

Burman, E. (ed) (1990) *Feminists and Psychological Practice*. London: Sage.

### *Afterword*

[pp. 189-194]

A book about feminism and psychological practices should end only by indicating dilemmas and directions, rather than offering tidy conclusions - for this would commit feminist psychology to a finite future, rather than enabling us to be open to the possibilities and issues arising from a changing context. The contributions in this book testify to the productiveness of psychology as well as the ambiguous and ambivalent ways this positions women who participate in its practices. There are now a number of pressing consequences of the current reorganization of education and professional structures that demand clear thinking on the part of feminists and progressives. Some of these are neither specific to feminists nor psychologists, but nevertheless still call for a response. This final section, then, is devoted to identifying some of these questions and indicating some possible courses of action.

### **Privatization (*clue: Thatcher's panacea – Guardian crossword, 5 Jan. 89*)**

Across all areas of education and health, teaching and service provision is increasingly becoming subject to the market forces of industrial demand and sponsorship, rather than the needs of the 'consumers'; or rather, industry *is* the consumer. In terms of research, this means an increasing number of people will be chasing dwindling funds and have less freedom to determine what to do with them. As well as putting 'enterprise culture' in to our teaching, these changes mean that radicals have to reinterpret what they want to do imaginatively in terms that will make the securing of funds more likely. While this is not in itself new, making money dependent on industrial interests compromises subversive or critical work: we are positioned clearly as aiding patriarchy and capitalism - indeed the task for psychology is how to convince industry that it needs to harness psychological knowledge for its own ends. One of the most insidious outcomes of this is that we have to develop even more coded ways of talking about progressive work. The dangers of self-censorship are perhaps even greater than those of external constraints. Moreover, it is easy for our political analysis to become diverted: the strategies we develop to cope with these situations can slip into being formulated as principled positions, positions we would not otherwise want to adopt.

In clinical and educational psychology the dilemmas loom even larger. While health authority funding of clinical psychologists seems to be secure for the time being, the general direction of change makes [190] the situation precarious and creates an atmosphere of retrenchment rather than promoting experimental or radical practice. Educational psychology has already been hit by legislative changes: while the Education Reform Act to some extent removes from psychologists their position as sole testers of children and hence demands a redefinition of their role, the changes in local government mean that local authorities have the power to delegate part of the funding of the service to schools. The scenario this presents is of educational psychological expertise effectively being commissioned by individual schools to deal with the problems presented by individual pupils. While it has always been a tricky issue to define who the 'client' of the educational psychologist is - child, parent, school, community or local authority - it is not difficult to see how an educational psychologist's autonomy is severely curtailed by these changes, and makes the 1970s reconstructionist calls for educational

psychologists to act as change agents and child and community advocates very remote. These developments also have particular implications for feminists working to challenge racism and sexism.

The constraints with which women have to work as a result of privatization and local authority reorganizations are paralleled inside the institution of British psychology. The form this is currently taking is through debates over the 'future' of psychology and establishing psychology as a Chartered profession.

## **Chartering**

The procedure whereby those seeking to use the title Chartered Psychologist have to be registered by the British Psychological Society is now well under way. This development has a number of important consequences.

*Centralizing the organization of psychology* Chartering overrides the various professional and academic psychological organizations already in existence which have provided a forum for the supervision of each area. Women's activity as psychologists often (deliberately) takes place outside patriarchal institutions. Feminists, outside the newly formed Psychology of Women Section of the British Psychological Society, have or may want little to do with traditional male institutions.

*Homogenizing the diversity of psychology* The differences in approach, practice and audience will be collapsed together. No longer can being a psychologist cover an unspecified range of possibilities. The term Chartered Psychologist is being copyrighted and constrained to a [191] specific meaning, generating some spurious uniformity for the variety of work we do in psychology. The default norms to which we will be invited to conform will be precisely those which as feminists we have tried to struggle against.

*Confirming the efficacy of psychology* One of the main arguments advanced for the necessity of chartering is to protect the public against charlatans, and make psychological practice more accountable. Without denying the reality of the problems, the effect of this is to confirm the importance and effectiveness of psychology; since the abuse of psychology is harmful, by a curious sleight of hand its application becomes benign and desirable. Feminists have been all too aware that on balance most psychology is deeply destructive to women.

*Confirming the facticity of psychology* Psychological knowledge is portrayed as neutral; the fault lies in its misapplication by individuals. The role of ideology in determining what research is and is not done, and which approaches are and are not adopted, and hence what interests structure that knowledge, is masked. What is also conveniently masked here is the way patriarchy revels in its status as a universal fact.

*Legislating psychology* Chartering will serve to demarcate what is or is not considered 'proper' psychology. The BPS already governs the structure of undergraduate degrees through academic requirements set for eligibility for membership. This has now been heightened in that courses which seek to confer the Graduate Basis for Registration (the first step to becoming a Chartered Psychologist) must cover a specified syllabus. This is likely to be tightened up in the near future.

Increasingly, chartering will bring all practising psychologists under the aegis of the BPS, and the resulting supervision of training and admission requirements can only be constraining. Although the criteria used to define psychology and scientific research in recent BPS documentation are broad, the definition and regulation by a party not specifically set up by each area to meet this purpose does not augur well. A small example of the problems ahead is indicated by how students taking joint or combined degrees may be penalized for their efforts to span disciplinary boundaries by becoming ineligible for membership and for Chartered status. This also has significant consequences for the complex and varied roles and services psychologists engage in and provide in education, health and social services, both for training and personnel. Developing feminist critiques in psychology have always had their roots outside 'proper' psychology, and the force of a Women's Movement inside the discipline rests on [192] his political activity. Chartering increases the difficulties for feminists seeking to join forces across disciplinary boundaries, and reduces the opportunities for feminists to make 'legitimate' interventions within psychology.

The overall effect of chartering, then is to demarcate the boundaries of psychology. This means that those 'outside' are effectively disenfranchised, and the tightening up of disciplinary and institutional boundaries makes it more difficult for feminists working within psychology to have the space to analyse and comment on prevailing theories and practices in the course of doing what is deemed 'proper' psychology.

### **The Psychology of Women Section and women in psychology**

In terms of the organization of women psychologists, the contribution in this book have identified the barriers and compromises involved in setting up a Psychology of Women Section within the British Psychological Society. However, current pressures make the choice of working within the system or not no longer relevant. With chartering either one is within the system or one has no right to say or do anything which impinges on its territory. The most hopeful scenario is one where the enforced presence of feminists within organized psychology creates more active and vigorous voices both inside and outside the section, which thus transcends the 'apolitical' remit with which it was initially instituted. A recent example of the promise of this position is the intervention made by the Psychology of Women Section through its response to deficiencies and omissions in its statement about the roles women and 'multi-ethnic society' play in *The Future of the Psychological Sciences* (BPS, 1988). The sense in which the section can be seen as the voice of women in psychology is of course constrained by the fact that it is not a women-only organization. It is also not very representative of women, since most women in psychology fail to see the relevance of the BPS - although chartering may change this. As various contributors indicate in their evaluation of the position of women in academia, and specifically the position of women in psychology, organizing within 'the system' requires correspondingly strong organization outside. Hence, an alternative would be to extend the parallel organization of Women in Psychology, the members of which might or might not be Chartered Psychologists, to provide an external forum for the development of strategies and ideas which can be applied elsewhere. Without these measures the debates could degenerate into a concern with 'equal opportunities' (usually no more than liberal sentiments exercised more on paper than in practice). [193]

### **Section 28**

The Local Government Act 1988 outlaws any local authority sponsorship of activities that could be interpreted as facilitating the 'promotion of homosexuality'. By now it is clear that this only legally applies to educational institutions under the control of local authorities, and hence does not apply to university or polytechnic courses, or any other training courses. Even though it now appears that the Act is unlikely to apply to schools, the Act places particular pressures on those in teaching. With the increasing promotion and popularity of psychology as a subject taught in schools and colleges, (women) teachers will be confronted with interpretations of the section designed to inhibit a feminist perspective.

There can be no doubt that this Act constitutes a general attack on the rights of lesbians and gay men. Although officially outside its remit, there is a serious danger that issues relating to the experience, recognition and value of lesbians and gay men will be excluded from teaching and professional practice by self-censorship. We need to ensure not only that this does not happen, but also to dissociate ourselves publicly from its rationale and implications. This may mean organizing within unions, departments and professional associations to formulate policies and statements affirming opposition to Section 28, and it would mean the active implementation of an equal opportunities programme incorporating discussion of these explicitly into our teaching, training and practice. More than this, we might even attempt to use some of the public prestige of psychology (risky though this is) to counter the assumptions and implications of the Act, although this would probably be proscribed by the BPS. So for example we could indicate the ideological deployment of 'the family' and its illusory nature to counter the insulting depiction of lesbian and gay relationships as 'pretended families'. Or we could use our positions as investigators of the domains of the intra-psychic and interpersonal to highlight the processes that give rise to the production and maintenance of 'homophobia'.

### **Feminist academics or academic feminists?**

With the advent of women's studies, and the promotion of some women to senior academic positions, the question of interests and radical credentials necessarily arises. At what point is working within the system selling out on our politics? There is a general sense in which the project of education as self-development is at some point necessarily in conflict with institutional needs. A number of contributions in this volume discuss this issue, and suggest that feminists [194] who rise to relatively powerful positions need to be accountable, both in their relations with their students and to the wider community of feminist activists. The arena of women's studies has itself some major dilemmas both to pose and to negotiate: is it reactionary for women to work in distinct disciplinary departments? Alternatively, does separating women's studies ghettoize and confine the impact of the radical educational developments? Does it support the existence of current structures by existing alongside them as if as another department? Positioned in these ways, how can it avoid reproducing some of the same inequalities?

The position of women in psychology has always been fraught with difficulties, and feminists have to address the complex theoretical and practical structures of the discipline. While the above collection of issues is neither exhaustive nor optimistic, it does at least highlight, as does the whole of this book, that psychology, as academia and technocracy, does not lie between the covers of books or within the obscurities of bureaucracy, but is also a living practice produced and reproduced by its participants. We must use our participation politically, sometimes as psychologists, always as feminists.

## Reference

British Psychological Society (1988) *The Future of the Psychological Sciences: Horizons and Opportunities for British Psychology*. Report prepared for the Scientific Affairs Board by the working party on the Future of the Psychological Sciences. Leicester: BPS. [End of page 194]