

A woman's place in education: myths, monsters and misapprehensions

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In 1887 a book was published called *Forbidden Fruit for Young Men*. It consisted of questions put by men on relations between the sexes answered by a doctor. One query was as follows:

Should the girl who wishes to fulfil her maternal duties avoid the influence of education? And should the educated woman remain celibate?

The expert answered firmly YES

Girls who are natural, and would like to be (well) married, would do well to avoid education, remembering that the personal advantage to the highly educated woman impairs her usefulness as a mother. Those who overtax their vital energies by an intellectual strain likely to produce ill effects on their offspring, ought to accept a voluntary celibacy. They are self-made invalids and must accept the penalties of the position.

(Macdonald, 1981:16)

This idea did not die with Queen Victoria. In 1920 a woman doctor, Arabella Kenealy wrote that:

The woman of average brain attains the intellectual standards of the man of average brain only at the cost of her health, of her emotions, or of her morale. (p. 155)

Kenealy argued that the girls' secondary schools established since the 1870s were producing in 1920, girls who had lost "every womanly characteristic", and who had lapsed "to the biological grade not of cultured, but of rough working men". Kenealy believed that schools like Wycombe Abbey, St. Leonards and Bedford High School for Girls were making girls more masculine in physique, so they became "more like colts or smaller bullocks!" They also became masculine in their mental processes, so that.

... male mental proclivities develop: obsessions to wear trousers, to smoke, to stride, to kill.

By despising cookery, needlework and child care and excluding them from the curriculum, the state schools for girls had:

...engendered the race of stunted, precocious, bold-eyed, cigarette-smoking, free-living working girls who fill our streets, many tricked out like cocottes, eyes roving after men, impudence upon their tongues, their poor brains vitiated by vulgar rag-tunes and cinema scenes of vice and suggestiveness.

Kenealy blamed the feminist movement for the schooling of girls, and for leading Britain (and the whole Anglo-Saxon race) into Prussianism, socialism, Bolshevism and Anarchism! (We should be so lucky!)

It is easy to laugh at such wild statements and ridicule such bizarre views. Anyone can be wise after the event. In this chapter I propose to make four points about woman's place in education which will lead us to see Arabella Kenealy in a different light. These four points are:

1. The views held by experts (e.g. doctors, clergyman, judges) on woman's place in education during the period 1850-1945 now seem to us quaint, illogical and even lunatic.
2. **But**, it is very easy for us to look back and mock both the opponents of women's education (and their supporters) while ignoring the facts that our views today may well be founded on equally shaky, unexamined premises.
3. **Consequently** it is the task of educational researchers to scrutinise the unexamined assumptions, the take-for-granted, commonsense 'reality' of educational institutions and practices - and this includes the roles played by schools and colleges in reproducing sexual divisions in society. By researchers I mean men **and** women scholars, because single-sex research will not scrutinise and make problematic every day reality.
4. Finally, I discuss what woman's place in education **is** - once we have challenged the myths, dispelled the misapprehensions, and learnt to avoid the monsters. It will come as no surprise that my view is that woman's place in education is wherever the action is - not at the margins and in the backwaters.

The debate and the cause 1850-1950

Both sides of the struggle to gain women's entry to academic secondary education, university degrees and the liberal professions during the 1850-1950 period appear absurd today.

Opponents of women's education believed that the female reproductive system made her health so precarious that she could not study Greek or Algebra without the risk of brain fever or sterility. Such dangers to the health and welfare of ladies (because no one really expected working class females to learn Latin or go to university) were not just serious

for the individuals. The lady might become sterile and thus threaten the survival of their class and race. If the 'best' women did not have babies, their class and race would either die out, or have to mix in inferior stock.

We find such ideas absurd today. We believe that the feminist educational pioneers, who held that regular exercise without tight corsets would ensure good health in female scholars, were closer to scientific truth. Yet when we hear about how pioneers like Ada Benson ran their schools and colleges many of *their* ideas seem bizarre. For example, when Bedford High School for Girls (founded in 1882) opened its playing fields in 1900 the girls had to walk there in silence, and could only walk beside a friend if written permission had been granted by both sets of parents and the headmistress. Gloves, of course, had to be worn on the walk, and hats were *de rigueur* (Godber and Hutchins, 1982:211).

The reasons for these rules has been explicated elsewhere (Delamont and Puffin, 1978, Delamont 1989, 1993b) and is not repeated here. My point is that it is all too easy to mock such beliefs and practices, while ignoring the social context in which they were held; and to assume that we are not too wise to hold any mistaken notions, and all our beliefs are grounded in scientific fact. Our beliefs about sex roles and education today may be just as mistaken as Kenealy's. We need to be very, very careful to study the basis for our beliefs and not accept, passively, the things that our culture takes for granted. Our job is to scrutinise, to challenge, to dig deeply into what non-researchers take for granted.

This is not an easy strategy. Michael F.D.Young (197) told us two decades ago that we should 'make' problems, rather than 'take' them from educators. This is easier said than done, especially when we want to scrutinise the reproduction of sex roles in education. It is hard to remember that when a teacher says "I want four boys to carry these boxes", or a pupil announces that "drama is for sissies" or a parent decides that her son is not going to learn cookery, these are only late 20th Century versions of the myth that giving women the vote would produce a pacifist, temperance-introducing government.

In the main body of this chapter the need to 'make' research problems is explored, using qualitative research on everyday life in schools, and the schooling of girls and boys as interrelated illustrations.

Gender and familiarity

This section brings together two issues that concern me when I consider the current state of qualitative research in education: the familiarity problem and the boom in 'women's studies'. I have written about both issues before: familiarity in Delamont (1981, 1983c) and Galton and Delamont (1985) and gender issues in Delamont (1980, 1983a, 1983b, 1984a). However the relationships between the two themes have not been fully explored, although the results are of interest both to qualitative researchers uninterested in gender, and to those concerned to study gender as a topic. My argument is that few qualitative researchers have lived up to the standard set by Becker (1971) and Young (1971), and

that focusing on gender can help us deal with the familiarity problem and provide important data. Focusing on gender is characterised both as a strategy and as a topic.

Before considering these two topics, it is necessary to exemplify what I mean by qualitative research. It is not a term with which I feel particularly happy - I would normally write about 'ethnography'. For the purposes of this paper qualitative research is taken as synonymous with what Cohen and Manion (1985:41) call interpretive methodologies. Included within qualitative research would be participant and non-participant observation, unstructured/open-ended interviewing, life-history and oral-history elucidation, and certain kinds of documentary research. Sampling is likely to be theoretical, and rigour, reliability and validity are more a matter of reflexivity than statistical probabilities and correlations. Theorizing and generalising will be done via generic problems and the use of formal concepts.

In educational research qualitative methods have been much more intensively used on some topics than others. Research on school ethos, on classroom processes, and on teachers' attitudes has been done with both qualitative *and* quantitative methods - but there is a very little qualitative research on social mobility. My own research in education has been mainly qualitative, and focused on interaction in schools and classrooms, the evaluation of CAI, the training of chemistry teachers, and the problems of research students in education. (Delamont, 1983c and 1983d; Delamont and Howe, 1973; Galton and Delamont, 1976; Eggleston and Delamont, 1983). Most of what follows is based on school and classroom ethnography, but the general principles would apply to other empirical topics, so I have used examples from other areas where possible. With these preliminaries in mind, let us turn to the familiarity problem.

The familiarity problem

In 1971 Howard Becker went into print saying that one of the most serious problems facing the contemporary classroom and school observer was that

it is first and foremost a matter of it all being so familiar that it becomes impossible to single out events

He said that when he talked to educational researchers 'who have sat around in classrooms trying to observe' he found that

it is like pulling teeth to get them to see or write anything beyond what 'everyone' knows

Becker's comment appeared in an American 'anthropology of education' collection, while M.F.D. Young (1971) was issuing his similar clarion call to British sociologists. Although there are significant differences between British and American researchers in their use of qualitative methods (Delamont and Atkinson, 1980) it is clear that, in 1971, on both sides of the Atlantic there were similar feelings about researchers taking too many features of schooling for granted. It is fifteen years now since those diagnoses

were made, and in this paper I want to show that neither has been heeded sufficiently, suggest why this might be so, and then move to consider gender as one focusing device for tackling the problem.

The central argument in Young's (1971) piece was, of course, that sociologists had focused so much on structures that they had neglected to study the *content* of education and who had power over it. Young did offer a solution for sociologists, instead of taking the problems of teachers, to make the curriculum problematic. Becker (1971) did not offer any solution to the familiarity problem, although he and Blanche Geer did a project on learning in non-educational setting such as barbers' shops (Geer, 1972). It is my contention, however, that the Becker/Young diagnosis was correct, and that little has changed since. Our task now is to devise strategies to deal with the familiarity problem.

Harry Wolcott (1981) was making a similar point, when he wrote that it took a colleague from outside educational research:

to jolt me into realizing that the kinds of data teachers gather 'on' and 'for' each other so admiringly reflect dominant society and its educator subculture.

This colleague was 'particularly intrigued' by the research about 'Time on Task' [Denham and Liberman, 1980], and commented:

How incredible ... that teachers would measure classroom effectiveness by whether pupils appear to be busy. How like teachers to confuse "busy-ness" and learning.

Wolcott then pointed out that he and his educational research colleagues

have not systematically encouraged our students ... to go and look at something else for a while. We keep sending them back to the classroom. The only doctoral student I have sent off to do fieldwork in a hospital-was a nurse-educator who returned to her faculty position in a school of nursing!

There were, therefore, some pieces of evidence that most ethnographers were trapped by the familiarity of their research setting. I do not intend here to examine subsequent research to see if there has been any change, but to argue that many of the people currently doing research are still having the problem. Accordingly, it is useful to run through the strategies I suggested to combat the familiarity problem:

1. Studying unusual classrooms in our own culture.
2. Studying schools and classrooms in other cultures.
3. Study non-educational settings.
4. Adopt gender as the main focus.

I will only deal with 1-3 briefly here, with an example of a study that 'works' because of its employment.

1) *'Unusual' settings in our culture*

A great deal of insight into ordinary schools and classrooms can be gained by studying unusual ones. Apart from Atkinson's (1981, 1984) work on a medical school, we can see ordinary schooling better when we have read about the Newsom Department in a Catholic School (Burgess, 1983), a men's cookery class in an adult education centre (Coxon, 1983), an industrial training unit of slow learners (Shone and Atkinson, 1981), or the Harvard Business School (Cohen, 1973).

2) *'Other cultures'*

The most interesting school ethnography I've ever read is Bullivant's (1978) research in an Orthodox Jewish Boys' School in Australia which is particularly fascinating because the study shows culture-clash between schools and home, among very clever, very scholarly, boys rather than among failures. Equally fascinating are Singleton's (1979) study of *Nichu*, a Japanese school; Kleinfeld's (1971) research among Eskimo teenagers in a Catholic Boarding School in Canada, and Dale Eickelman's (1978) work on how Islamic scholars learn in Koranic schools and universities.

3) *Non-educational settings*

My favourite example here is a particularly exotic one - research on urban Brazilian *Umbanda* (Leacock and Leacock, 1975). I have argued elsewhere that their data on how Brazilians learn to receive spirits, and take part in ceremonial dancing offer fascinating parallels for teacher training. Paul Atkinson (1981, 1985) has drawn on equally intriguing parallels between Homer's *Iliad* and the street *argot* of Labov's inner city blacks. Harry Wolcott (1977) used the Australian kinship organizational device of opposed moieties to illuminate the relationship between teachers and educational administrators and innovators. An analysis of icon painting (Kenna, 1985) would throw light on the ways in which infant school teachers expect paintings to be constructed (King, 1978 p.36). Howard Newby's (1977) work on deference and paternalistic authority in farming areas offers illuminating parallels for studying relationships between parents and teachers, ancillaries and staff, and between the head and his staff.

4) *Adopt gender as the focus*

Many school and classroom ethnographies have not treated gender as an issue at all. For example David Hamilton's (1977) study of an open-plan infants class hardly mentions that the teachers were not only working in a type of building quite new to them, but were also teaching mixed classes for the first time. David Marsland's (1982) essay on 'The sociology of adolescence and youth' focuses on studies of male adolescents, and never even *mentions* that all work on females, or criticisms of the field by feminists, are being ignored. Leaving aside for the moment the inaccuracies and lacunae that arise when researchers ignore gender, or focus on males only, let us consider first the *power* that

resides in focusing on gender as a strategy for illuminating otherwise taken-for-granted situations.

If we accept that most of us find educational institutions and the interactions in them too familiar too much of the time, how does focusing on gender help? It can act as a new lens through which to view the previously taken-for-granted, as in Carol Joffe's (1974) research in a 'progressive' nursery school in San Francisco. This pre-school was run by a group of parents on self-consciously 'progressive' lines, yet Joffe, by concentrating on gender, was able to raise our consciousness about schooling. Joffe reports that one aspect of the school buildings which disturbed parents was that the lavatories were uni-sex. The fact that this school did not sex-segregate its lavatories is a salutary reminder that we do not 'see' many of the organizational devices which separate males and females in our schools.

Similarly, Joffe noted that when the teachers commented on the clothes and appearance of pupils, girls got such compliments not boys - but girls only got compliments when wearing skirts and dresses. Girls in trousers, like boys, received no favourable remarks on their clothes or appearance. This finding, which needs to be replicated in other educational settings, raises very interesting questions about sex role socialization, and about how teachers interact with children. Similar challenges to what we take for granted about children's toy and play preferences can be seen in the work of Serbin (1978). Serbin's work not only revealed that teachers were unaware of the ways in which they reinforced, the very 'clinging' behaviour in girls they disliked, but also focused our attention on proxemics and object - use in the classroom. Both these are topics which, if studied closely, can provide novel analyses of important classroom dimensions. It took Serbin to make the cliché 'boys play with cars, girls with dolls' problematic and study *why* they did so.

Two pieces of research on gender differences in school which revealed important aspects of pupil culture are those of Sussman (1977) and Guttentag and Bray (1976). Guttentag and Bray were working on an action-research project to reduce sex differentiation in schooling, and found a fascinating feature of pupils' playground culture. They report that ten year old boys avoided the girls because of a belief that if they touched a girl they became polluted with a mysterious contagion, called 'cooties' or 'girltouch', which needed to be cured by a ritual. Sussman's ethnography of American progressive primary schools revealed that the more 'pupil-centred' the regime, the more sex-segregating the pupils engaged in. This is an important hypothesis about 'progressive' classrooms which deserves careful research attention.

In Britain we have two pieces of research on infant and primary pupils (King, 1978; Clarricoates, 1980, 1983) where, because both class and sex are highlighted, a fuller and more rounded picture of school life emerges than from studies which pay attention only to class, ignoring sex (Sharp and CTreen, 1976; Nash, 1973). At secondary level the insights of Buswell (1981, 1984) into everyday life in a mixed comprehensive school are sharpened by her attention to the constant gender differentiation compared to, for example, Larkin's (1979) essentially familiar study of a suburban American high school.

Wolcott (1981) is concerned about the way in which features of schooling taken for granted by educationalists are built-in to educational research rather than scrutinized. Precisely because schools are imbued with unthinking sexism, focusing upon gender differentiation is a powerful strategy for making the familiar strange, and challenging the taken-for-granted realities of educational institutions.

So far I have concentrated on using gender as a strategy for tackling the familiarity problem, but for the remainder of the chapter I want to address the importance of gender as a topic in its own right.

Gender as a topic

When we turn to educational research which focuses on gender as a topic we immediately confront four paradoxes. First, we have a boom in research on women and girls in nearly all sectors of the education system which has had little or no impact on the mainstream of the subject. Second, we have several assertions and assumptions being made about gender and education on the basis of what, on inspection, is a rather shaky data base by the very people who have attacked the extant research for being grounded on inadequate samples and methods. Third we have a serious shortage of research on boys and men *as males*, rather than studies which treat them as typical/normal representatives of the whole of humanity, because all-male samples are now only feasible among those who choose to ignore gender as an issue. Fourth we have the call for 'feminist' methodology which, if heeded, would prevent any research by or on females being taken seriously by mainstream educational circles. Each of these is examined in turn.

The booming ghetto

There is no doubt that research on women and girls, in education has grown rapidly with the rise of the new women's movement since the late 1960s. An American bibliography (Wilkins, 1979) has 1134 items; Coates (1983) lists 224 items from Britain and Europe published since 1970; and the bibliography by Riddell (1984) is 25 pages of very small print packed with references. There is plenty of research being done now on a range of topics, in nearly every sector of the education system. However, as Acker (1982, 1984) has pointed out, much of it is in books, journals and research reports which are only read by those interested in 'women's studies', and its impact on the mainstream disciplines of educational research have feminist critiques and new bodies of research, but the material is presented and represented as a separate appendix to the 'real work' of the discipline.

The houses built on sand?

Much of the force of feminist critiques of existing educational research has come from pointing out that only half the story is being told. Thus Brian Simon's four volume history of education in Britain fails to deal with women's education at all (Simon, 1965, 1974a, 1974b, 1990); the philosophy (Martin, 1984) psychology (Sayers, 1984) and sociolinguistics (French and French, 1984) of education have all been criticised on similar grounds; while sociology of education has been particularly censured (Acker,

1981). There is no doubt that women and girls have been neglected, and that the accounts offered by the various disciplines are thereby impoverished. However, there is also no doubt that some of the supposed 'findings' on women and education rest on some inadequate basis. Some of the studies are methodologically suspect, others draw on tiny samples which may well be unrepresentative.

Dale Spender's (1982:57) dramatic claims about language use in secondary classrooms is a good example of this. Spender argues that in co-educational secondary comprehensive schools there is a grossly unjust division of classroom talk. Boys take an unfair share of the pupil talk time available, and receive an unfair proportion of the teacher's talk, time and attention. If a teacher tries to reduce the boys' contributions below 70% of the pupil talk, or devote attention to girls, boys react violently. She summarises her findings as follows:

in a sexist society boys assume that two-thirds of the teacher's attention constitutes a fair deal and if this ratio is altered so that they receive less than two-thirds of the teachers' attention they feel they are being discriminated against.

Now, if this is a real finding, it is one to which we should all pay attention. However, Spender bases it on an unspecified number of lessons (sometimes 'many' and sometimes 'ten'), and any classroom researcher would be vehement that such sweeping statements should not be based on such a small, personalised, and unrepresentative sample of lessons. Flanders (1970) proposed six hours as a *minimum* sampling period to categorize a teacher's style; Croll (1980) points out that the ORACLE project draws on 47,000 observations of 58 teachers and 85,000 observations of 489 pupils. Spender's researcher is patently inadequate. A more thorough review of the literature on sex differences in teacher-pupil interaction by Bossert (1982) concludes, more accurately if less dramatically:

These results leave us in a muddle. Teachers do treat girls and boys differently, but the extensiveness of this differential treatment, whether it is perceived by students, and how it might affect their sex-role behaviour and attitudes is unknown because the results are ideologically exciting.

The irony of the absent male

Research on boys and men in education has now become a paradoxical topic. On one hand we have a plethora of research on all male samples in all areas of educational research from social mobility (Halsey et al., 1980), history (Simon, 1974a and 1974b), grammar school streaming (Lacey, 1970), delinquency and school ethos, (Rutter et al., 1979) medical student socialization (Becker et al., 1961) urban street gangs (Parker, 1974) and public school parental choice (Fox, 1985). Yet in all these projects the male samples are not studied *as males* who might have different perspectives from females, but as representatives of the UK Population, the rise of the working class, the inhumanity of the grammar school, the importance of a good ethos, the learning environment of medical school, life in an inner-city slum, and the social role of private schooling in modern Britain.

When we need to know something about men's different experiences compared to women's, we typically have no available data. In a society where most people live in a mixed world, and where most educational institutions are mixed, this is distinctly odd. There are at least three areas of research where data on males *as males* would be of considerable educational value: the stigmatised clever woman, sexuality in adolescent life, and subject-choice at secondary school.

Long ago Komorovsky (1946) found that female undergraduates in the USA believed that men did not like clever women, and therefore 'played dumb'. She repeated the research in 1972 and found that the next generation of college women still felt constrained by male prejudice, and, by studying men, showed that they were correct. College men did indeed feel threatened by clever women. In the UK we have a study of Scottish women students (Galloway, 1973) which found they believed men disliked clever women. We still do not have any research on men to see if it is true in Britain!

As Morgan (1981) has pointed out 'taking gender seriously' is not a simple operation as research on sexuality, in particular, shows. The sexual double standard is a second example. Deidre Wilson (1978) and Lesley Smith (1978) show clearly that teenage girls do not necessarily believe that all females can be easily divided into 'slags' and 'virgins', but they *are* convinced that boys believe this. Lesley Smith's sample of fourteen to sixteen year olds in Bristol were quite clear about where they stood. For example:

Liz: Look I don't believe there should be one standard for a boy and another for a girl. But there just is round here and there's not much you can do about it. A chap's going to look for someone who hasn't had it off with every bloke. So as soon as you let them put a leg over you, you've got a bad name.

Because boys believe it, and the boys' definition of the situation is the determining one, girls have to abide and live by it. Girls have to guard their own behaviour, and choose their friends carefully, because a slag's friends are contaminated by her. Some researchers have shown boys hold this simplistic view of girls (e.g. Parker, (1974; Willis, 1977) but no detailed work has been done. Yet it is an important area for social policy. Adolescent girls believe that boys think that only slags use contraception and therefore to be known as knowledgeable about it or to be 'on the pill' brands one as promiscuous. If boys really believe this, then the implications for health education are clear - it has to be directed at boys, and it has to challenge their simplistic views of females' 'virtue'. Directing homilies at girls to use contraception is unlikely to be effective in dealing with teenage pregnancies because they see themselves as powerless against male ideology. The social consequences of being labelled a slag by local boys are seen as more serious than risking pregnancy by unprotected sexual relations.

The third area where attention has been focused on females and not on males is that of co-education and subject choice at secondary school. Shaw (1976) was one of the first of the recent group of scholars to raise doubts about the effects of co-education on girls. Since Shaw other authors have questioned the benefits of co-education (e.g. Deem,

1984), alongside a continuing anxiety about the small number of girls studying maths, sciences and heavy craft subjects (Kelly, 1981). It is now clear from the reviews by Bone (1983) and Steedman (1983) that it is not possible to disentangle the relative importance of single-sex schooling compared with social class and initial ability, when the specialisation patterns and exam success of girls are considered. Upper and middle class females, and those of higher ability, are more likely to be in single-sex schools than working class and lower ability ones, so the three factors are confounded. However, we have seen projects designed to encourage more girls into science and craft subjects, as well as research into exactly what it is about science, maths and craft which repels this. Such enterprises are based on clear ideas that sex equality demands numerate women who can make a dovetail joint and understand electricity. If so, it is equally clear that sex equality demands boys who can order a meal in rural Austria, cook a Christmas pudding and sew on a button. Yet we have not seen publications or research on how to attract and retain boys in needlework, German or cooking. Powell and Littlewood (1982) have expressed concern about the failure of foreign languages to retain boys, but we lack detailed data on classroom interaction, boys' perception of the subject and so on. The data from the ORACLE transfer studies (Galton and Wilcocks, 1983; Galton and Delamont, 1985) suggest that boys particularly resent the oral methods used to start French, but that project did not study how this related to their sense of masculinity. Measor and Woods (1984) have made some moves to focus on these issues, but we are a long way from understanding the role of masculinity in education.

Feminist methodology or good methodology?

The second edition of Cohen and Manion's (1985) excellent book of educational research methods points out that there have been developments in methodology since 1980, and that the new version includes expansions and revisions. One development which they have excluded is feminist methodology and it is that topic and its exclusion from standard handbooks that forms my last point.

Sue Clegg (1985) has produced an excellent over-view of the debates on feminist methodology, and it is not necessary to recapitulate all aspects of it here. Let me just say that two ideas frequently found in the debates over feminist methodology worry me a great deal. These are the equation of feminist research with qualitative methods only, and the argument that sound scholarship can be judged by the criterion of personal authenticity.

Arguing that quantitative methods are unsuitable for, or unacceptable, for feminist research seems to me to insult researchers who use them; ignore the fact that policy makers are often more influenced by numbers than accounts; and make unduly optimistic assumptions about qualitative research. (The first two arguments can be followed up in Jayaratne, 1983; the last in Lofland, 1985).

Arguing for personal authenticity is superficially appealing, but seems to me to be quite erroneous. Not only does it reinforce stereotypes that women are:
irrational

ruled by their emotions
unable to generalize
liable to personalize everything

but it can lead to absurdities. Dorothy Smith (1976), a scholar I much admire - her work on women under capitalism seems to me the best thing on the topic (Smith, 1977) - has written a paper on creating a sociology for women, which illustrates my problem with the authenticity criterion. Smith argues that Talcott Parson's sociology, in which she was trained, is built upon the model of a rational man planning his life in a rational, rule-governed world. She offers as a challenge to this school of sociology her own biography:

I think I would be by no means alone in seeing in my past not so much a *career* as a series of contingencies, of accidents, so I seem to have become who I am almost by chance.

Smith argues that this is true of other women for females

have little opportunity for the exercise of mastery or control.

So, Smith argues, if women had built modern sociology it would not have taken the form it did under Parson's influence. Moreover women in social sciences (as opposed to those in the arts) have not learnt how to build social science from their experience.

Smith's critique of Talcott Parsons is devastating and certainly shared by this author. However, I cannot accept her base for it. Any socially deprived powerless group could be used to show how Parsons' supposed theory of mankind is actually a theory of WASP middle class urban males. For example the work of Liebow (1967) on Afro-Americans would serve just as well to challenge the supposed universality of Parsons's ideas.

Dorothy Smith's own experiences have given her a valuable *insight* but it cannot be said to prove or disprove anything. There is no evidence that all women are like those she pictures - drifting through a series of accidents. If I apply Smith's criterion to my own biography, I find that her description of 'women' lacks personal authenticity. My own experience is of planning a rational career in which occupational values have always taken precedence over personal ones. My biography fits Talcott Parsons's model of man better than Smith's model of woman. On Smith's own account I should therefore be a Parsonian.

Obviously that is silly. Because of my scholarly knowledge of the lives of the powerless I know that Parsons's model is inadequate. My personal experience (like Dorothy Smith's) is only useful *to make things problematic*, not as a criterion of academic soundness. If a theory 'feels' wrong about oneself, or about 'women in general' then it probably is wrong or inadequate, but personal authenticity should not be our criterion of falsification. We should use our academic authority and skills to challenge it, and rebuild it. Good feminism will not be built on bad social science.

The research agenda

So far I have been loosely talking about 'we'. Many men will have assumed that 'we' meant women researchers. However I do not mean women researchers. I mean all of us. Sex roles are too important to become a ghetto area in educational research. This is not just because sex roles are an important research topic, it is also because when researchers focus on how sex roles are reproduced in educational institutions they gain excellent leverage on many other aspects of these institutions. For example, once we begin to examine the introduction of needlework to boys, we can begin to think clearly about what needlework is doing in the school curriculum as a whole. Once women entered Yale, certain previously unconsidered aspects of Yale life became visible, problematic, and were open to scrutiny.

So, I believe that the payoff from research on sex roles is considerable for both sexes. I am also cynical enough to fear that if only women work on the subject, the results will be 'written off' and not believed. If a woman discovers that 20% of all biology teachers never address an open question to girls in their classes, it can be written off as feminist (even hysterical) propaganda. When a man decides that sex roles in questioning in biology is worth researching, does a project, and finds that 20% of teachers never address an open question to girls, it will be believed.

This is not, of course, a state of affairs I condone - an ideal world would judge all results on their merits, not the sex of their author - but it is a recognition of contemporary research politics that if Neville Bennett, Maurice Galton, or A.H. Halsey produced a research report demonstrating sexual inequalities it would be received as objective. If I did it, it would be feminist propaganda.

So men and women need to work on sex roles, not just women. It is also important that educational research ignore the calls for 'feminist methodology'. There is no such thing! There are research projects carried out according to scientific standards, and there are projects which have strayed from them. The latter may have built sexist assumptions into their research instruments, but that makes them badly done, not male methodology. An empirical example will demonstrate what I mean here.

Irene Jones, a research student at Leicester, reanalysed the data (published and unpublished) from the Murdock and Phelps (1973) study *Mass Media and the Secondary School*. She found that the research instruments had sexist assumptions built into them affecting boys and girls. One section offered pupils role models, such as 'leader' and 'tomboy'. Murdoch and Phelps found that girls and boys had different preferred roles - but they had not, as Irene Jones shows, been offered the same roles. Boys and not been offered the roles of 'fashion follower' or 'stay at home', while girls were not offered the role of 'leader'. The design of instruments was riddled with such assumptions, leading to sex differences in the results, due to bad methodology, which stereotypes boys and girls.

Not only were the research instruments designed for the study stereotyped - the researchers went on to distort their own findings. All pupils were asked whether they

went around in a group of the same sex, a mixed sex group, or just with a particular boy or girl friend. Boys said they spent their leisure with a group of boys. Girls said they spent time in a mixed group. Murdoch and Phelps report the finding that boys go around in single-sex groups - that is they chose to believe the boys' answers, discount the girls', and ignore the really interesting finding. That is, they failed to see that their research had shown a fascinating *difference* in the social construction of reality by teenage boys and girls. This was, again, bad research, not male research.

Murdoch and Phelps (1973) may seem long ago now - but a glance at David Marsland's (1982) review of the research on adolescence shows that all the same problems still characterised the field a decade later. Marsland writes a literature review on youth which never mentions girls. All the research covered is on boys, and no mention is made of females. This is an unscholarly, inaccurate paper - because blatant sexism produces bad research. This must be improved by adopting the blueprint of the ideal researcher outlined by Ian Morris (1981)

Somewhere there is someone who is totally objective, has no preconceived notions and who collects data unsullied by selective perception.

Ian maintains that the SED:

seek out this paragon for every project but always finds that she is already employed on another project and will not be free for two years.

Note that this paragon is not an exponent of feminist methodology, but good methodology.

Woman's place in education

So what is woman's place in education? At the centre of the discourse, receiving equal attention from researchers, earning equal salaries, attaining an equal proportion of all the jobs - salaried and honorary - and doing only half the domestic work in society. This last point is important because one cannot be Dean of the Faculty, President of the BPS, Director of the Research and Intelligence at the SED or Master of Baliol if one has *all* the childcare, all the cooking, all the care of aged parents, all the housework, and all the domestic planning on one's shoulders. So woman's proper place in education is one of equality - but that can only be achieved when man's place in the house becomes one of equality too. Woman's place in education will be nearer when Mothercare is renamed Parentcare.