

Gender and Education in Europe: an overview

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Main aims

- To provide a map of the field of gender and education for those not so familiar with the issues
- To draw on research and studies from across Europe
- To provide a (brief) historical and cultural context
- To recognise the importance of feminist movements

Contents

- Opposing perspectives on gender
- Role of feminism
 - Feminist 'waves'
 - European feminist movements
 - Gender in the European Union
- Gender and concepts of equality
- Sex differences research
- Cross-national studies
- Intersection of social factors
- Gender themes in educational practice

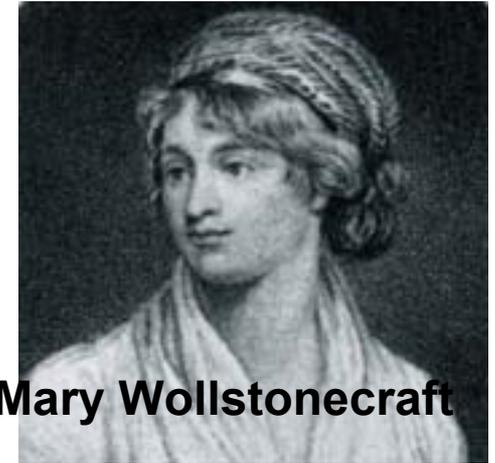
Opposing perspectives

- *Conservative:* social and cultural difference between men and women seen as biological, 'natural' and therefore unchanging
- *Progressive:* men and women's social roles seen as shaped largely by influences arising out of history, culture and society, and thus constantly in the process of change as society itself changes.

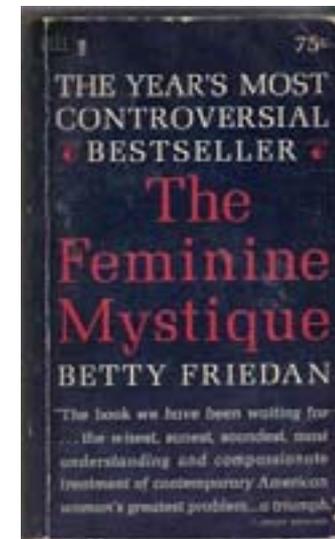
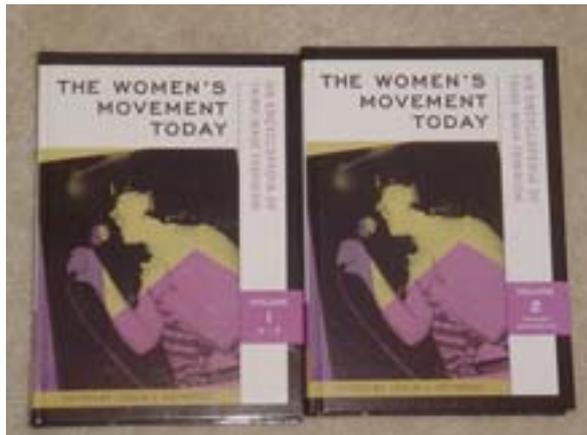


Influence of feminism

- (Western) feminist 'waves'
 - 1st (C19, early C20)
 - 2nd wave (1960s-1980s)
 - 3rd wave, 1990s onwards



Mary Wollstonecraft



▪ **European feminism movements**

- European feminism, good example of situated specificity of feminism in terms of geography, history and culture
- forms of feminism adopted dependent on country's culture, politics and history
- (western) feminist movements paralleled politically progressive ideas from the 1960s onwards, in particular from student political movements
- not much evidence in countries within the Eastern European communist bloc (until 1989) of autonomous feminism
- liberal feminism ideology embedded in EU policy

▪ Gender in the European Union

- 1957 Article 119, Treaty of Rome, equal pay and benefits for men and women
- 1975 Equal Pay Directive
- 1976 Equal Treatment Directive
- 1986 Equal Treatment in occupational pensions
- 1992 Social Chapter, agreed at Maastricht
- 2000+ Directives extending principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment in employment

Taken together, directives provide ‘a solid and comprehensive basis to ensure the principle of non discrimination is respected’. Such legislation will also enable individuals to take their cases to national courts (EU, 2007:1).

▪ Overall situation of men and women in the EU

- Employment rate of women has increased, yet remains lower than for men
- Women represent majority of students and university graduates.
- Women earn on average 17.4% less than men for every hour worked, and this figure remains stable.
- Women remain under-represented in economic and political decision-making, although their share has increased to some extent over the last decade.
- Family responsibilities remain unequally shared between women and men.
- Risk of poverty higher for women than for men.
- Women and girls the main victims of gender-based violence and more vulnerable to trafficking of human beings (European Commission, 2009).

Gender and concepts of equality

| | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| 1. equal life chances | open competition for shared resources | equal cultivation of different capacities | independence of educational attainment from social origins (Wood 1987) |
| 2. formal opportunities | | actual opportunities | educational outcomes (Halsey et al., 1980) |
| 3. equal treatment | | positive action | gender sensitive policy/mainstreaming (EC, 2007) |
| 4. specific gender concepts, e.g. | jämställdhet | gender equality/equity | gender gap |

Sex differences research

- Huge literature 'proving' sex differences
- Similarities between the sexes much greater than differences & some gaps closing
- Methodological inconsistencies & culturally insensitivity
- Not able to explain how factors intersect to influence performance and behaviour
- Based on relational dualism: boy-girl, male-female. (If one goes up the other must come down)
- Able to identify variations internationally and between social and ethnic groups etc.

Intersection of social factors

- *Obstacles* to high academic performance: poverty, family size, parents in unskilled or low skilled employment
- *Advantages*: higher social class, being a girl, having educated parents
- Minority ethnic group membership can be either advantageous or disadvantageous

▪ **Example of intersectionality (1): Home learning environment**

- Home Learning Environment (HLE) = frequency of reading to the child, visiting the library, teaching songs nursery rhymes, playing with letters and numbers, drawing/painting etc.
- Combined influence of gender and HLE on attainment of young children (age 3+) particularly marked
- Girls have a higher HLE than boys (as reported by parents); so gender difference in attainment may reflect differently gendered levels of parental support (Sammons et al., 2008).

▪ **Example of intersectionality (2): Special needs**

- Gender intersects with special needs and disability with differential outcomes.
- Issues include:
 - invisibility of girls with special needs, as opposed to boys who attract more attention, concern and resources
 - gendered impact of the formal and hidden curriculum to produce in girls (& boys): restricted learning opportunities, low achievement and aspiration, poor self concept and bad body image etc.
 - discrimination against all students with a disability (Lloyd, 1996).

Themes in (current) educational practice

- Official and hidden curriculum
- School reading materials
- Subject preference and choice
- Motivational and psychological issues
- School environment
- Teacher attitudes
- Assessment
- Teaching as a profession
- Co-education and single-sex settings
- The problem of boys

Summary

- Policy has shifted from righting the wrongs against girls and women towards examination performance and boys' relative 'failure'
- Sex differences remains the most popular form of research
- Strong impact of European Union directives
- Individual countries have largely engaged with the same gender issues, though at different times, e.g. establishing extent of gender inequality, arguments for the need for change, practical strategies aimed at schools
- Western feminists were pioneers in the late C20. Who next?