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Gender and curriculum : a case study

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that women must be able to enjoy the right to achieve any goals that men enjoy and that this could be done through equality in education. Recent liberal feminists like Eileen Byrne (1978) have argued that if girls are given the same opportunities as boys and if they experience a non-sexist curriculum, they will be able to 'free' themselves of the limitations and restrictions imposed upon women in society. In other words, girls will enjoy equality through the power of qualifications. This means that girls and boys are should be able to make any choices regarding their curriculum and in this way enter any field or vocation they choose. In this way, women would be able to compete with men in the workforce and enjoy equality in work and wage. Thus an emphasis is placed on education to bring about sexual equity.

It is important to mention briefly how liberal feminists see current education practice as limiting and why they argue that there is a need for change. The notion of equity through education will be fully dealt with in chapter two in a discussion on sex-role theory.

Even though the liberal feminist perspective has made an important contribution towards the issues concerning women, it has also met with critique (see for example Mica Nava, 1980 and Eisenstein, 1981). Liberal feminism does not question the historical or material bases of sexual stereotypes and it gives no particular consideration to the position of women in the mode of production. The liberal feminist perspective has operated as both an academic movement and a movement for liberation in that it has played a significant role in activating women to address the issues of inequality; but it has done this without giving adequate consideration to the importance of social structures.

Liberal feminists wish to see sexist practices removed and they wish to see women actively involved in management positions and other areas where women are traditionally excluded (see Friedan, 1963) but this equitable distribution of sexes is regarded unproblematically as possible within the existing social structure of capitalism.

Liberal feminist perspectives therefore concentrate more on individuals, whereas socialist feminists place an emphasis on social structures.

SOCIALIST FEMINISM

Socialist feminists endeavour to understand and explain the terms 'masculinity' and 'femininity' as terms belonging to the structure of capitalism. Unlike radical and liberal feminists perspectives, socialist feminists (for example Eisenstein, 1979) attempt to develop a theory which will account for the complex and involved relationships between patriarchy and capitalism. The socialist feminist perspective also attempts to describe and explain the part played by schooling in the reproduction of class and gender relations, that is, the ways in which schooling may be involved in processes of legitimation and reproduction within capitalist structures. This second point will be discussed briefly in this chapter but will be fully dealt with in chapter two in a discussion on political economy theory.

Zillah Eisenstein (1979) argues that socialist feminists are committed to understanding the system of power deriving from capitalist patriarchy.

Eisenstein believes that what is essential to socialist feminist political analysis is an understanding of the interdependence of capitalism and patriarchy; she emphasizes " ..... the mutually reinforcing dialectical relationship between capitalist class structure and hierarchical sexual structuring ...." (1979:5). Patriarchy is seen to have existed before capitalism and it still continues in postcapitalist societies and it is this present relationship that must be understood and explained. Eisenstein therefore looks at both the Marxist class analysis and radical feminist analysis and endeavours to synthesize the two to form the theory of socialist feminism.

According to Eisenstein, Marxist analysis provides a class analysis necessary for the study of power; it also provides a method of analysis which is historical and dialectical. In other words, the social relations governing women's existence can be analysed. Secondly, patriarchy has been defined by radical feminists as a sexual system of power in which men enjoy economic privileges and a superior power, and this system is preserved in the family and through the sexual division of labour and society.

However, as previously mentioned, the concept of

patriarchy is rooted in biology rather than economics or history; this means that the theory is sexually based. Eisenstein argues that capitalism does not appear within the radical feminist theoretical analysis to define women's access to power.

Eisenstein sums up her argument by saying that Marxist analysis seeks a historical explanation of existing power relationships in terms of economic class relations. Radical feminism describes the biological notion of power. However, the revision of socialist feminism she proposes analyses power in terms of both its class origins and its patriarchal roots.

In this way capitalism and patriarchy are seen as 'mutually dependent':

> For socialist feminists, oppression and exploitation are not equivalent concepts... Exploitation speaks to the economic reality of capitalist class relations for men and women, whereas oppression refers to women ... defined within patriarchal .... and capitalist relations. Exploitation is what happens to men and women workers in the labour force; woman's oppression occurs from her exploitation as a wage-labourer but also

> occurs from the relations that define her existence in the patriarchal sexual hierarchy - as mother, domestic labourer and consumer .....
>
> (1979:22)

For socialist feminists historical materialism cannot be defined in terms of the relations of production without the understanding of its connection to the relations that arise from women's sexuality (see Rowbotham, 1972 and Eisenstein, 1979).

Roberta Hamilton (1979) has a similar argument. She says that both Marxist and feminist accounts must be used in the analysis of positions of women in society. The first is rooted in the social relations of production and the emergence of private property; the second is rooted in the study of how biological inequalities and differences are transformed into their social meanings and institutionalized. The first would require a socialist revolution and the second would require an overturning of those notions which have been considered as 'natural' since the beginning of time.

Heidi Hartmann (1981) in her article "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: towards a more progressive union", argues that while Marxist

analysis provides insights into laws concerning history and the economy, it fails to understand the dynamics of sexism. Feminist analysis alone is inadequate because it is ahistorical and insufficiently materialist. Therefore Hartmann concludes that Marxist analysis must be used for its strength in understanding economic laws of motion and feminist analysis for its particular understanding of the predicament of women.

Arnot, a socialist feminist in educational research provides a note of warning as well, while being committed to explain the relationship between gender and class: one must not forget the analysis of conflict between gender and class as two systems of control. Arnot explains this in two ways: when discussing gender and class, one cannot know whether class resistance is oppressive in itself, or whether the child's response to class is mediated by her or his gender. Secondly, there is a danger in under-theorizing the effect of patriarchal forms of domination; gender analysis is being slotted into class analysis, instead of trying to develop a new theory.

While acknowledging the short-comings of socialist feminist theories, I would nevertheless argue that this form of analysis makes definite attempts to explain the complex relationships between patriarchy and capitalism, and consequently has greater power than radical and liberal feminism. As will be seen in chapter two, Althusser's theory of Ideological State Apparatuses has shown ways in which societies and institutions are perpetuated and maintained.

The three major feminist theories have all identified that an ideology of gender differentiation exists; in other words, there exists a complex set of beliefs regarding the basic major social representations of the two genders. All three theories range across a broad area of debates which needs to be considered. The position of women in education needs to be seen within this range of debates.

The next chapter will focus on the position of women in the educational system. This will involve looking at two predominant theories regarding gender inequalities and the ways in which schools encourage gender codes. The education theories of liberal and socialist feminism will be discussed because these two theories have generated debates on education.

The parts played by the formal and hidden curriculum will be examined and then the research will look specifically at the important part played by school texts in the perpetuation of the prevailing ideology.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PART PLAYED BY SCHOOLS IN PROMOTING GENDER RELATIONS

This chapter will concentrate on the theories regarding gender differentiation in education and the ways which gender inequalities are perpetuated. The research will then look at curricula both formal and hidden and the specific ways in which gender codes are transmitted. Lastly, the research will focus on the ways school textbooks perpetuate the prevailing ideology.

In the literature concerning the part played by schools in promoting gender relations, two bodies of theory predominate. Firstly, the liberal feminists have tended to work within 'role theory' (for example, Byrne, 1978; Gaskell, 1977/8) which is individual-based and sees girls and boys internalizing the sex-roles which already exist as portrayed in family, school and work. Secondly, socialist feminists (for example, Arnot, 1981; Wolpe, 1981) use reproduction theory as their springboard for analysing the ways in which the social relations of production or relations of class are extended into the realm of gender and

form the basis of a gender-coded ideology (Acker, 1981).

In this chapter the above mentioned theories will be presented as two theories with various differences. Both theories have advantages and limitations (Arnot, 1981), but it is important to highlight the theories' focal points in order to understand more fully how feminists view the part played by schools in the area of gender. The chapter will then go on to explore the ways in which schools encourage gender codes. Sex-role theory and the political economy perspective will now be considered in more detail.

SEX-ROLE THEORY

Sex-role theory has a long history. British and American research goes back about twenty years and numerous empirical studies have been conducted which form a basis for the development of sex-role theory. This theory assumes that there are differences between boys and girls which are expressed in work, aspirations and futures as well as in lifestyles for boys and girls. Liberal feminists

see the school as playing an important part in building the roles of masculinity and femininity. Schools are seen as agents of socialization in which children of different sexes assume roles or internalize them because they model themselves on the gender roles they see and experience in society. Different roles which are played by men and women in places of work and the home become accepted by children and they in turn conform to these roles.

Society has labelled and venerated a typical feminine character structure in which is included such personality characteristics as sensitivity, passivity and the desire for protection. The predominant societal definition of femininity involves the internalization by girls of characteristics like submission and docility (Loftus, 1974). These characteristics, that is, characteristics 'appropriate' to different genders, are reinforced in institutions like the family and the school; in fact, these institutions are seen as major transmission agents within the society. Women are located in the home and men are located in places of work (Gaskell, 1977/8). Women's vocations embody all those tasks which are related to domesticity and meekness. According to this theory women are not naturally seen as playing

a role in the workplace. The notion of a 'successful' woman has connotations and images which are contrary to the feminine qualities of being loving, generous, sympathetic, pure and patient. "Career girls" are seen as 'unfeminine' (Henricksen, 1981) because a career is usually synonymous with ambition and aggression which are 'qualities' generally associated with masculinity.

According to sex-role theory, children of different sexes are taught to view themselves as unlike each other within the structure of the family, the formal and hidden curricula of the school and the differences of jobs in the workplace. They learn that different sexes behave, feel and value things differently because they are regularly experiencing situations which convey messages about how men and women behave. Inequalities exist in the home and the workplace and these are brought into the school. These inequalities exist within the structure of patriarchy because as Spender (1982) says, "Schools cannot teach what society does not know". Schools are agents whereby sexual inequalities are acquired and accepted. Schools enhance and emphasize values which already exist in the family. The school's role is one of reinforcement and extension - that is reinforcing and extending the notions of masculinity and femininity prevalent

in the wider society.

There are a number of different ways in which schools have achieved the promotion of differences in characteristics and aspirations for children.

Eileen Byrne(1978) has explored ways in which the formal curriculum of the school promotes gender inequalities. For example, she argues that separate curricular routes are consciously planned for the two sexes. Girls opt for courses involving housecraft and typing and boys opt for courses that include subjects like metalwork. Byrne also points out that girls are often discouraged from mathematical work and as a result there are fewer women mathematics graduates. This can be taken even further because fewer women are employed in posts needing mathematical ability. Byrne argues that this needs to be attacked at the source. Girls are not adequately qualified to enter some tertiary courses because they are not qualified in the basic scientific, mathematical and technical craft subjects necessary for some future courses. Thus, girls are being denied equal opportunity in or access to education. Alison Kelly (1981) has similarly shown that girls generally do not take scientific subjects and thus are not prepared for careers in scientific pro-

fessions. The formal curriculum however, is not the only way in which sex differentiation is prevalent; the school's hidden curriculum is of vital importance.

The socializing work of schools includes the segregation of boys and girls for example, standing in separate lines, sitting separately in classrooms, having separate playgrounds and sportsfields (see Byrne, 1978). Also, different tasks are allotted to boys and girls for example, boys are often asked to move heavy furniture and girls are assigned to clean the blackboard.

Byrne (1978) also mentions the presence of women in the teaching profession with men holding most of the senior positions, and that teacher behaviour is sometimes different towards different sexes for example, some teachers pay more attention or show favour towards either sex depending on how conscientous the girls are or how noisy the boys are. Research has highlighted similar examples of the ways in which the hidden curriculum is seen in socializing roles (for example see Berlotti, 1975; Frazier and Sadker, 1973 and Byrne, 1978).

Sex-role theorists have also scrutinized school textbooks for sex-role stereotypes. (Biraimah (1982) has studied the textbooks prescribed for

particular courses as well as reading books which children enjoy. It has been concluded by researchers that books and curricula promote role expectations and aspirations for female students. In fact, females were under-represented in the texts examined, themes of passivity and weakness were consistently associated with women and women were involved in home or nurturing activities. Nelly Furman (1980) has studied the 'images' of women and has attempted to explain women's characterization in books. Furman considers cultural biases which discount women's interests and women's views of experiences and feels that studies by women writers should be included in curricula in order to present women's literary expressions as well as their interactions. Eileen Byrne (1978) suggests that educational publishers and teachers should ask questions about textbooks and readers; they should see whether texts and illustrations depict traditional sex-roles whether texts avoid polarizing masculine and feminine characteristics as in, "She was technically gifted but feminine," or, "He was a good sportsman but gentle," (1978:262). Those scrutinizing school texts should also see whether the proportions between masculine and feminine examples, nouns and pronouns are fairly balanced.

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