Gender, Schooling and Transformation: evaluating liberal feminist action in education

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ABSTRACT   *This paper describes one aspect of a study carried out by the author in three secondary schools in New Zealand, where the overall goal was to critically analyse the message about work and non-work given overtly and covertly by teachers in various areas of the curriculum. The article focuses principally on one of these schools, and on the messages given within this school regarding the choice of subjects and occupations. 'All Girls' High' was found to function as a political site involved in the construction and control of feminist discourse, meaning and subjectivities. This discovery is linked to the transformative and reproductive debate within the 'new' sociology of education, and specifically placed in a context which evaluates the effectiveness of liberal feminist discourse.*

INTRODUCTION

This article draws on data from a larger study which set out to discover and critically analyse the messages about work and non-work given overtly and covertly by three high schools in a provincial city of the North Island of New Zealand. The bulk of the data collected was used in a doctoral dissertation entitled 'Schooling for Work in New Zealand: a qualitative study of three high schools' (Sultana, 1987). The focus in this particular article is on one school—referred to here under the pseudonym of 'All Girls' High School'—and on the messages given within this school regarding the choice of subjects and occupations. Reference is occasionally made to the other two schools involved in the research—'Co-Ed High' and 'All Boys' College'—in order to highlight contrasting messages communicated to students there.

The article first considers the reproduction/transformation debate in the 'new' sociology of education and relates the insights of liberal, radical and socialist feminist discourse to the transformative agenda of education. The 'Girls Can Do Anything' campaign is then located within the liberal feminist tradition and a description of the campaign at All Girls' High is provided as an example of feminist schooling within this tradition. The efforts of the school—and the reception afforded to the messages by various students—are explored in ethnographic data.

Finally, the effectiveness and shortcomings of liberal feminist discourse are discussed and evaluated in the light of data presented.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Reproduction and Transformation Debate

In this particular study, the focus is on the relationship between gender, schooling and the established order—although it will be pointed out consistently that one cannot isolate gender from the total matrix of life experience, which includes class and ethnicity. Much of the debate about education in the last two decades has revolved around the concern that through its form, content and pedagogy, schooling serves the interest of the *status quo* and therefore *reproduces* the injustices and inequalities entrenched in the wider social organisations. This entails a particular view of society which considers that the social relations of class, gender and ethnicity are relations of domination and subordination with some groups benefiting more than others from the same social–economic organisation [1]. Jones (1986, p. 75) represents such a perspective when she argues that:

> In broad terms, dominant class, race and gender groups are enabled to control or influence in their own interests almost the entire matrix of institutions which constitute New Zealand society, including the definition and distribution of material wealth, good, services and socially valued knowledge, while the collective interests of subordinate groups are not met in the prevailing social and economic organisation.

Althusser (1971) and Bowles & Gintis (1976) are the foremost exponents of the critique of the reproductive function of schooling. This critique belongs to the tradition of structural Marxism which stresses the connections between educational institutions and economic power. In this tradition, schooling is seen to reproduce both labour power for the capitalist class and ideological consciousness which legitimates capitalist production and defends the *status quo*. Every aspect of schooling therefore defines a mode for the production of ways of thinking that are fundamentally linked to specific interests within a concrete form of economic and social organisation. Neo-Marxists highlight the way schooling promotes and defends the interests of the ruling classes while denying access to knowledge and power to people from the working classes, women and those coming from ethnic 'minorities'.

This strictly reproductive view of schooling has increasingly been criticised for being too deterministic and a series of ethnographic studies, particularly that of Willis (1977), has led to a consideration of the transformative potential of schooling. Following Gramsci (1971) rather than Althusser (1971), the connectedness between the economic base and the world of ideas came to be considered as neither an autonomous nor an externally determined field but rather as a site of social differences and struggles. This represents a continuation of the development of a more sophisticated understanding of the contemporary state [2]. As Whitty (1985,

p. 33) has pointed out "The State came to be conceived as a site of struggle, the outcomes of which could not be taken for granted". The state was no longer treated as a unitary or monolithic site but rather as a "constellation of sites whose determination by the economy was both general and varied rather than specific and identical" (ibid., p. 33).

Within this conception of the relationship between the state and education, teachers and students were no longer viewed in deterministic terms but were seen instead as having a degree of 'relative autonomy'. They were therefore capable of 'penetrating' the hegemony of 'common-sense' typifications and of contesting and resisting the reproductive intentions of what Althusser had called the Ideological State Apparatuses, chief of which are schools. Much of the interest of contemporary sociologists of education [3] has been with this recent strand of Marxism which has given rise to a new language of optimism in the bid by various oppressed groups—including women and ethnic 'minorities'—to use education for transformative ends.

This article draws together both strands in the Marxist tradition of educational scholarship outlined above. The study of the relationship between schooling and work and of the specific school-to-work messages is therefore placed in a context which highlights the intricate relationships between macro-economic and social forces and the realities of people's everyday lives. This highlighting is achieved through the use of ethnographic material which exposes some of the internal cultural politics of an all girls' secondary school. Processes of conflict, negotiation, resistance and accommodation are identified in order to reveal the contested terrain in which meanings and messages are forged. By moving away from the idea of schools as a 'black box' the ethnographic data alerts us to both the possibilities of spaces for transformation and to the constraints within which this endeavour is bound.

Feminist Education and Transformation

Women have been particularly interested in developing a critique of reproductive schooling and in exploiting its transformative potential [4]. Not all feminist critiques of—or transformative alternatives for—schooling share the same philosophy or goals. However, all start from the same assumption that the educational system, together with other social institutions, is less favourable to girls and women than to boys and men (Arnot, 1985). Acker (1986) and Middleton (1987, 1988) identify various discourses which have shaped feminist educational theories, and of these, three are considered to be relevant to this particular study. They are liberal, radical and socialist feminism. Reference will be made to these different images or approaches with regard to both All Girls' High School's attempts and specifically the Girls Can Do Anything Campaign, and to alternatives to—and development of—such attempts. It is therefore important to describe briefly the different perspective of each tradition in feminist education.

Liberal feminist educational strategies seek to promote equal representation with men in the educational structure and in positions of power at large. They do this through such means as affirmative action, positive discrimination and the

abolishing of stereotyping. Education is a prime tool because, as Middleton (1988b) points out, "Drawing explanations from psychological models of learning, liberal feminists view social equity as achievable through changes in individuals' attitudes". One example of liberal feminist strategy in education is highlighted in this particular article, namely, the Girls Can Do Anything Campaign. This campaign [5] had its roots in the early eighties in initiatives taken by the Vocational Training Council which networked with both the National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women and the Department of Labour. A wide range of publicity material—including posters, stickers and leaflets about women in non-traditional jobs—were produced by the VTC and the Department of Labour. One leaflet—entitled *Career Options for Girls*—has as a goal the raising of consciousness of teachers and encourages them to promote non-traditional subject and employment options with girls. Ways of how to get 'the message home' are suggested and a list of resources is provided. This campaign, aimed specifically at school-age girls, led to the Department of Labour's Positive Action for Women Programme with a major objective being "To increase awareness among employers, women and girls and the community in general of the need and scope for wider job opportunities to be made available to women and girls." (Department of Labour, 1987).

Radical feminists criticise the liberal position because, in the overriding concern for equality within an established system, the nature of hierarchies in capitalist society are not analysed. Radical feminists consider the established order as one characterised by male dominance where women are not simply individual victims of discrimination but rather members of an oppressed class. This oppression is evident in schooling; a structure which upholds "male" educational forms and pedagogy—what Spender (1981) calls the 'patriarchal paradigm'—while women's experiences are not legitimised. Radical feminists therefore set out to establish a feminist image of schooling and to promote such measures as the setting up of transdisciplinary subjects like women's studies.

Socialist feminists share many of the radical feminists' views but argue that the sole concentration on male oppression blinds us to the oppression experienced by people from the working classes and ethnic minorities—be they male or female. It also blinds us to the differential oppression experienced by females as members of ethnic or class minorities (see Jones, 1985). Like radical feminists, socialist feminists set out to reconstruct education and its impersonal, bureaucratic and authoritarian patterns of social relations by giving importance to the student voice where oppressed groups can tell their story in their own words [6]. The description of All Girls' High School is located within these broad traditions of feminist discourse after the methodological strategies for data collection are outlined in the next section.

METHODOLOGY

The ethnographic material referred to in this study was collected utilising grounded theory methodology which was pioneered by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and used in the study of New Zealand education by Battersby (1981) and Ramsay *et al.* (1983)

among others. The methodology enhances the generation of formal and substantive propositions 'grounded' in qualitative data. For the propositions to become part of theory it is necessary that they be substantiated by similar data which occurs frequently in the field. Thus, any excerpts quoted in this article are not 'anecdotal' but typical of others gathered throughout 1986.

The study also follows the sequence suggested by Osborne *et al.* for their 'Learning in Science Project' (1982). This involved first an interview with teachers prior to their presentation of a unit relevant to the research focus to ascertain intended messages about work. This was followed by an observation in the classroom of the messages actually presented. Students were then interviewed after the delivery of the lesson or unit to gauge which messages had been received, accepted or contested, and what factors intervened in the communication process. Finally, another interview was held with the teacher concerned to discuss any mismatches between the messages he/she had intended to give, the actual messages given, and the messages ultimately received by the students. Formal and unstructured interviews as well as observation were the main data collecting tools utilised throughout the study.

Some relevant statistics to indicate the extent of the research are:

(1) Out of a total of 197 school days, 182 were spent in carrying out observations in the field. The total represents observations and interviews carried out in the staffrooms, in the classrooms, at assemblies, parents' evenings, school camps, work exploration placements and recreation programmes.
(2) In all, 151 lessons were observed. These included careers and transition education programmes, social studies, English, economics and history lessons, as well as classes in secretarial studies.
(3) A total of 370 students were interviewed individually and in groups of up to five: 187 of these students were female; 87 identified themselves as Maori, and of these 49 were female.
(4) A total of 50 teachers were interviewed individually, and 23 of these were female. Three were teachers of Maori language and culture, and two of these were female.

ALL GIRLS' HIGH: SCHOOLING FOR FEMINISM

The Givers of the Messages

All Girls' High represents the only single-sex education option for the secondary school students in the city and the surrounding districts. In 1986 it catered for 950 students and 136 of these were Maori. Its population was a composite one, representing most, if not all, socio–economic statuses.

A feature of the school's ethos which is singled out in this study is the emphasis it put on promoting feminist issues among its students as well as among the community generally. In various newsletters, school magazine publications and even on radio broadcasts, the principal and other members of staff told the city about the value of single-sex schooling. One such statement by the principal read:

> It is my belief that girls flourish in a single sex school and that those who
> have experienced the special nature of single sex girls' education are well
> equipped to face the world beyond school ... It is becoming increasingly
> recognised that girls' schools foster a climate where one is encouraged to
> do one's best and where healthy competition is considered desirable. (All
> Girls' High, 1986, p. 4)

The majority of the staff (out of 49 full-time and 10 part-time teachers, only 5 were
male; all but one of the positions of responsibility were held by females) strongly
supported the principal, with a number of them being active in women's rights
movements. In comparison with the other schools in this study, there were fewer
incidents observed at All Girls' High, or reported by interviewees, where teachers
expressed open opposition to the feminist agenda of overcoming traditional roles. It
is important to note, however, that not all teachers at All Girls' High were
enthusiastic supporters of the campaign. As Ramsay (1983) rightly points out in his
critique of Anyon's work (1981), schools are the site for various struggles over
meaning. Those who criticised the liberal feminist discourse at the school did so out
of conservative beliefs rather than in the tradition of radical or socialist critiques
outlined earlier where the aim would be to raise the status of women's knowledge
rather than to refashion women in the image of men. A case in point was the
school's Careers Adviser. She expressed strong reservations about the Girls Can Do
Anything campaign, saying "I see it as a problem because there are many traditional
jobs that are still available, and there are not many opportunities in the non-
traditional areas" (Fieldnotes, 26.11.86, p. 1724).

Various episodes noted in the staffroom helped to socialise new teachers into
the philosophy of the school and to consolidate a solidarity around the ethos. On one
occasion, for instance, the principal recounted to the staff how at a formal dinner,
one of the male dignitaries went into some 'technical details' which he felt he
"should explain for the sake of the lady present". The staff laughed in unison at
such a misguided statement and cries of 'chauvinist' were uttered in jest (Fieldnotes,
24.7.86, p. 1010).

As a general rule, liberal rather than radical or socialist expressions of feminism
were present among All Girls' High teachers while a few, generally older staff
members of a conservative persuasion, expressed their resistance to this general
ethos to the researcher only in rare individual exchanges. A research project carried
out in 1984 by two university graduates (Castina & Claire, 1985) which looked into
the equality of opportunity for girls in the city's secondary schools, embodied the
All Girls' High philosophy, and was occasionally referred to by staff.

Feminist issues featured strongly in almost all the areas of the curriculum
observed—English, social studies, history, economics and careers education. While
various issues relating to women and work—such as equal pay for equal work, the
value of unpaid labour, sexist behaviour and discrimination, as well as harassment in
the workforce—were addressed by teachers in classrooms, the major emphasis
regarding the feminist ethos lay in the effort to encourage girls to widen their
occupational and subject options. While this was also one of the goals at Co-Ed

High, the issue was the subject of a concerted and thoroughly planned strategy at All Girls' High. No messages were observed being given at All Boys' College which encouraged the students there to examine critically traditional role and occupational stereotypes. Indeed, data collected throughout the year gives further credence to Blackburn's argument (1982, p. 40) that "attitudes towards women bred and fed in boys' schools are inimical to the development of sex equality".

All Girls' High communicated its message in a variety of ways. The school environment emphasised the feminist ethos throughout the year so that posters and stickers announced brightly and vividly that "Girls Can do Anything". The posters were found everywhere: in the staffroom, on noticeboards, in the classrooms, in the workshops, in the library and canteen, on school bags. The theme was reinforced in a number of ways on the school noticeboards. During the study, newspaper cutting reporting incidents of sexual harassment, pictures of women doing traditionally male jobs, and some thought-provoking posters including one saying: "Boys grow up to do something. Girls grow up to be married" were noted. Women rather than men were asked to distribute awards on Prize Days in an endeavour to move away—as the deputy principal said in an interview on the local radio station—from the community's image "of females just sitting pretty".

The curriculum offered traditionally male options—such as workshop technology and technical drawing—which were taught by three of the male staff and a female student-teacher. As the principal said:

> ... students are actively encouraged to see themselves as succeeding in areas which traditionally have been perceived as suitable for boys and men only. The provision of these opportunities has been strongly supported by parents. (All Girls' High Prospectus, 1986, p. 4)

Considerable pressure was put on the students to include mathematics and science in their course of studies. The teachers and principal pointed out to students and parents that such choices led to non-traditional trades or professions which in turn bore the most promise for employment in the modern labour market. Though a secretarial course was still functioning at the school, one of its teachers criticised the school because she believed that "There's a lot of subtle and not so subtle pressure against girls doing this course" (Fieldnotes, 10.4.86, p. 564).

In comparison to the other two schools in the study, All Girls' High teachers generally gave maximum importance to the goal of encouraging and motivating girls to move away from traditionally female occupations, to widen their occupational choices and to extend themselves into previously male domains. This was true both in terms of declared intentions in pre-lesson accounts and in actual messages given to students in classroom situations. The message 'be aware of your abilities' and 'be aware of choices' [7]—which formed the basis of career education in all three schools studied—was consistently extended at All Girls' High to encourage female students to look beyond traditional choices and not to be constrained by gender, parental and societal expectations of women. Teachers at this school used various ways to politicise the 'neutral' notion of occupational choice by bringing the process to the level of conscious awareness [8]. A video entitled 'Rosie the Riveter' was

shown to practically all the classes in order to explain how women were able to do 'male' jobs when a situation like the outbreak of a war warranted it. Students were invited to attend a day-long workshop organised by the Department of Labour entitled 'Women in Unusual Occupations'. Another way of providing role models for the students was to invite over 100 female employers and employees to talk to students during a Careers Afternoon organised by the school Counsellor and Careers Adviser.

The liberal, rather than radical or socialist, feminist discourse meant that the underlying structure of All Girls' High as a state school was not challenged in terms of what was earlier referred to as 'patriarchal paradigms'. Neither were the intersections of gender with class and ethnicity considered in the development of a feminist approach to schooling. It is therefore important to highlight other aspects of the school's ethos, in particular the discipline and competitiveness fostered by principal and staff alike. These are considered to be contradictory elements in the experience of feminist schooling as described above.

The teachers' emphasis on firm discipline was reflected in certain standards demanded of the girls, including correct uniform (worn by all except 7th formers), a ban on jewellery, a demand for punctuality and for 'correct' English to be spoken at all times. Power was wielded by the staff with little delegation given to senior students. In fact the Student Council was not a structure elected democratically by students but rather the getting together of students interested in fund-raising activities for the school. Even decisions about school socials were taken by the staff.

The strong spirit of competition fostered at All Girls' High in relation to academic performance supported the school's firm belief in liberating its students through acquisition of knowledge, without, however, making the nature of that knowledge problematic except in its diluted form of providing wider subject choice for girls. In line with this orientation, and articulated more clearly than in the other two schools studied, All Girls' students felt that the set curriculum was a given entity that was not subject to critical inquiry but rather to assessment and marking. One of the more exciting pedagogical approaches to teaching observed by the researcher in all the three schools studied, in which students were involved in community research and in knowledge production, was justified by the teacher in terms of exams: they had to do a research project to pass School Certificate English (Fieldnotes, 10.6.86, p. 803). There was a general feeling among students that although All Girls' High did not officially practise streaming there was indeed covert streaming within the classroom and competitive tests "from the word go ... and if somebody's going to be at the top, somebody else has got to be at the bottom ... and there's nothing for the dull ones" (a 5th former) and " ... with a lot of teachers, if you can't keep up, they don't want to help you ... they don't give you a hand" (another 5th former). One student justified this by saying: "Perhaps it's because when you're a woman, you have to be twice as good as a man to make it to the top" (Fieldnotes, 15.4.86, p. 613).

The authoritarian discipline and competitiveness led Maori students especially to experience problems and frustrations. They spoke to the researcher about

teachers' (often unsuccessful) attempts to puts a "gloss of civilisation" on them. They frequently complained that they were not understood, that "it's all Pakehafied out there" (Fieldnotes, 30.5.86, p. 760), that most teachers didn't know how to handle their candour and ways of expressing themselves, and that teachers drove them to breaking-point by their putting excessive and insistent importance on what they considered to be irrelevant to their lives, such as being punctual, bringing their homework, saying 'sorry' even when they did not feel it in their hearts. Teachers were generally seen to be unaware of the material reality of the Maori girls' everyday life, which often included caring for younger brothers and sisters and led to lack of punctuality and inconsistency in completing their schoolwork. Maori students were either tolerated or punished. The few who were affirmed were those who, in one teacher's words, had "crossed the fence" and adopted Pakeha ways of behaving, thinking and even feeling. When interviewed, these students claimed that, in crossing the fence, they had lost their friends and their Maoriness (Fieldnotes, 25.9.86, p. 1293).

These internal contradictions at All Girls' High are an important feature—and an indictment—of liberal feminist schooling. In turning a blind eye to class and ethnicity, liberal discourse has little hope of developing the sisterhood bonds which in theory characterise feminist schooling. Senior students experienced and expressed some of these contradictions when they complained that their school did not help them to confront their racial prejudices and that teachers were generally wary of even speaking about Maori issues in case their own prejudices came through. A group of 7th formers spoke of the only experience of comradeship with Maori students they had felt during the four years they had spent at All Girls' High. This occurred during a game of softball. However, after the game, " . . . all the fences between us went up again . . . It was strange" (Fieldnotes, 15.4.86, p. 620). At times, prejudices on both sides were expressed in a confrontational way and at one point during the second term, the staff feared that fighting would break out between racially-based groups.

Reception, Acceptance and Contestation of Messages

The above description suggests that despite its myopia to class and race issues, and its uncritical acceptance of the male paradigms of schooling, All Girls' High School functioned overtly as a political site in the construction of a feminist discourse. That this discourse was received by students is well documented in the field data, which reveals that pro-feminist activism surfaced frequently among the girls. On one occasion a group of 4th-form students insisted that the English teacher start a letter "Dear Madam/Sir" rather than "Dear Sir/Madam". On another, 5th and 6th formers organised themselves into a protest group against an Apprenticeship Field Day Organiser for not including women apprentices.

With regard to the feminist emphasis, closely linked to a vocational, liberal discourse which suggested that girls ought to be avoiding traditionally female jobs, around 40% of the girls interviewed from the 4th and 5th form felt that "the school was going overboard" about the issue. Many of these felt pressured to think only in

terms of 'male' jobs, and resented that, exclaiming "If I want to be a nurse, what's wrong with that?!" (Fieldnotes, 25.3.86, p. 504).

Contestation marked a number of classroom encounters where teachers were attempting to give feminist messages to students. While this was particularly true of 4th-form classes, 5th formers too on occasions resisted the consideration of non-traditional career choices and roles. Contestation was often based on biological arguments, such as when a 5th-form student asserted: "I might be old-fashioned, but if you wanted to do something physical, and our bodies are not built for some things, then you have to accept that fact." (Fieldnotes, 24.9.86, p. 1274).

Contestation also took the form of a defence of males, who some students felt were being unjustly criticised by their teachers. An English teacher was attempting to conscientise her 5th-form students about the role of housework in women's lives, and how that labour could be shared with males. One 5th former whispered to the researcher seated next to her:

> Ms Marks is trying to show that the father doesn't do anything in the house, but I tried to think of anything he does to put it down. I don't like it when she tries to force us and put so much pressure on us to make us give up traditional roles. I think women should care for their kids instead of leaving them at day-care centres. I wrote that down. She probably won't like that, but I don't care! [9] (Roseanne; Fieldnotes, 17.7.86, p. 942)

The fact that resistance to the campaign was more in evidence among the junior students, and had become more acceptable to the senior students—including 5th formers—points towards the effectiveness of the school ethos in forming the subjectivities of students, and to the possibility that stereotyped roles are adhered to more rigidly during the earlier phase of the process of constructing an image of their own femininity where parental and societal models are still too powerful. This factor of age is explored in detailed by Romm (1980–81), and explains why senior students generally spoke highly of the campaign. A 7th former said:

> At school there is a lot of emphasis on doing what you want to do. Like, a lot of teachers are saying: 'Women can do Anything' . . . like the principal, my parents went to see her and told her I wanted to do accounting, and she said that was really good because I was breaking into a male-dominated area. And they're just placing a lot of emphasis on jobs that girls usually don't do. (Maryanne; Fieldnotes, 25.3.86, p. 503)

A large number of students referred to a careers unit they had done in the 4th form in social studies. Two 5th formers recalled that unit and said:

> A lot of the time teachers are encouraging us to do more way-out things. They really tell us about jobs that aren't traditional, and the main point of it is that some girls might be afraid to ask about them or don't actually realise that they'd like that job because they never thought they could do something like that. (Renee)

Yeah . . . They've been sort of opening new doors, saying "So what if guys have traditionally done this?! You are capable of it too. If you want to do it, go ahead and do it!" (Raylene; Fieldnotes, 25.9.86, p. 1285)

FACTORS INTERVENING IN THE STUDENT RECEPTION OF MESSAGES

There are of course a large number of factors which can intervene between the transmission and the reception of messages. In this context, only the major ones are considered briefly in an effort to examine the potential of education for moving away from a purely reproductive to a more transformative role.

1. **Parents**

In attempting to understand the reception given by students to the Girls Can Do Anything campaign, it is important to keep in mind that young people already interact with and react to socio–economic realities in their capacity as family members where they experience first hand the effects of the macro-structural forces on their parent/s. Class, gender, ethnic and adult–child relations are therefore played out initially in the family (Arnot, 1984; Middleton, 1985).

Various interviews were recorded where students described the role of their parents in curtailing and limiting occupational choice. A 5th former said, for instance: "I wanted to be a truck-driver, but dad said 'no' because it's rough work" (Fieldnotes, 2.10.86, p. 1364). Further indirect parental influences in restricting females in traditional roles took place through modelling which some students saw first hand at home. One 5th former said:

> When my mum started working again, dad did *not* want her to work at all. It's just because they needed the money, and deep down he doesn't like the idea of mum working. (Fieldnotes, 24.9.86, p. 1275)

There were other constraints reported by students where parents actively discouraged their daughters from aspiring to higher levels of education and careers. One 5th-form student said:

> My mother says I study too much. She says I'll become a social reject [laughs shyly] . . . She's afraid I'm spending too much time with books, though I don't think I am. (Tania; Fieldnotes, 24.9.86, p. 1277)

It is not inconceivable that parental expectations of how much study was appropriate differed according to the gender of their children. In other words, the demands of being sociable, a prerequisite for meeting boys and marrying, might be considered to be more pressing for girls than for boys by their parents.

Teachers at All Girls' High were generally aware of these sorts of pressures to the extent that the Counsellor, together with social studies teachers, organised meetings for parents. The Head of the social studies department said:

> Last year we realised that it wasn't the school which mattered with regard to jobs and information . . . it was parents. So, we decided to work with parents more. We get them here. We duplicate sheets and give work which has to be worked out with the parents at home. Some, of course, have another expectation of their daughters. They see her only in terms of having kids and being a housewife. We try to present alternatives to the parents as well as to the girls. (Fieldnotes, 5.2.86, p. 52)

2. General Social Environment

General social environment encompasses a number of different factors—including media, peer pressure, and male-peer pressure specifically—which generally reinforce traditionally female occupational choices with students and thus serve to contradict and limit the transformative messages given at All Girls' High.

Teachers who worked hard to encourage girls into non-traditional roles were very much aware of opposing messages coming from the media. In interviews they referred to the fact that their messages had to compete with the indoctrination the students received from television and teenage literature they tended to watch and read (Fieldnotes, 3.10.86, p. 1383). Teachers actively encouraged their students to resist such media images in defining femininity and to recognise peer group forces which pressured them to be attractive to the opposite sex. As one teacher said to her 4th-form class:

> Many of you are led to believe that if you have dirty hands, if your fingernails are always grimy because you've got that sort of job . . . nobody's going to like you. (Fieldnotes, 3.10.86, p. 1375)

Many students spoke of their own experience of such pressures. One 5th former said:

> A lot of guys I know, they'll claim not to be sexist, but really, when it comes down to it, they wouldn't like to see their wives doing better than them. My ex-boyfriend told me: "Oh! I could never marry a genius like you!" I don't see myself as a genius, but I really think he would get touchy seeing a woman doing better than him. It's a bit of the old ego there, and I've got friends who wouldn't perhaps mind their girlfriends doing better, but once they got married, they would want their wife to stay at home and look after them . . . So their job, once they're married, is to stay in that home. (Judy; Fieldnotes, 24.9.86, p. 1275)

Students from all social classes, as well as those of them who were Polynesian (in the majority of cases, Maori), expressed their awareness of social pressures for them to be 'female' in traditional ways. The data shows however that the *extent* of such social pressures depended on a confluence of factors, chief among them being class and race. Female students who came from working-class backgrounds or who were Maori were therefore particularly susceptible to these pressures. Talking about their futures, working-class females, and especially those of them who were Maori,

spontaneously mentioned career as controlled and defined by a male partner's wishes. A group of Pakeha Co-Ed High girls are here seen considering themselves and their careers as secondary to male demands:

> There's a teacher at this school. She took a year off and she's come back, and her husband stays at home and looks after the baby. (Mandy)

> It depends what husband you marry though. If he's a real brute!... (Joanne)

> Or he might not be the kind cut out to stay at home. (Elaine)

> It's what you expect. You go to school, you leave, you get a job, you get married, you have your kids, and you go back to work. (Joanne; Field-notes, 9.10.86, p. 1460)

A life and a career defined by a male seemed to be especially real for Maori females. One teacher noted that "You very rarely get a girl not firmly tied to female-oriented jobs, and Maori girls especially so" (Fieldnotes, 7.10.86, p. 1422). The Maori teacher at All Girls' High also made the comment that "Some Maori parents don't value education, and some of them have this old-fashioned idea that girls shouldn't have an education" (Fieldnotes, 21.10.86, p. 1533). When asked directly to comment about such pressures, Maori girls often agreed that they did exist. In one such case, a student said:

> Maori males can be so sexist! They just want us to work for them! They want their tea to be prepared when they come back... a big feed ready for them! (Roimata; Fieldnotes, 2.10.86, p. 1370)

Another 5th-form Maori girl felt guilty for being attracted to traditionally male roles:

> I like pulling things apart and then trying to put them together again. It's like a hobby kind of... But I wouldn't want to do it as a job. It's kind of we're taking all the guys' jobs and then they're the ones who have to support the family. (Te Huia; Fieldnotes, 29.9.86, p. 1331)

3. Experiences at Work

Another form of social pressure which intervened in the reception of messages given by the school concerns female students' experience of sexism in their weekend, casual and part-time work. Over 85% of students interviewed in all three schools participated, to a greater or lesser extent, in what is often referred to as the 'twilight economy' (see Sultana, 1990b). It is posited that this experience of sexism influenced the girls in limiting their career choices and roles, serving as a powerful reminder of the female's traditional role in society. Groups of female students who worked in different environments were interviewed. One All Girls' 5th former spoke of her experiences as a 'checkout girl' at a supermarket:

> Most of the guys are at the rear of the store, packing shelves and bringing trolleys in, and the girls are usually at the front, at the check-out controls. There are two guys being trained as checkout operators though, but all the guys think it's ultra sissy to become a checkout operator. There's two at the moment and they get their hassles. (Mandy; Fieldnotes, 9.10.86, p. 1458)

Another group of 5th and 6th formers from the same school spoke at length about their experience of a sexist workplace, this time at another supermarket. All but one of the girls were working because their families needed an extra income. The excerpt which follows picks up the interview at the point where they are describing their jobs as checkout operators. While some of their comments arise out of their status as part-time workers, others are directly relevant to gender.

> Now you've got two stickers to look at, and the yellow one is the G.S.T. price, and you end up on your toes all the time and its's really easy to make a mistake. You end up so dizzy. (Janice)

> It would be good if you could move around and do different things. (Sandra)

> I reckon everybody should get trained at checkouts, and so everybody has a turn. (Meg)

> The Males get an easy job when you think about it! (Janice)

> You reckon! I am jealous! (Therese)

> As I said to Molly last night: "Do the trolleys need doing?" And she said "Oh yes, they do". And I said: "Can I go and do them?" And she says "No. I'll get one of the boys to do that". (Janice)

> They think you're sort of fragile little things, like we can't carry things. (Sandra)

> Perhaps we're at the checkout because they know we're hard workers! (Rudy)

> But they should give us a chance to do something else because it is so boring! You're stuck inside all day long, and you can't even get some fresh air! And the hours just drag! (Meg; Fieldnotes, 31.10.86, pp. 1579–80)

2. Students' Perceptions of Openings in Non-traditional Areas

This was seen to be an important and influential factor in that the students' own personal experiences in the labour marker showed girls that the changes might perhaps be advocated at school but they were not really happening in the outside world. In other words, negative experiences with regard to sexism where it really mattered—in the 'real world', as students often referred to work—ensured that

when they came to make personal choices, what they saw in the workforce influenced them more than what they heard at school.

Such recognition was dramatically brought home to a large group of students from All Girls' High who were taken by the Counsellor and the Careers Adviser to a day's field-trip to a 'Skillympics' field-show. The management had advertised this to schools, promoting it as an opportunity to show students various apprentices at work and for students to ask questions related to careers. There was also a marquee with a Department of Labour official distributing stickers and information regarding the Women Can Do Anything campaign. As the project seemed to reinforce the ethos of the school, the principal encouraged students to attend, paying for the bus fares from school funds. But the disappointment of the students was great when they discovered that practically all the apprentices in the various marquees were male. When groups of the students present were interviewed, they expressed their dismay:

> They're all males! You get all those stickers 'Girls can do Anything', and yet wherever you go it's males. (Helen)

> Yeah . . . and the only girls you find are apprentices in kitchens and with sewing machines . . . the usual stereotypes. (Frieda; Fieldnotes, 7.3.86, p. 377)

A group of these students actually went to the Manager's office to protest. He apologised and agreed that their complaint was justified. The incident shows that while the messages the girls were receiving at school had been accepted there were other powerful messages in the way that the labour force was structured which in many ways defeated the transformative potential of the school. Girls realised that while they might agree with the *idea* of widening their career options, dominant societal structures were there to limit and constrain those choices, and finally to reproduce the stereotypes.

WHAT GIRLS FINALLY CHOSE AS CAREERS

It would seem that despite the consistent and clear messages given by the school, girls ultimately chose traditionally female occupations. Teachers noted that while students generally agreed at an abstract level with the ideas of the Girls Can Do Anything campaign, the latter's occupational choices remained within the traditional range (Fieldnotes, 18.9.86, p. 1197). Interviews with school leavers and perusal of statistics gathered by the researcher and by the careers adviser provided similar evidence.

This was also the case for those female students who chose traditionally 'male' technical subjects at All Girls' High. Interviews with 5th-form girls in the workshop technology class revealed that there was not a single student who was aiming to take up carpentry or metalwork as a career. They saw it only as an 'interesting' and 'fun' subject to learn. Working with lathes, electric saws and drills was an unusual thrill (Fieldnotes, 2.7.86, p. 895).

DISCUSSION

This study has suggested that while All Girls' High successfully challenges its students to *think* beyond traditional stereotypes, it does not ultimately succeed in influencing *actual* career choices. Students have been shown to be aware of the powerful definitions wielded by a society characterised by the sexual division of labour, and to know that realistic chances of actually getting a job depend upon their making the choices expected from persons of their gender (as well as race and class: see Sultana, 1988). In other words, while progressive schooling might change ideas, it does not necessarily change labour market realities. Even if some students do form new attitudes and new life plans, cultural and structural processes can continue to prevent school success being translated into a different power and status structure in the overall economy (Yates, 1983, 1985). In her research in Vancouver schools, Gaskell (1984) encountered the same processes. Even though teachers argued with their students that clerical jobs would disappear with the introduction of new technology and that there were more chances of employment in other areas of work, the girls' experience of a gender-segregated labour market finally carried the day. Gaskell (ibid., p. 97) comments:

> The girls are accurately perceiving that there are a large number of clerical jobs out there now, of many different types and in many different locations. The women they know who have jobs, have clerical jobs. It is difficult for a counsellor or a new economic survey to discount their overwhelming experience of where the jobs are.

The failure of schools to affect labour market realities does not suggest that the efforts made by All Girls' High staff are without worth. Their intentions to place girls in positions which in the past have been dominated by males, the campaign to persuade them to enter non-traditional jobs, or to continue with mathematics and science so they may enter higher status careers, is to be applauded. The school was far in advance of the largely and overtly non-interventionist career education programmes—in use at Co-Ed High and All Boys' College—in its engagement in a political exposition of the process of occupational 'choice' where elements beyond the individual's control are seen to exert a major influence on the course of one's entire life, including one's educational and vocational decisions. In the other schools there was little evidence of what Kelly (1985) refers to as the interruption of a process whereby pupils' pre-existing gender identities become transformed into male advantage and female disadvantage in the classroom.

However, the efforts at All Girls' must be considered to be only a first step. The model espoused at this school was observed to fail in accommodating the experiences of working-class and Maori/Polynesian girls. Indeed, the liberal feminism at this school was translated into a form of hierarchical, academic-oriented schooling which took for granted, accepted and repeated definitions of what elements of the present culture are important. The result was that this alienated many of the working class and Maori students from investing in the education offered. In such a situation, the messages given by teachers cannot connect with and represent the reality of such

students. Rather they will be associated by the latter with other alien forms of schools' knowledge and deemed to be irrelevant to everyday existence. As Wilson and Wyn (1983) have concluded from their research in Australian schools:

> The success of programs to address the existing structure of inequality depends on the development of analysis and explanation which is explicitly concerned with the complexities of people's experience of everyday life, and hence with the interaction of class, gender and ethnicity.

Dunn (1983, p. 80) has urged that if schools are to move beyond their reproductive role with regards to sexism and sex-stereotyping, they have to adopt a three-pronged approach. She notes, however, that action and research programmes have tended to be largely directed to the development of the first, or consciousness-raising phase. She suggests the need for a second phase where a detailed analysis of real day-to-day school structures is made, which leads into a third phase, the drawing up of a broad programme that extends beyond school into the public sphere. In her critical review of movements in the theorising of inequality over the last two decades, Yates (1986) notes that liberal definitions of the problem of gender and inequality have had limited effectiveness and are to be seen only as a first step. The next direction, she argues, is to address the deeper ways in which inequality is embedded in social relations generally. Gender has therefore moved from 'inequality' as a framework to a recognition of the problem being one concerned with social (and not just educational) change.

CONCLUSION

What is the future, then, for the liberal feminist agenda as represented by the 'Girls Can Do Anything' campaign? This paper has suggested that more radical and far-sweeping educational and political action is necessary if the goal of feminist education, as defined by O'Brien (1986, p. 102), is to be achieved. The latter states that:

> The goal of a feminist education is not equality in knowledge, power and wealth, but the abolition of gender as an oppressive cultural reality.

It has been argued that the liberal campaign can only have limited success in achieving these ends for at least two reasons. First, in so far as it fails to take into account the confluence of class and ethnicity, the campaign can at best only reach a select audience of females, and thus it obliquely mirrors the oppressive system it criticises by being insensitive to the everyday realities of working-class and ethnic persons. Second, it has been argued that liberal feminist education needs to engage in the public sphere, an agenda which Giroux (1983)—with reference to general progressive action—put in the context of social movements. Teachers assume the role of 'transformative intellectuals', and the issue of teaching and learning is linked to the more political goal of taking risks and to the struggle within ongoing relations of power in order to alter the oppressive conditions in which life is lived. In this context, feminist teachers could represent a collective voice demanding democratic

and equitable legislation which addresses, and heals, the injustices New Zealand society perpetrates on women.

In conclusion, having recognised the limitations with the Girls Can Do Anything campaign, it is necessary also to recognise what Eisenstein (1980) refers to as "the radical future of liberal feminism". Acker (1986, p. 67) notes that increasingly there is a tendency to combat the divisiveness between the different positions in the women's movement. She refers to Gearhart (1983) for instance, who makes a case for alliances between radical and liberal feminists based on the fact that the goals of liberal feminists (such as getting women into educational management to advance their own careers) may be the same as the strategies of radical feminists (getting women into educational management in order to introduce anti-sexist initiatives).

Yates (1986) moreover, following Eisenstein, acknowledges the probability that radical and socialist forms of feminism flow from the experiences of liberal feminist action. Liberal education encourages women to look for and expect equal treatment in the workforce, although in fact they will continue to be treated unequally (men remain in power and control because in order to remain competitive the capitalist economy requires that a range of jobs be done more cheaply than others). Ultimately, women will become increasingly aware of the roots of their oppression, and Eisenstein argues that this conscientisation will lead women to give up their concern with success and recognition in terms of the system and to make demands which threaten the workings of the system. Yates (1986, p. 129) comments on this proposition and notes that in terms of radical action it is a mistake to draw barriers between 'radical' and 'liberal' strategies, and that "a materialist analysis ... should recognise the value of 'liberal' and reformist' action in relation to women and try to work with this". Through living the contradiction between what they are taught and led to hope for at school, and the conservative sexual division of labour in New Zealand society, former students from All Girls' High might increasingly become disillusioned with the liberal discourse of equality and become more politically involved along radical—if not socialist feminist—lines.

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NOTES

[1] With reference to gender relations there is ample research to show the subordinate position of women in the New Zealand work force (Whitcombe, 1979; Department of Labour, 1980; Hyman, 1981; Waldegrave & Coventry, 1987) and their peripheralisation in part-time and unpaid work and unemployment as the country's foremost reserve army of labour (see Shipley, 1982; Ramsay & Sultana, 1986).

[2] See Apple, 1982; Offe, 1984; Carnoy & Levin, 1985.

[3] This finds its expression in the works of authors in the 'new' sociology of education tradition, chief

among them being Young (1971), Apple (1979, 1982), Anyon (1981), Giroux (1983) and Whitty (1985). New Zealand exponents of this approach are Ramsay *et al.* (1983), Codd *et al.* (1985) and Jones (1986), among others.

[4] Deem (1980), Spender (1983) and Arnot (1985) are three examples among many in this tradition. Feminist critiques of the New Zealand education system have been developed by Middleton (1985, 1986, 1987) Jones (1985, 1986) and Abigail (1983) among others.

[5] There is very little written material available which actually describes the development of the Campaign as well as its guiding philosophy. Most of the information was obtained following an interview with Ilana Edson, one of the four Department of Labour's Women's Employment Co-ordinators, and from Hansen's overview of the activities and issues addressed by the National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women (1987).

[6] For a more detailed account of the different feminist educational theories and their application to New Zealand schooling, see Middleton (1985, 1986, 1987).

[7] A 'matching', 'trait-factor' model of vocational guidance harking back to Parsons (1908) and refined by Holland (1966).

[8] With two exceptions, teachers politicised the process of occupational choice only along gender lines. Generally, no attention or recognition was given to the confluence of gender with class and ethnicity in determining such choices. This lack is critically analysed in another article by the present author (Sultana, 1988a). The reproductive tenor of school-to-work messages has been explored in other papers (see Sultana 1988b, 1989, 1990a,b,c).

[9] Comments such as these reveal the dynamics and problems of a male researcher in an all-female environment. There is agreement here with James (1986) who argues that gender places limits on sociological investigation, and with Frankenberg (1976) and Morgan (1981) who acknowledged that as male sociologists they needed to critically examine their research practices.

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