

# Gender, Childhood and Development: New Political Subjectivities under Neoliberalism?

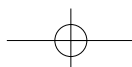
AF ERICA BURMAN

*Do shifts in the ways models of child development are explicitly and implicitly gendered indicate broader changes in models of the subject that correspond to current national and international economic-political agendas?*

*Should feminists and other critics be suspicious of new feminised models of the subject?*

E S S A Y

This article interrogates implicit norms underlying dominant models of child development, arguing that these reflect specifically gendered attributes which coincide with particular configurations of political subjectivity. Drawing on poststructuralist and postcolonial perspectives, I explore contemporary shifts in the ways models of child development are explicitly and implicitly gendered. I argue that such shifts indicate broader changes in models of the subject that correspond to current national and international economic-political agendas. As with claims to childhood, the deployment of discourses of gender within educational and psychological debates needs careful and cautious treatment: both are informed by and in their turn culturally inform the wider political arena – often in unhelpful ways. Reviewing current debates on gender and achievement, models of childhood, and their ‘fit’ with models of economic development, this paper aims to highlight some new concep-



tual challenges and arenas for feminist intervention. The paper finishes by indicating how and why feminists and other critics should be suspicious of new feminised models of the subject as not only indirectly pursuing old oppressive agendas but also elaborating new equally insidious varieties.

To clarify the status of these claims, I describe the relations of influence or effect between models and practices in rather indirect ways, using terms such as ‘reflect’, ‘inform’, or ‘inscribed within’, that tend to blur (rather than specify) the direction of causality and location of responsibility. This is because my concern is *to identify relationships between patterns of cultural norms configuring gender and childhood and broader political-economic contexts* rather than to map the directionality of influence between specific politicians (or policies) and shifts in models of childhood. While space does not permit further exploration of these relationships, nevertheless their complexities should be noted – for we need to avoid both conspiracy theory on the one hand, and on the other a voluntarism that abstracts theory from the historical, political and cultural contexts that both enables its influence and structures its reception. So here my principle concern is to bring into focus a discernable cultural shift within the contemporary gendering of models of childhood that warrants critical evaluation. As argued below, the ambiguities and complexities around the shifting locus of ‘development’ – from international relations, to nation states, to individuals, to (girl and boy) children – is precisely what obscures an easy answer to questions of determination.

I write this paper as a feminist academic psychologist, psychotherapist and activist with a longstanding involvement in critiquing models of childhood and the cultural-political agendas that are mobilised and realised through psychological models of individual development. In this analysis I draw on discussions about child rights,

gender roles, representations of childhood in sociological and political theory, international development policy and feminist critical engagements with psychological theories and practices. Together these have highlighted four key issues that frame my account below:

1. the longstanding political preoccupation with models of childhood to shape future citizens;
2. the role of professional, expert knowledges on/about childhood as a way to evaluate and intervene in family functioning (which is then used to exonerate state responsibilities);
3. the complex cultural inter-relationships between understandings of gender and childhood within notions of activity, vulnerability, competence and incompetence;
4. how – notwithstanding their apparent naturalised or essentialised status in culture – gendered norms are subject to change alongside broader cultural-economic shifts;

Hence this article draws on available literatures across a range of disciplines, arenas of policy and practical intervention; evaluating these as resources to help address new twists and turns in the gendered politics of childhood and development.

Some methodological presuppositions also need to be made clear. While I address representations of childhood, or qualities accorded an ideal-typical model of the developing child, this does not mean I am only discussing children or childhood. I am drawing on a broadly Foucauldian understanding of the structuring of cultural-political discourse such that every model of the child implies equivalent subject positions for others around him/her: for parents, teachers, and other welfare professionals (such as social workers, educational and clinical psychologists, health visitors and counsellors) and, as I will endeavour to indicate, even (or especially) the nation state. Some of these positions are more clearly specified than others. Positions for

teachers and mothers, for example, are usually pretty unambiguously prescribed by any specific pedagogical approach (usually either as negligent or intrusive (Walkerdine 1981), while those for fathers are typically more variable, in the sense of being discretionary (though ultimately also amenable to pathologisation – whether as ‘absent’ or ‘abusive’) (see Burman 1994). In such a way, the role of both the nation state and transnational economic-political processes fades into the background in favour of a focus on family background, organisation and functioning.

In what follows I juxtapose economic and psychological models of development to make claims that connect economic and psychodynamic notions of ‘investment’. While crossing between different disciplinary domains may appear tenuous, nevertheless my arguments aim precisely to question how allocations of financial and emotional resources across these different levels come to be linked. Moreover, the connection between children, gender and emotionality itself speaks to a set of culturally contingent, but affectively and economically potent, relations structuring contemporary life under late capitalism (Gordo, Lopez and Burman 2004).

### CONTESTED CHILDHOODS

As many commentators have noted (e.g. Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers 1992, Jencks 1996), the western world is currently witnessing an explosion of concern about children – both with protecting children and protecting people *from* children: abused children, delinquent children; children as victims, children as aggressors. The obviously contradictory character of these concerns indicates something of the ambiguous societal identifications young people carry (c.f. Kessen 1979). Steedman (1995) traces how the motif of the child emerged within western culture as the personification of interiority, representing a

sense of unique selfhood or individuality that lies inside the individual body. The economic and cultural conditions for this motif at the inception of modernity implicate this model of childhood, alongside increasing differentiation of gender roles with industrialisation, within the consolidation of the nation state and its imperialist/colonialist projects.

This moment – the birth of modernity – simultaneously confirmed both the temporal constitution and bifurcation of childhood: as a separate biographical domain or condition, but yet still relationally defined in terms of what it is not – adulthood. Vulnerability, innocence, nostalgia for times past, or even nostalgia for times denied or withheld by the actual conditions of our past childhoods – all these qualities inform contemporary representations of childhood. In this way childhood becomes ‘our’ past, beyond merely being a period of life that all adults have gone through (and thus feel qualified to claim expertise on). Indeed childhood and normative, prescriptive statements about childhood, such as those elaborated within notions of child rights as well as models of child development, come to be filled with imaginary investments that probably say more about the desires generated by dissatisfactions of our current adult lives under late capitalism and heteropatriarchy than any childhood actually experienced, or wished for, as children. In this sense, there is danger in the sentimentality that surrounds representations of childhood. For it is so replete with adult emotional investment that we can overlook the actual conditions and positions of contemporary embodied, acting children and young people (Burman 1999, 2003).

Where the conditions of actual children do impinge, the shattering of such ideal-typical representations can instigate bitter vengeance. Children who transgress (dominant western) models of childhood suffer stigmatisation and vilification to a degree that must tell us something about societal

investments. Children who behave like many adults, that is, children who have sex, who work, who are violent (including within some culturally sanctioned political conditions as soldiers) are neither counted as children nor deemed by their 'adult' activities to have joined the adult world. This was also the case historically where, for example, it is impossible to evaluate the role of children and young people in the protests against exploitative conditions in the early European factories that gave rise to their reform because age was simply not recorded (de Wilde 2000). It is also currently happening where the role of children as 'freedom fighters' within the struggle against apartheid in South Africa is rapidly being forgotten (Seekings 1993).

Hence the romance of the child as natural, closer to nature, gives rise to particular problems when children act 'unnaturally'. An ideological notion of 'nature' covers over the violence of its domestication and exploitation. Here educational and psychological models fit well with broader discourses of 'development' whereby children of the South who do not fit the (western) models of development invite a further stigmatisation of the organisation, functioning and even (especially) cultures of the South. The discourse of development relies for its benign mask upon a model of the developing subject as passive, compliant and grateful for its needs being attended to. While post-development theorists (e.g. Rahnema with Bawtree 1997) have highlighted how this model warrants the oppression and exploitation meted out by international aid and development policies (especially where Structural Adjustment Policies are presented as 'aid'), child activists have shown how Euro-US models of childhood at best fail to engage with the key issues facing most of the world's children and young people, and often in this process simply pathologise them further (Schlemmer 2000).

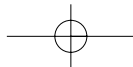
Models of childhood, portrayed as natu-

ral and presumed universal, play an important role in maintaining this dynamic. In particular, international development policy presumes a harmonisation between individual and national interest and well-being, as in the Human Development Index (HDI) formulated by the United Nations Development Project in 1992 and used thereafter in its annual reports to measure disparities between more and less 'developed' countries.

The concept of human development [...] is a form of investment, not just a means of distributing income. Healthy and educated people can, through productive employment, contribute more to economic growth. (UNDP 1992, 12)

Elsewhere (Burman 1995a,b) I discuss how the HDI commodifies individual development as a condition of, and for, national development, and so abstracts specific national economic trajectories from the international and multinational market – thereby eschewing the latter's responsibilities for 'underdevelopment' or impoverishment. As Pupavac (2001) argued in relation to international responses to children in political conflicts, child rights policies are all too easily recruited into neocolonialist international intervention programmes that confirm the childlike, dependent status of the recipients. The new humanitarianism structuring child rights is therefore suspect not only on the grounds of recapitulating paternalism but also of evaluating cultural contexts and parental authority:

The discourse of children's rights re-conceptualises the plight of children as the fault of the adult population. The existence of child soldiers or child labourers is condemned by proponents of children's rights in terms of the moral and legal culpability of the societies concerned... The perception of stolen childhoods ignores the continuing reality that the experiences of children cannot be separated



from the conditions in society general, but singling out the plight of children implicitly or explicitly blames the adults for their fate [...] Moral condemnation of the South through concern for the child helps give a sense of mission in the West lacking since the end of the Cold War. (Pupavac 2001, 102)

Indeed Pupavac claims that the increasing popularity of the child as cultural icon owes much to the demise of other available unifying myths or belief systems. The therapeutic association between childhood and rehabilitation wrought by modern welfare professional knowledges defines the child as the malleable site of and for change:

The elevation of the child is highly suited to today's climate with the contemporary preference for the instinctual and the distrust of rationalism. In these circumstances it is the child, not the politicised adult, who becomes advanced as the agent, or rather the focus, of social change. (ibid, 97)

Significantly, Pupavac points to the convergence of radical feminist attention to abuse and the rise of psychological models claiming 'cycles of violence' in the widespread distrust of parental authority as inherently abusive:

The mistrust of adults and the imperative to reconstruct parent-child relations under Anglo-American policy are being projected on to the formation of international policy (ibid. 107)

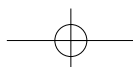
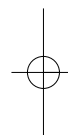
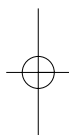
#### PEDAGOGIES AND POLITICS

Such analyses suggest that the abstraction surrounding childhood functions potently to distract or displace attention from the actual child or children under scrutiny to some distant other, (mis)remembered place – so constructing the current challenges surrounding children and childhood as deviations from a naturalised condition. In-

deed it is worth recalling that – alongside current scandalizations of child labour and sexuality – the introduction of compulsory primary level education which occurred in the late nineteenth century across Europe owed much to public concern over threats to social order because of the rise of an economically active and politically engaged generation of working class young people (Hoyles 1989).

Here the link between childhood as an origin state – whether of innocence or sin – and childhood as a signifier of process and potential becomes clear. Theories of teaching and learning subscribe to specific models of the student (and correspondingly also of the teacher). The rationale for the schooled child, unlike the working child, was that s/he was without knowledge, and so in need of teaching (Hendrick 1990). Thus the educational project either erased or pathologised the knowledge that children already possessed. Alongside the rise of behaviourist approaches, other more nativist theories in circulation in the early twentieth century put forward equivalent projects to classify, and control potentially unruly or undesirable elements by (at best) segregation and surveillance (Rose 1985).

Thus attempts to model the ideal citizen through educational practices structured the inception of modern state-sponsored schooling. Such modelling was given only a new liberal twist in the post second world war period with the emphasis on building democratic subjects through appropriate familial and schooling interventions (Walkerdine and Lucey 1989). The rational unitary subject of the modern nation state was explicitly prefigured within educational philosophies. Both Piaget and Dewey linked their philosophies with their politics, and each saw education as a key way of improving society. Moreover the longstanding slogan 'our children are our future', pins 'our' fantasy of the future onto children as signifiers of futurity, fantasies of the world to come or what it could become, as well as



of what is now lost – so highlighting the mobile character of the temporal significations effected by notions of childhood. By such means we run the risk of justifying deficits within children's present conditions for a model of the future (or past) – whether national or environmental – that they have played no part in formulating, and may not ever be in a position to enjoy.

To clarify my point: rather than implying we should dispense with such agendas, I am arguing precisely the reverse: that we cannot. Representations of childhood as we know them are shot through with normative assumptions that tie individual to social development – and here 'we' extends from Euro-US contexts across the world through globalization and through particular forms of covert globalisations created by international aid and development (and especially child development) policies. So while currently it may be impossible to disentangle these two levels of (individual and social/economic) development, at least we can attend to *how* they are entangled, and with what effects. In particular we can analyse how the nation state is configured via such formations of the subject, and so counter the ways the abstraction of the child occludes states' responsibilities for constituting the very problems they then claim to address.

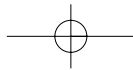
### GENDERING THE CHILD

So far my analysis has addressed 'the child' and children in a gender-neutral way. Yet – notwithstanding the ways childhood functions precisely as a warrant for abstraction from the social – gender (and other aspects too – including class, culture, and attributed or assumed sexuality) infuses representations of childhood. This covert gendering is not only a matter of grammatical pronoun attribution – albeit indicative of how (in English at least) the masculine pronoun 'he' not only comes to represent humanity but also secures the mother/child

'couple' safely and prefiguratively within the domain of heterosexual relations. But there are also less direct cultural qualities that carry gendered associations.

The rational unitary subject of psychology, like the model of the rational, autonomous, self-regulating responsible citizen, is – culturally-speaking – masculine. Piaget's model of the child as mini-scientist (Piaget 1957), along with information processing models of cognition, reiterates the culturally dominant project of modernity: mastery. Learning as an individual, self-sustained process fosters a gendered model of the self-sufficient, rational, autonomous, problem-solving subject. In covert as well as explicit ways, therefore, educational and psychological models of the developing child privilege cultural masculinity which, as Walkerdine (1988) shows, in practice do not necessarily benefit boys any more than girls.

The dualisms surrounding childhood therefore map onto a gendered division. The state of childhood is portrayed as a needy place: associated with dependency, irrationality and vulnerability. These qualities are, of course, associated with femininity and indeed this culturally-sanctioned elision between women and children has many profound effects (indeed Sylvester 1998 writes of: 'womenandchildren'). Claims to special treatment or protection, alongside diminished responsibility and secondary civil status, usher in a general infantilisation of the condition of being a woman. Here it is useful to recall how such representations of femininity are not only profoundly classed but are also part of the ideology of colonialism, with claims to women's emancipation figuring as a longstanding motif in imperialist ventures (McClintock 1995), as indicated also recently in the recent wars against Afghanistan and Iraq. Drawing on the wider influence of evolutionary theory, models of development portrayed the child, the woman and the native/savage (along with other 'rejects' from the modern deve-



lopment project of productivity – the mental defective and degenerate) at the bottom of progress' ladder. At the top was rational, white, western middle class man, and the task of individual – as now international – development was to expedite the ascent (Haraway 1989). Thus prevailing models, in their portrayal of development as linear and singular, reproduce the gender and cultural chauvinisms of the time and place of their formulation.

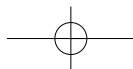
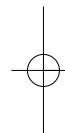
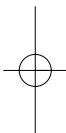
Further problems arise when considering the position of girls who encounter a double dose of these inscriptions – as both child and incipient woman. The new development category the 'girl child' speaks to this conundrum, since she is neither prototypical child nor woman. Yet 'she' invites further intervention precisely owing to her liminality in relation to both positions. For example, the slogan 'Educate a girl and you educate a nation', which circulated around the time of the launch of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (Vittachi 1989), has been taken up by many countries. Longstanding gendered agendas have surrounded the connection between women and nation, to render women responsible for cultural, as well as biological, reproduction and so subject to particular social and sexual regulation (Yuval Davis 1998). In the context of international development policy, these agendas become expressed through the intensification of intervention on (behalf of) girls and young women. Indeed the slogan 'Education is the best contraception' of the World Bank Poverty Report in 1986 makes two elisions: between woman as mother, and girl as pupil. Hence, notwithstanding how this is intended to promote their access to education, not only are women considered primarily in terms of reproductive activities, but childhood is so thoroughly gendered that 'the girl child' is regarded primarily as an incipient woman, and thus a future mother.

It seems we have a conundrum. On one hand the *invisibility* of gender within domi-

nant western psychological models, with their implicit celebration of culturally masculine qualities, has worked to marginalize or pathologise girls. But outside this context the *visibility* of gender threatens to combine the oppressions of being both a child and a woman for 'the girl child'. In contrast to the gender-free discourses of childhood and adolescence that have characterised western literatures, and have offered some scope for manoeuvre for girls and young women (e.g. Hudson 1984), it seems that 'girl children' of the (political as well as geographical) South are scarcely children: they are girls. Helpful as some of the measures for girls may be, feminists need to be aware that putting gender on the agenda is not always or in all respects emancipatory. I now move on to consider some further cautionary questions.

#### IS DEVELOPMENT FEMINISED?

If the rational, autonomous problem-solving child has fitted with the modern development project, what shifts attend post-modern (or late capitalist) shifts in labour and production processes? Alongside the general crisis of credibility of the project of social improvement, we have witnessed a general backlash against educational approaches that emphasised individual self-expression and exploration. Like many other modern aspirations, the liberal project of education as the route to social mobility has not delivered – in the sense that social stratifications have widened within and between nations. Worldwide, and within each country, the rich get richer while the poor get poorer. From the mid-1980s economic recession had started to impact on educational horizons, with instrumentalist agendas coming to the fore, as well as general crises over 'standards'. There are of course continuities underlying these apparent shifts in pedagogical approach. For example, Avis (1991) analyses how the individualism of child-centred approaches was part



of what made possible the apparent reversal of British educational agendas from progressive education to 'back to basics' vocationalism.

Yet this changing context seems to have produced a new set of beneficiaries. Amid claims of falling standards (or perhaps as a response to this?), girls are apparently doing well at school. Over the past 5 years British girls have achieved higher school-leaving examination results overall, and in almost all subject areas except Physics. Are we witnessing a change, even a reversal, in educational philosophy or models? Or a new generation of young women benefiting from the feminist struggles of their foremothers? Walkerdine and others (1990) had earlier documented how girls were 'counted out' by teachers, with their diligence and good behaviour working merely to confirm their status as 'plodders' rather than as possessors of the 'natural flair' that marked true cleverness (exhibited by the more unruly boys). In their follow-up study the trends indicated earlier are now exacerbated with those girls marked as succeeding continuing to succeed, while the others had 'failed' further.

This supposed educational 'overachievement' of girls has generated widespread public and policy discussion, but its very terms deny the ways girls were explicitly disadvantaged within the previous assessment system, with multiple choice tests discriminating against girls, and even then the original test scores subject to alteration because of girls' better performance in order to ensure an equal gender balance in educational selection processes (Epstein 1998). Now with the move towards more – and more continuous – assessment, girls' stereotypical qualities of docility and conscientiousness appear to be advantaging them (and boys' of indifference and last minute 'cramming' no longer delivering). Skills wrought in the domestic sphere, now applicable within schooling, seem to be paying off.

This shift seems to mesh with the widespread 'postfeminist' discourse, claiming that struggles for women's rights are now fulfilled. It may be true that some women have benefited from the widespread cultural move away from traditional patriarchal approaches to management and business alongside the rise of a psychotherapeutically-informed culture that emphasises 'people skills', including 'emotional literacy' and 'emotional intelligence' – all qualities associated with femininity (Burman 2004, 2005). With the decline of manufacturing industries in most developed societies and the rise of the service sector as the major source of employment, 'emotional labour' has assumed an unprecedented significance (Hochschild 1983). Certainly girls and women form an increasing target for such initiatives. Worldwide, women have never before been so enlisted into development projects, while women form the ideal-typical labour force within the information technology sector as the new 'cottage industry'. But just as getting women through the 'glass ceiling' does not necessarily change anything about the disproportionate dimensions and distributions of the institution specific women are rising within (including even gender inequalities), so the recruitment of women and girls to the development process may be less in their interests than first appeared (Marchand and Parpart 1995).

Indeed when the public focus on gender in relation to educational achievement is displaced to attend to class and 'race' we get a very different picture (Dillabough 2001). Moreover even those middle class girls who appear to be succeeding in these times of increased pressure and competition are doing so at major personal cost to their mental health (Lucey 2001). So while the feminisation of development is in part illusory, insofar as such claims have some purchase we need to examine more specifically how they work.



## GENDER AND NEOLIBERALISM

There is something very powerful about current shifts in gendered imagery, even if these images are at least partly spurious (in the sense, as I have been arguing, of being an artefact of a cultural slight of hand). Current economic conditions seem to have detached processes of 'feminisation' from women, to extend them to men as well. So now men suffer conditions of part-time, casualised and low paid labour formerly associated only with women. The very notion of a continuous 'career' that unfolds with one's own unique developmental trajectory, as the apotheosis of cultural masculinity under modernity, has suffered irreparable change. Within the public eye, men now figure within public and mental health targets, as sufferers of undiagnosed depressions and as potential candidates for suicide or self harm, in part precisely because accessing support would transgress their – now maladaptive – gender norms.

The current cultural preoccupation with men as vulnerable, rather than hegemonic, not only coincides with other narcissistic insults to the modern gendered arrangement of man-as-breadwinner, but also with broader curtailments of the grandiosity of western expansionism (the recent invasion and occupation of Iraq perhaps indicating a reactive overcompensation for, rather than contradiction of, this). Androgyny, hailed since the 1970s as a key index of mental health, now fits the flexibility required of the new world order.

Are we now witnessing a feminisation of the neo-liberal subject who can better realise traditional globalizing aims? Do shifts in models of gender indicate genuine changes in gendered power relations, or are they merely surface displacements whose novel aspects obscure the continuity of pre-existing agendas? Jensen and St Denis (2003), in a cross-national analysis of new social policy, claim to have identified a model of the subject that they call LEGO™ after the children's educational building

blocks. This policy takes education and development as the route to economic prosperity, emphasising the maximisation of individual productivity through participation within the paid labour force. Like the children's toy, it focuses on 'learning through play' (as a self-motivated, non-goal directed activity), with play becoming a practice that can become instrumentalised into a form of legitimised 'work' through a commitment to 'lifelong learning'. Moreover it is future-oriented, with an emphasis on activation of human potential for later benefit as the mode of social inclusion and protection from marginalisation, rather than focusing on corrections to existing social inequities of distributions of goods and access to services. Such moves link initiatives for individual development to community and national development. 'Lifelong learning' becomes the route for individual protection and security from the instabilities of national economies and international labour market fluctuations.

Critical educationalists have long critiqued this idealisation of play (e.g. Sutton Smith and Kelly Byrne 1984), so its re-emergence in this context of the rise of the knowledge-based society is significant. It links with individualised, psychologised notions of skill development that have a long history coinciding with industrial development (Harris 1987). The focus on individual activity and familial context is cast explicitly in terms of maximising human capital, warranting policies of cutbacks in state support for the unemployed – including (the usually female) lone parents who are now to be offered increasing incentives to enter the labour market (and suffer increasing penalties and pressures if they do not). Parental employment becomes the route for solving child poverty.

The two ideas – that work is the route to maximising individuals' well-being; and [that] social cohesion, that is the well-being of the collectivity, depends on such activity –

lie at the heart of notions of activation as a social policy, and an 'active society' as a policy goal. (Jensen and St Denis 2003, 15-16.)

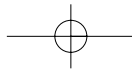
Within this activity/activation model, then, individual and collective good collapse into each other, importing all the political problems of a voluntarism that makes individuals responsible for their social position. Moreover this is a feminised form of social participation, that exudes 'family-friendliness' and 'emotional literacy': the 'activity' of this form of learning is not only rational problem-solving but now includes care – at home and at work. The generalisation of the condition of play and celebration of child-like qualities within contemporary culture (Burman 1998), alongside the longstanding infantilisation of women through their association with – and with the status of – children, has become extended into a more comprehensive strategy that enjoins us all as active learners.

How might feminist practice respond to such issues? I will end with three points for consideration. Firstly, we need to attend carefully and critically to how models of individual and economic development are not only interwoven but are also mutually legitimising. Indicators of this in public discourse are statements about societal needs and character, some of which are presumed obvious and so typically escape critical inquiry, while others mark explicit shifts within social policy. The current attention to state investment in childcare and early education is not only a way of countering contemporary child poverty and disadvantage; it also aims to contain or prevent future sectors of social exclusion or marginalisation. This might sound like a good thing, but what it means is that apparently benign measures function within a neo-liberal model of the marketisation of human potential to tie responsibilities for welfare and well-being to the economically productive individual and family.

Secondly, it is important to attend to the

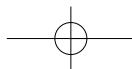
slipperiness of gender, both in terms of evaluating the new possibilities created by its shifts and the old problems these shifts cover over. Current initiatives to mobilise women within the paid labour market form a key priority for many advanced, as well as developing, countries. Since women and children's (low-paid and unpaid) labour have long been a key reserve resource for familial survival, the extent to which this is emancipatory is debatable. Indeed both are now undergoing ruthless exploitation across the world, albeit in different ways in richer and poorer countries (Niewenhuys 2000). This explicit mobilisation of women's labour potential and the focus on the active model of individual development – epitomised by the educational dictum of 'play as work' – coincides with unprecedented retraction of state welfare provision, and therefore threatens to intensify women's responsibilities for both economic and child development.

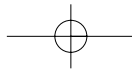
Finally, we need to identify counter-examples that disrupt the mutual relationships or determinations I have highlighted here, to document how psychological and educational theories can revolutionize – rather than confirm – political arrangements. In their analysis Jensen and St Denis emphasise that identifying policy convergences, or even the emergence of new policy 'blueprints', does not mean uniformity of implementation. Similarly feminist post-development critics (e.g. Crewe and Harrison 1998) note that the different agendas and interests of the various stakeholders or actors involved within any development intervention gives rise – at least potentially – to counter-hegemonic effects. Analysing such perspectives might enable identification of gendered fluctuations in and between models of the child, child carer and worker to promote more useful pedagogical and political strategies.



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Erica Burman  
Professor of Psychology and Women's Studies  
Manchester Metropolitan University

