriculum and a blatant lack of concern with the form of pedagogy (other than formal assessment) was not immediately obvious. Early commentators (Kant, 1987; Myers, 1989; Arnot, 1989b) interpreted the legislation as yet another instance of 'missed opportunities' to tackle sex discrimination in education rather than a case of virulent anti-feminism. But the list of subjects to be included in the National Curriculum, based on a traditionally 'male' grammar school curriculum, provided early evidence of an androcentric structure. Whilst girls could benefit from the compulsory science and technology, many of them were likely to choose the least intensive or more traditionally 'feminine' options within these subjects. Girls' schools were also threatened by lack of sufficient resources, especially for technology.

National Curriculum planning could theoretically challenge male biases in subject content. Yet as evidence emerged of the low level of female representation on subject working groups, the lack of reference to gender research, the absence of consultation with women's groups, and the derisory reporting on the issue by the National Curriculum Council (Arnot, 1989b; Davies, Holland and Minhas, 1990; Weiner, 1990), it became clear that masculinist and racial biases within most subjects were not going to be challenged officially. Indeed,

working groups have not, to date, taken a major stand on promoting anti-sexist or anti-racist curricula content—arguably, subject content and pedagogy have regressed to outmoded styles, reasserting male-centred forms of knowledge (Barton and Weiner, 1990).

The ideological significance of the National Curriculum in terms of gender, therefore, is somewhat unclear. If this centralized control of the curriculum represented a victory for the neo-conservatives, then why were precisely those courses closest to parental education (i.e. child care and domestic science) demoted to the margins of the curriculum? The downgrading of these 'female' domestic courses could be seen either as fortuitous for girls, releasing them from domestic ideologies, or alternatively as a signal of the Conservative government's lack of concern for the subjects in which girls achieve. Certainly it is not clear that family values have shaped the selection of subjects nor indeed that subject working groups were actively encouraged to find ways of valuing family life in anything like the same way that they were pressured to celebrate English history and nationhood (Jenkinson, 1990). Apart from failing to refer to anti-sexist or anti-racist education, the National Curriculum supposedly leaves schools with the duty to choose their own pedagogy and to find ways of 'promoting equal opportunities'.

The ideological tensions within the Government concerning equal opportunities can also be glimpsed in the approach adopted by the National Curriculum Council. Equal opportunities, for example, was listed as only one of two cross-curriculum dimensions for schools to develop as part of the whole curriculum. At the same time, the Council's chief executive, Duncan Graham, indicated that because gender was such a 'delicate' issue, no task group would be formed to consider it and hence no specific non-statutory guidance for schools would be produced. This approach, coupled with the fact that there was no official commitment to monitor sex bias in assessment, nor to train governors in sex discrimination legislation, nor to encourage the teaching profession to improve its expectations of female pupils or reassess teaching styles, was unlikely to win support from those committed to sex equality.

In effect, centralized intervention appears to have reinforced male control of education policy-making and to have delegated the issue of sex equality to teachers to implement (Arnot, 1989b). Whilst at first glance this may seem beneficial, the evidence provided by sociological research on teachers' attitudes to gender difference suggests that although there is likely to be considerable rhetoric about the importance of equal opportunities policies, in practice little will happen. In other words, the rump of teacher autonomy still allowed within the new educational system may well serve to marginalize gender issues and to sustain continued discriminatory behaviour.

CONCLUSIONS

The effects of the Education Reform Act on women have yet to be evaluated. Current sociological understandings of the policy intentions and expected

outcomes of the Education Reform Act and the National Curriculum have tended to ignore the significance of the gender dimension, preferring to focus predominantly on the relationship between schooling, the state, ideology and the economy (see, for example, Whitty, 1990; Ball, 1990). These accounts sit well within the tradition of the British Left, which has failed to 'understand the nature of the New Right through a gender blind analysis' (ten Tusscher, 1986). There has been a failure to consider whether the New Right in the United Kingdom had any similarity with the emergence of the New Right in the United States. The latter movement, as Andrea Dworkin (1978) found in her influential study, was a 'social and political movement controlled almost totally by men and as such it was fundamentally anti-feminist in stance'.

The gender analysis offered here demonstrates, I hope, that the context for the emergence and success of the new Right was not just a 'crisis in capitalism'. Feminism, along with anti-racism, had thrown liberalism itself into crisis. As Eisenstein (1987) put it in the context of the United States:

Feminism has uncovered the truth that capitalist patriarchal society cannot deliver on its liberal promises of equality or even equal rights without destabilising itself. (Eisenstein, 1987, p. 239)

This challenge was particularly true in education, where feminist educationists and researchers were shattering the illusions of the social democratic project. Many of the fundamental beliefs in equality of opportunity, universalism, co-education, comprehensivization and progressive teaching styles had been challenged by gender research. Further, the more that power relations in education were being exposed, the greater were the demands for gender, class and race equality and the more outspoken were the calls for increased state intervention to limit liberal so-called 'freedoms' and to help restructure domestic relations in the name of social equality (Arnot, 1991).

Thatcherism, if it existed at all as a coherent political philosophy, was not synonymous with the moral right nor, indeed, with pure neo-liberalism. It attempted to respond to the interests of capital and patriarchy and also to the threat to British nationhood. However, as far as women were concerned, since Thatcherism reasserted a form of competitive individualism and attempted to reinforce sexual divisions within and between public/private domains, it did not represent a significant break from social democratic thought.

In the event, the strength of the women's movement in shaping public opinion over the last two decades restricted the options available to the New Right to respond to such crises. Despite the attempt at a 'moral crusade', there has not been a concerted ideological attack on wage-earning women *per se*. Instead, we find an assault on the working classes in an apparent attempt to raise productivity, increase profits and weaken collective organization, especially trades unions. Meanwhile, as Wilson (1987) has shown, the range of strategies adopted by the Conservative government in the 1980s had the effect of incorporating women into the labour force but under the worst possible

terms—by reducing their protection, raising unemployment rates and failing to establish childcare provision, thus adding to their domestic burdens.

The new vocationalism and modernizing influences in education arguably promised women more opportunities to extend their occupational horizons. The National Curriculum—at least in its early formulations—would make available to girls traditionally male subjects and professional scientific and technological careers. The effects of such reforms, however, are most likely to be felt by middle-class women whose opportunities could be enhanced through consumer choice in education and increased concern about access and training.

Working-class women and black and ethnic minority women, in contrast, are likely to find their opportunities even further reduced and their rights to choose their own work patterns restricted by Conservative economic and family policies. It is not difficult to predict that there will be a widening class gap between women. Miles and Middleton (1990, p. 201), for example, observe that 'the Education Reform Act will not be neutral in its effects on different classes and ethnic groups ...' [...]

The key issue for sociologists should, therefore, be an investigation of the processes involved in the attenuation of class relations in the context of gender and race. Such analyses would need to draw upon the insights that gender research brings to bear on social democracy, on the nature of the public-private division, on the impact of school organization and gender dynamics within schools. Research into such themes will also, no doubt, take into account the new era of centralized control which extends male power even further with respect to educational policy-making over a predominantly female teaching force. It should also consider open enrolment and opting out, issues which raise yet again the question of parental choice of single-sex or coeducational schools; particularly in relation to separate schools, and it should look at local management of schools, which will highlight the priorities of educational managers and affect the development of equality policies. Sociological research which takes account of gender, race and class will provide valuable insights into whether full 'entitlement' is either possible or being achieved by such educational reforms.

As far as women's position within the family is concerned, the impact of educational reforms is somewhat different. It is difficult to argue that the attempt to use education to regenerate patriarchal values and thus counter the excesses of the egalitarian movements of the 1970s has been effectively orchestrated. Instead we find an attempt through centralized control of the curriculum to reassert outmoded educational formats against increasing professional resistance. It seems, though, that feminist research (particularly on the effects of school organization and patriarchal relations within the educational system) has had little to no impact on the architects of the new education system. The forms of control over gender relations within schooling have been left largely intact for the 1990s but are embedded in a new more rigidly

classified structure of school knowledge. How this new 'gender code' (MacDonald, 1980) will shape the masculinizing and feminizing processes of schooling in the next generation of children is another important topic for sociological investigation.

Let us hope that Segal was right when she argued that:

Thatcherism ... has not successfully crushed a feminist consciousness which is aware of the oppression of women's lives as vulnerable and exploited workers and as hopelessly overburdened housewives, mothers and daughters. (Segal, 1983, p. 214)

Feminist research still has a valuable role to play in maintaining that consciousness within the sociology of education, but equally important is the integration of that perspective into mainstream sociological theorizing and evaluation of these educational reforms.

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