



# **Gender discourses in education and educational policies**

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# Discourses in education

- Ideological implications of particular discursive configurations around gender and youth, as well as 'race' and class.
- The **second-wave feminism** and education
- Late 70s, 1980s - feminist analyses of sexism in education. Dale Spender and Elizabeth Sarah (Eds, 1980) *Learning to Lose*.
- 1980s. Feminist concerns over **girls' relative 'underachievement'** in science and mathematics compared to boys



# Discourses in education

- 1970s-1980s. **Black pupils’ ‘underachievement’** in the focus of debate through the first half of the 1980s (pupils as victims of racism in school, the labour market and in wider British society). Focus on race, There was **no positioning of girls** as performing well in school *at the expense* of boys.
- No idea of **intersections of ‘race’ with gender or class.**
- **Boys’ discourse** (late 1990s)
- Discourse of **gender equality**
- Recent development: focus on **ethnicity** rather than gender (Luttrell, 2005), performance of Black boys



# Discourses in education

- **Meritocracy** versus **social reproduction** in education discourse
- Discourses and practices of **international organizations** (Gender-related indexes)



# Feminist sociological imagination

- **Feminist imagination** (Weiler, 2008)
- The Sociological Imagination, C. Wright Mills (1959/1970) - individual lives could only be understood within **broader historical and social context**
- to grasp **history and biography**. second-wave feminism: **‘the personal is political’**.
- Second-wave feminism: **individuals** are not free floating outside of society or culture, but are shaped by broader forces and discourses



- **Second-wave feminism**: global capitalism and post-World War II anti-colonial and liberation, new social movements, including feminism.
- **White middle-class women** continue to be presented in the media as the face of feminism.
- Limitations of **white feminists** in the second-wave women's movement and their failure to recognize their **own race privilege**
- Second-wave feminism had a powerful effect on **public education** in all the **metropolitan countries**



# The second-wave feminism and education (USA)

- young high school women to reflect on everyday experiences such as **classroom dynamics, sex,** and the **gender expectations** in their own families. Teachers and women's groups began to critique the sexism of **school textbooks and children's books**
- In higher education, feminist academics initiated a **critique of academic disciplines**, which were analyzed for underlying patterns of **sexism and male privilege.**
- most women academics in general were white.



# The second-wave feminism and education (USA)

- **Gender equity in all aspects of educational programs**, profoundly affected the lives of girls and women in public schools and higher education
- Move from **consciousness-raising groups** to an examination of their own education and the possibilities being offered to the **next generation**
- Asking mothers to observe boys and girls on **playgrounds**, examine **children's books** for gender images, demand of school boards how many girls got **athletic scholarships**, and speak with their children and husbands about **the expectations** they had about their lives





# Move toward the third-wave feminism

- The impact of poststructuralism and **neoliberalism** on education feminism
- **Neoliberal ideology**: we all live in a global marketplace of free competition in which anyone can succeed and in which failure to do so is a personal shortcomings
- **personal experiences** to see the way they were shaped by social structures and discourses



# Move to the third-wave feminism

- Emergence of **poststructural** and **postcolonial** theory
- Judith Butler's (2006) ideas of Performativity
- Many feminisms
- **multiple forms** of femininity and masculinity
- individual subjects construct themselves and are constructed through **discursive** as well as material practices
- individual subject is envisioned as capable of **self-transformation** and **self-production**



# Boys' crisis discourse (late 1980s)



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# Boys' crisis discourses in late 90-ies

- Youth/adolescence has operated as a central element in **contemporary crises** and debates over the past century
- Discourse of crisis and loss '**Moral panic**' and a crisis of contemporary masculinity
- '**Moral panics**' (radical criminologist Stan Cohen in the early 1970s on the role played **by media representations of young white working-class men** to construct a 'popular' panic over '**gang wars**' between Rockers and Mods in seaside towns of south-east England during the 1960s (Cohen, 1973)
- **Moral panic** (Epstein et al. 1998)
- Moral panics around 'teenage pregnancy', youth crime, drug abuse, hooliganism, etc. Abusive behaviours towards self and others



- Positioning of men, and especially young men, as the **‘new victims’**: ‘Men are the **New Women**’
- Discourses and debates in both the ‘popular’ media and the academic press, in the statements of politicians and policy makers
- girls as a group outperform boys across the curriculum, but in fact boys broadly match girls in **mathematics and science**. The one area of the curriculum where boys do tend to underachieve is **English**



# Discourse of moral panic

- Growing **interest in masculinities**
- Moral panics over ‘problem youth’ tend to represent young (especially working-class and/or Black) men as actively deviant, resistant and rebellious.
- Boys and young men are constructed and presented as being **‘in trouble’, vulnerable** and **‘at risk’**. **‘Poor boys’, ‘lost boys’, Britain’s lost boys**
- *Gender and Power* (Connell, 1987) on crisis tendencies’ in the ‘gender order of the rich capitalist countries. Connell differentiated the **rhetoric of crisis** (e.g. recurrent crises around the state of ‘the family’) from what he termed **‘real crisis tendencies’**
- **Boys’ crisis** (Kimmel 2010),



- Discourse of boys' 'underachievement' as a discursive configurations around to represent the **undifferentiated** group **'boys' as victims** and **'girls'** as relatively **privileged**
- The boys' 'under-achievement' debate is also peculiarly **non-racialized** and **non-class-specific**
- working-class and/or minority ethnic boys' low achievement in school (on average) is often framed as a question of gender



- Adopting a Foucauldian discourse analytic approach (cf. Foucault, 1980; Burman & Parker, 1993), Epstein *et al.* (1998) identified three key discourses mobilized in the debates around the ‘gender gap’: **‘boys will be boys’**, **‘poor boys’** and **‘blaming schools’**.
- ‘Boys will be boys’ discourse - **celebration of boys’ masculinity** and their resistance to a **‘feminine’ school ethos** of diligence and discipline.
- blaming the apparent **‘feminization of schooling’**





- Struggle over the gendering of the respective positions of the **victim(ized)** and that of **privileged status** —a particular form of the **master-and-slave** narrative
- feminism is seen to have ***produced boys*** ‘**underachievement**’ by undermining the self-esteem of males at the expense of gaining ‘equality’ for women.
- Panic over ‘lost boys’ as part of a resurgence of **hegemonic masculinity** and/or a backlash against feminism (e.g. Cameron, 1998/99; Epstein *et al.*, 1998; Skelton, 1998; Raphael Reed, 1999)
- feminism or a taken-for-granted sexual equality cited as one **source of this ‘problem’**.



# Discourse of underachievement of boys

- Great Britain: girls have been performing increasingly well compared to boys at GCSE level examinations in most subjects
- Great Britain, Australia, Canada, the USA, parts of Western Europe and in Japan, many other OECD nations. OECD PISA report on ‘gender gap’
- Boys’ ‘underachievement’ is constructed around and through the repeated recitation of **official statistics** and research studies on **examination results** and **school performance**, broken down by gender (see Epstein *et al.*, 1998).
- Recitation of **statistics** + the **language of crisis**, alarm and urgency



# Discourse of underachievement of boys

- ‘Something must be done’, a list of **remedies**, the emphasis is more on ‘**help**’, ‘**rescue**’ and the need for **practical action**
- More **male teachers** as **role models** for boys
- Shift from ‘**feminized curriculum**’
- Attempts to **masculinize curriculum**
- Criticism of school practices and working methods which are not suitable for boys



- **‘healthy idleness’** of young boys
- boys were low achieving, but they were central in the class’s **informal hierarchy**



# Criticism

- **Criticism:** boys' underachievements are considered *as a consequence of girls' better performance* but not as result of their own and adults' constructions of activities like reading, languages etc.
- Sexism and patriarchal ideologies and practices as not identified as a potential source of boys' poor performance
- Boys are considered as **undifferentiated** group of 'boys'
- this focus on **all boys** as underachievers has been misleading educational policies
- Issues of '**race**' and **class** are marginalized. There is no idea on the **intersection of class with gender and 'race'**.
- Location of underachievement in the **individual** rather than with **social structures by neo-liberal policy** movements
- neo-liberal discourses at work in English educational policy



# Gender equality discourse in education

- It is based on **international and national** declarations and plans, and is focused predominantly on the position of **girls and women**.
- Eliminating all forms of **discrimination against women** with special focus on education.
- to challenge **traditional gender roles and stereotypes**. Other objectives include enhancing the representation of **women in decision-making bodies**, countering gender-based attainment patterns and combating gender-based harassment in schools (EURYDICE 2010, 13).



# Gender equality discourse in education

- curriculum planning and teaching methods, student counselling, early childhood education, equality planning in educational institutions and teaching materials
- main focus on **gender segregation** in the labour market and in education and on lack of awareness of **sexual harassment** or **women in leadership positions**



# Criticism of boys' discourse

- The lower educational status of men on average in relation to women does not cause **lower salaries**
- strong **gender segregation** in further education and the labour market.
- girls, as a group, earn higher marks, but as a group they are also more dependent on marks to gain entry into higher education and the **labour market**
- **Lack of sociological imagination**
- **Social reproduction** (P. Bourdieu on 3 forms of capital – financial, social and cultural)





- boys' achievements in school, even if (on average) weaker than girls' achievements, seem **not to lead to weaker positions in further education and in the labour market**



# Discourse of meritocracy vs Discourse of social reproduction



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- **Social reproduction** emphasizes **discrimination and bias** based on ascribed characteristics of individuals.
- Powerful groups maintain **a social structure** that systematically discriminates against less powerful groups.
- **Systematic restrictions placed on girls and women.** These restrictions may be in the home (domestic sexual division of labor, parental restrictions, or resource control), the school system (curricula, infrastructure, and instruction), and the labor market



**Meritocracy** stresses differences **in ability in educational attainment** and, in turn, differences in educational attainment explain **occupational achievement**



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# Discourse of international organizations on gender and education



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# Gender-Related Indexes

**GDI** - Gender-Related Development Index  
(UNDP, 1995)

**GEM** - Gender Empowerment Measure (UNDP,  
1995)

**GGI** - Gender Gap Index (WEF, 2006)

**SIGI** - the Social Institutions and Gender Index  
(OECD, 2009)

**GII** - Gender Inequality Index (UNDP, 2010)

# Gender-Related Indexes

**GEI** - Gender Equality Index (the African Development Bank)

**AGDI** - the African Gender and Development Index (UNECA, 2004)

**GSI** - the Gender Status Index

**AWPS** - the African Women's Progress Scoreboard



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# Interconnection of education with other pillars

- GDI (**Gender Development index**) disparities between women and men in three basic dimensions of human development - **health, knowledge and living standards**
- **Africa Gender Equality Index** (AGEI) measures these differences across three dimensions: economic opportunities, human development, and law and institutions





# Global Gender Gap Index 2014 (142 countries)

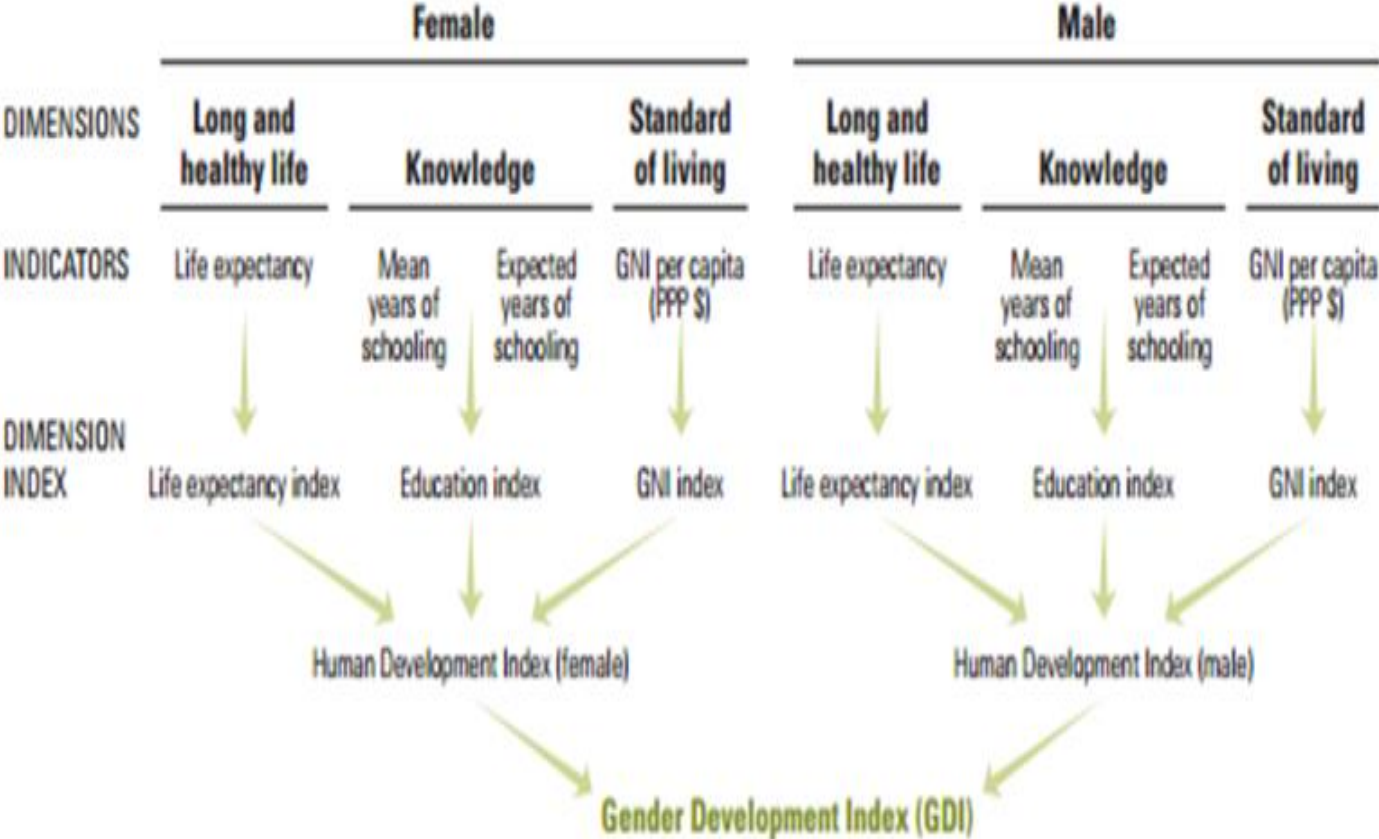
- Morocco 133 (0.5988)
- Tunisia 123 (0.6272)
- Hungary 93 (0.6759)
- Greece 91 (0.6784)
- Ukraine 56 (0.7056)
- Lithuania 44 (0.7208)



- **GEM** gender empowerment measures contains 3 components: political representation, representation in senior positions in the economy, and power over economic resources.
- **Gender Gap Index (GGI)**. 3 dimensions: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, political empowerment, and health and survival.
- **Gender Status Index (GSI)** measures three dimensions: social power, economic power, and political power.



# Gender Development Index (GDI)



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# Education indicators

- Literacy rate, School enrollment in primary, secondary, tertiary education (**Gender Equality Index**, the African Development Bank)
- educational achievements through school enrollment rates, dropout rates, and literacy (**Gender Status Index, GSI**)



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