GENDER IN DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY: TOWARDS A POLITICAL ECONOMY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL 'PROGRESS'

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This paper opens by situating my account of the problems with developmental psychology within my own cultural-historical context, as an example of how all such accounts are necessarily also culturally-historically located. From there problems and dilemmas posed by the formation and paradigm of developmental psychology are identified, including highlighting the cultural masculinity of early developmental psychology. Methodological issues are discussed in terms of the ways they make implicit as well as explicit assumptions about gender, including why women were considered unsuitable psychologists in the early child study movement. Connections between psychology and wider political practice are indicated by reviewing the ways ideas of motherhood and ideologies of the family were formulated at the same time as and formed also a key rationale for imperialism. Having identified all these constitutive problems with developmental discourse – that are not specific to but include developmental psychology – the rest of the paper outlines five strategies that feminists have put forward to address, if not avoid, these difficulties.

Starting positions

I should begin by explaining that, while there are many interpretations of this title, this is not a paper on 'sex differences', or a discussion of the relations between women's and children's rights – although I would be happy to discuss these. My focus is rather upon a more distant history, but one which I believe has wider resonances. Hence it is important to say something about where I come from, as this context and history specifies my disciplinary as well as geographical position. I live and work in Manchester, which is England's second largest city (after the capital, London). Manchester has the dubious privilege of being the city where capitalism can be said to have begun, in the sense of being the city where industrialisation began, and in this sense was very much at modernity's 'centre'. In key respects, what we understand as the (first) 'industrial revolution' could be said to have started in Manchester. The campus where I work is named after the Manchester (feminist) novelist Elizabeth Gaskell. Her fiction dramatised the poverty and desperate circumstances of the men, women and children factory workers, and even now the Town Hall (a fine example of Victorian gothic architecture) bears a cotton flower on its spire, as a symbol of the crop to which the city owes its prosperity. This was not, of course, because Manchester grew cotton, but because it imported cotton from its colonial territories, who were forced to provide the raw materials to serve British manufacturing industries. Manchester is now a very multicultural and diverse city. But – like most British cities – it is a product of European modernity, as indicated by its complicities in slavery and exploitation of the poor, both worldwide and at 'home'.

Nowadays Manchester is a post-industrial city; the cotton weaving mills – after lying derelict for a while – have been 'regenerated' into luxury apartments, and the city is full of cafés, bars and restaurants, marking the shift into a service sector economy.

But before I leave this scene, a further relevant piece of history (and also an indication of the thriving political culture of resistance) is that a key component of modern European feminism started in Manchester. For the British suffragette movement, that is, the campaign for women to get the vote, started there and where the Pankhurst family, the mother and daughters who led the campaign, lived. Their house is now a women's centre, from which support services for women refugees and women dealing with domestic violence are run.

This description of my context hopefully indicates something of where my critical feminist engagement with developmental psychology comes from. For already there are glimpses from this historical account of how models of child and human development link up with economic development; how modernity built its promises of national wealth and social improvement on colonialism and imperialism, and we will now see how the emerging social sciences, and developmental psychology in particular, presumed particular understandings of gender relations. Moreover these understandings have also shaped the role and reception of feminist analysis, including relations between feminists across the world. In doing so, developmental psychology has played a key role in naturalizing, and so prescribing, what are contingent and historically-specific gendered and cultural arrangements. Small wonder, then, that feminists have generally kept considerable critical distance from developmental psychology (but see Riley, 1987; Thorne, 1987; Burman 2008a; Burman and Stacey, 2010).

The rights and wrongs of developmental psychology

Modern developmental psychology is largely conflated, for significant historical reasons, with both the domain of 'individual psychology' (via study of 'the child') and with the rise of psychological testing. There are significant historical reasons for this – to do with social policy imperatives of emerging nation states for tools to assess the capacities and behaviour of their populations. The focus on developmental progress resolved into a study of 'the child'. This produced an elision between individual and national development, and correspondingly naturalised understandings of development. In this way developmental psychology has fulfilled a key role in the production of mainstream Anglo-US psychology's abstracted, asocial model of the subject, with class, gender and culture only appearing as 'variables' to be grafted on to it (Burman, 1994; 1997). Moreover, developmental psychology exerts its influence beyond these geographical regions, since its models and assumptions circulate widely through economic globalisation and are also drawn upon within international development policies (Boyden, 1990; Burman, 2008b,c).

Moreover there is a key paradox. Despite concern over 'the' developing child, there is often little focus on the particular circumstances surrounding that child. The focus is typically either on general epistemological questions (about the origin and development of 'knowledge' – as in Piaget's project of 'genetic epistemology') or on applied social policy imperatives to avoid stigmatised 'endpoints' or outcomes of development (such as deviance, pathology, criminality, teenage

pregnancy etc). The latter concern gives rise to the well-known methodological flaw of retrospectively, and thereby selectively, researching the early experiences and backgrounds of groups that have already been identified as problematic, and so by this circular chain of reasoning ignoring those whose adverse early experiences did not lead to such outcomes (Clarke and Clarke, 1976).[1] Hence the study of the child arises out of, and is usually warranted by, other debates or concerns rather than from an interest or concern with the actual states and processes of development of a particular child (or set of children).

A key effect of the occlusion of the social agendas structuring approaches to child development is that families and especially (given prevailing gendered patterns of childcare) mothers are positioned as responsible for such outcomes, rather than socio-economic conditions or state policies, while the actual conditions and dilemmas facing children and families remain unaddressed. Ann Phoenix (1987) has coined the phrase 'normalised absence/pathologised presence' to describe the ways developmental psychological theory only attends to (those who are in the Anglo-US context) minority women's parenting practices (that is, working class, black or non-western) when these are seen to be problematic or deficient. This dynamic (of pathologised presence) therefore works not only to maintain their stigmatisation but it also overlooks the ways the dominant cultural norms are reproduced as normal and natural.

The cultural masculinity of early developmental psychology

Developmental psychology of course started before the first wave feminist movement. Most accounts take Charles Darwin as the author of the first child study[2] with his `Biographical sketch of an infant', which, though published in 1877, was based on notes made in 1840 (Riley, 1983; Rose, 1985; Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989).[3] As well, the idea that 'ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny', the idea that individual development reproduces all the patterns and stages of species development, a belief in the heritability of acquired characteristics also informed the new developmental psychology. A set of equivalences was elaborated whereby the conception of the child was related to the `savage', who, in turn, was seen as akin to the neurotic. Comparison between child, prehistoric man (*sic*) and `savage' presupposed a conception of development, of individual and of evolutionary progress, as unilinear, in the form of directed steps up an ordered hierarchy at whose pinnacle was western European man. In such ways the project of individual (child) development became tied to a wider and highly politicised model of social and economic development. It-inscribed the cultural, gendered and racialised privilege of the global North, now universalising them as the normalized model of the nation state (see Yuval-Davis, 1997).

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[1] Models of 'cycles of abuse' typically rely on this kind of reasoning and so should be approached with caution.

[2] Both this study and the importance it has been accorded can be taken as prototypical of the form developmental enquiry was to take (although Darwin's theory was only selectively interpreted by the early psychologists (privileging selection over variation, with significant consequences for our understandings of the desirabilityfor, rather than pathologisation of, diversity (Morss, 1990).

[3] This was one among many early observational, diary studies of young children, although, as Bradley (1989) points out, there had been many conducted earlier, especially by women, but these have been eclipsed from the history of developmental psychology

'Progress' is a key term that ties individual, social and national development together, as post- and anti-developmental critics of international economic development have noted (Sachs, 1992). Indeed terms of developmental psychological investigation carry cultural-political assumptions that constitute an important topic for study. As commentators on models of economic development have long noted (Crush, 1995; Rahnema with Bawtree 1997), the metaphors by which we describe development are shot through with ideological assumptions that both reflect and perpetuate power inequalities. Change is usually understood as positive, while any 'development' implies as an unquestionable good - with its absence understood as deficit (undeveloped) or inferiority (underdeveloped). (Although not cast in these terms, this is also the basis of the sociology of childhood critique of developmental psychology. This argues that psychologists have formulated a model of childhood based on deficit and inferiority, and have only focused on what children should become, rather than what they are. They instead regard children as competent social actors within their own contexts and cultures, see e.g. James et al, 1998.)

Gender and method: Women as unsuitable psychologists

Let us look now consider some of the ways questions of gender and method intersect. The early child study guidelines on how to 'observe' children emphasised the importance of being objective. In doing this a split or opposition was created in the process of knowledge construction – between those who generate the knowledge and those about whom such knowledge is generated. This opposition was gendered, also reflecting the inferior position accorded women within models of competence and maturity – as closer to children and 'primitives'. Fathers were seen as having the necessary detachment and rationality to engage in scientific endeavour and mothers as too sentimental to participate. Women were excluded from the early child study movement of the late nineteenth century because they were declared constitutionally incapable of regarding their children with the requisite objectivity. The mother's approach to infants

> ...unfits her from entering very cordially into the scientific vein. She rather dislikes their being made objects of cold intellectual scrutiny and unfeeling psychological analysis. . . . (Sully, 1881: quoted in Riley 1983: 48)

Even if she is shown to want to participate, her efforts were to be treated with suspicion:

> ...if the mother gets herself in time infected with the scientific ardour of the father, she may prove rather more of an auxiliary than he desires. Her maternal instincts impel her to regard her particular child as phenomenal in an extra-scientific sense. She . . . is predisposed to ascribe to her child a preternatural degree of intelligence. (ibid.)

If this seems a little dated, the following quotation (from the introduction to an experimental child development textbook) indicates how little had changed fifty years later.

Many experimental psychologists continue to look upon the field of child psychology as a proper field of research for women and for men whose experimental masculinity is not of the maximum. This attitude of patronage is based almost entirely upon a blissful ignorance of what is going on in the tremendously virile field of child behavior. (Murchison, 1933: x)

But by this time the equation between science and masculinity was so strong, and research practice so `virile', as to be able to counter the supposedly feminising tendencies that proximity to children produces. We can only speculate now what impact the 'high tech' character of much infancy and child developmental research has on its supposed feminising associations.

Motherhood, familialism and imperialism

The late nineteenth century was a time of social upheaval and unrest all over the world, and with revolutions brewing across Europe and anti-colonial revolts throughout the world, including in India. In England, increasing urbanisation brought about by rapid industrialisation produced the appalling conditions of the Victorian slums, while the poor health of army recruits for its colonial wars made the physical state of the general population a matter of widespread concern. Moreover the colonialist imaginary connecting children, women and 'primitives' coincided with the regulation of the working classes at 'home', through the cultural significance accorded 'mothering'.

Politicians and the emerging social scientists – including psychologists - focused their attention on the `quality' of the population, in particular on those sectors of society considered unstable and unruly.[4] The concern with the quality of the genetic `stock' and with the moulding, and ameliorating, effects of environmental conditions was reflected in the discourse of `nature vs. nurture' formulated by Francis Galton in 1875, and which has since become the widely adopted formulation through which to pose questions about the origins of knowledge and learning in psychology.

Industrialisation, that is the process of moving production outside the household, gave rise to the division between public and private spheres. This division is not only enshrined in liberal legislation, but it is also profoundly gendered Pateman, 1989). Further, images of mother and child symbolize both `nature' and `civilisation'. These twin (and contradictory) notions (nature and civilisation) tie patriarchal ideologies of femininity and family to specifically racialised configurations set up by colonialism from its inception. Nationalist and imperialist claims of the 'natural' character of women's subordination to men, and children's to adults, have worked to legitimise exclusion and hierarchy outside the family (Ueno, 2004). Once inequalities *within familial relations* could be

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[4] Fears of social disorder of course also included young people, made economically autonomous through their (albeit exploitative) work (Hoyles, 1989). Hence the introduction of compulsory schooling (in Britain, as across Europe, from the 1870s onwards) was partly motivated to turn them into more docile and malleable citizens (Hendrick, 1990), an agenda which remains amply in evidence across the world today.

configured as natural, historical change and power inequalities *between countries* could be portrayed as inevitable, rather than as constructed, and amenable to challenge and transformation.

Projecting the family image onto national and imperial progress enabled what was often murderously violent change to be legitimatized as the progressive unfolding of natural decree. Imperial intervention could thus be configured as a linear, nonrevolutionary progression that naturally contained hierarchy within unity: paternal fathers ruling benignly over immature children.' (McClintock, 1995: 45)

Thus the naturalisation of inequalities *within* the family not only rendered these inequalities timeless and inevitable (Lieven, 1980), but also presented such oppressions as logical and rational. As McClintock elaborates:

> After the 1850s, the image of the natural, patriarchal family, in alliance with pseudoscientific social Darwinism, came to constitute the organizing trope for marshalling a bewildering array of cultures into a single, global, narrative ordered and managed by Europeans. In the process, the idea of divine nature was superseded by the idea of imperial nature, guaranteeing henceforth that the 'universal' quintessence of Enlightenment individualism belongs only to propertied men of European descent. (ibid.)

These sentiments clearly speak to a specific colonial context, yet they are certainly still in circulation. The following extract comes from the Year Book of the Salvation Army, a Christian evangelical movement founded in Britain in the late nineteenth century, but still functioning (albeit declining) now:

> The basic unit of society is the home and family, where women play a vital and definitive role. Furthermore, as natural providers of hope, women play an important part in shaping society. Therefore any fellowship of women in which Christian influence is exerted and practical help given benefits not only the individual and the family but also the nation (entry on the Home League in the *The Salvation Army Year Book* for 2004, cited in Reece: 8).

What is particularly noteworthy is the crucial link made between gender roles and nation, whereby women's competence as wives and mothers is portrayed a matter of concern for the welfare of the nation.

Some strategies…. And five feminist contributions

Moving from critical analysis to feminist engagements, I will now discuss five feminist-informed strategies for addressing these problems.

1. Beyond the 'Great White Men' critique

So far I have been describing psychology as not only a movement, but also in terms of the embodied figures who have dominated the history of psychology. Figures such as Freud, Piaget, Darwin and Galton come readily to mind. But cultural masculinity is not only a matter of

specifically gendered bodies: we also need an analysis of the ways gendered assumptions structure both theory and method, and covertly as well as explicitly. Feminist theory has generated critical scrutiny of the metaphors of development to highlight the cultural masculinity structured into models through notions of 'mastery' (equating to 'competence') (Walkerdine, 1988), and the privileging of the cognitive over the affective (Broughton, 1988). Even the seemingly innocuous 'arrow' of time can be critiqued for its cultural masculinity (i.e. asocial individualism):

> The arrow metaphor expresses three contemporary explanations of developmental change: (1) biology, which launches movements; (2) an ideal solution to a cognitive task, which serves as the target for development; and (3) linearity, which ensures continuity of travel. Arrows describe linear thought and linear development in a universal child. Arrows are also, of course, typically associated with aggression, domination, imposition of a view, and penetration of an influence. An arrow expresses development as a push towards change, not as a force that simultaneously transforms and is transformed. (Kofsky Scholnick, 2000: 34)

As alternatives, feminists have instead generated more relational metaphors such as friendship, conversation, apprenticeship and narrative that usher in more socially-based understandings of contexts for, and of, development.

2. Beyond gender essentialisms

Beyond these interventions at the level of theory and method, there are other considerations. Unless we are gender essentialists – who believe that particular qualities and practices are intrinsically and inevitably associated with being a man or a woman - it is not a question of replacing men with women in positions of power, since we know that this makes little difference. Women are not necessarily more kind, sensitive or socially-responsible than men; social constructionists (including many feminists) argue that it is because of women's historically marginalised positions that they may have acquired such qualities, and certainly there are too many examples of (powerful) women who have not to show that such differences are subject to class, cultural and historical variation. Recent discussions have also suggested that the category of 'gender' is a particularly modern notion (Hayami et al., 2003). This focus on gender as a modern, rather than as western, concept may offer a particularly useful way forward outside western contexts, in particular by inviting analyses that attend to forms and histories of modernity and modernisation (and also countering the argument that questions of gender and feminism in particular is tantamount to westernisation).

The presence of increasing numbers of women politicians and world leaders, and women progressing through the 'glass ceiling' should not deceive us into thinking that the world will necessarily become a better place with women in power. Indeed psychology is now very much a feminised discipline, and developmental psychology perhaps even more so. Instead of this giving rise to happier models, the feminisation of psychology is giving rise to some anxiety. The British Psychological

Society (like other national psychological associations) worries that the preponderance of women devalues the discipline (and there appear to similar debates in other countries). More generally, there is a social panic over the trend of girls' academic achievement outstripping boys in schooling.

Rather than seeing women as now outstripping men, these developments should rather be seen as an expression of a wider feminisation of culture prompted by neoliberalism (Burman, 2005). For, in these post-industrial times, it is people-skills rather than conventionally masculine attributes such as physical strength that matter at work, while the traditional flexibility and multi-tasking features of girls and women's traditional work are better suited to insecure and precarious employment conditions that increasingly structure the labour market. Thus there are consequences for men as well as women, and indeed for children – as the widespread emergence of national models promoting flexible, 'smart' and economically self-sufficient child-citizens indicate (see Fendler, 2001; Lister, 2006). Moreover most women have not benefited from such changes either.

If ever there was a reason to go beyond privileging the superiority of one set of traditionally gendered features over another, this should be it. *Feminisation is not feminism*, and the promotion of women (in psychology or anywhere else) is not the same as dismantling historically and culturally gendered relations of oppression (Burman, 2004; 2006b). Promoting the psychology of women runs the risk of reproducing all the same homogenisations and exclusions of the psychology of men (Burman, 1998), or the psychology of 'the' child (Burman, 1994; 2008c); instead, the task is to challenge the singularity and abstraction of the models, on which their claims to universality rely.

3. Beyond the dichotomy of women and children

Contrary to some applications of 'rights' discourse - the two categories of women and children are neither equivalent nor separable. In one way this is obvious: girls grow up to be women, so at least half the world's population of children cannot be absolutely separated from women – and indeed many international development policies take their rationale from this – as in World Bank calls to educate girls as a population management strategy, for example[5]. Further, researching with women and with children both pose particular methodological challenges since both groups are associated with the 'private', domestic sphere. This has particular consequences for the assessment of women's and children's labour, since household labour is necessary but usually not acknowledged as 'work'. Various feminist researchers of childhood have highlighted the urgency and analytic utility of addressing the complex intersections between gender and childhood. For example, Nieuwenhuys (1991; 2000; 2001; 2007) has highlighted how any adequate analysis of international child labour in relation to poverty not only has to take account of how both women's and children's household work is invisible, but also how this remains the last key resource for poor families' survival. This has particular implications for girls. Positioned as both children and incipient women, girls do both more, and more unpaid,

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[5] As in its 1980s slogan 'Education is the best contraceptive'

work - and consequently have less access to schooling - than their male counterparts. Hence *working with*, rather than attempting to resolve, this tension between girls and women allows for the attention to some interesting paradoxes. There are important relational contingencies between women and children (in relation to economic production in particular). As changing state policies on the resourcing of childcare provision highlight, there are wider (national and international) tensions and overlaps of interest between women and children. Attending to such tensions, however, emphasises the significance of gender as an interacting and intersecting axis for understanding the woman-child-state relationship (see also Burman, 2006; 2008b,c).

4. Beyond 'giving voice' to the disempowered/marginal

Debates in feminist research provide a key interpretive resource relevant for developmental research; namely, an attention to the ways power enters into the conduct as well as interpretation of research. This critique not only challenges the ethic of detachment and manipulation that underlies the aspirations of psychological research to scientific objectivity (e.g. Hollway, 1989) but also cautions against an equation of method and politics to assume that qualitative approaches are necessarily any better. They have exposed the paternalism that can underlie the drive to conduct emancipatory research (whereby the very desire to 'give voice' to the disempowered paradoxically performs those very power relations through presuming the power to bestow them (Bhavnani, 1990). That is, claims to conduct egalitarian research can instead work to better to disguise power relations that are always set up in research (though not in unidirectional ways), including how such research can colonise and extend the surveillance of marginal groups in ways that regulate them further (Scott, 1997; Parpart, 1995; Cooke and Kothari, 2001). In this sense, feminist research builds on, but goes beyond, humanist approaches to qualitative research in psychology.

These arguments are especially relevant to research with and about children. We need to be aware of how we always construct the child we write about; that is, how we *produce* (rather than find, or document) the subjects we investigate (Marks, 1996; Alldred and Burman, 2005; Alldred and Gillies, 2002). To that end, it is important both to document and to evaluate the personal and institutional agendas that inform our representations of childhood (Burman and MacLure, 2005). As Cannella and Viruru (2004) have pointed out, our images of childhood repeat many of the motifs of orientalism and colonialism: with children portrayed as the exotic, but inferior, other, while Hutnyk (2004) discusses how global inequalities are 'trinketised' through the commodification and consumption of images of childhood.

5. Beyond the individualism of psychology

I opened this paper by discussing how the paradigm of development is used to answer broader questions about the origin and nature of psychological processes. The study of child development has for too long been the arena for posing a whole range of questions that are largely unrelated to concerns with specific children's development or welfare. Developmental psychology has been the space in psychology where ideas

of the subject and society are formulated, modelled and evaluated, connect philosophical as well as psychological concerns with questions of economic and political theory. Indeed the study of the child has functioned as a key methodological tool by which national and international development can be identified, organised and planned, and we can see this very clearly in education curricula and social policies on children and families. The equation of developmental psychology with individual development itself betrays how individualism has come to relentlessly structure mainstream models and methods. Its role in strategies of individualisation (that is, intensifiying the policy focus on the measurement and maximisation of human qualities) is contributing to practices of exploitation and oppression in the name of producing flexible and employable workers (Ailwood, 2008; Fendler, 2001), and this abstracted approach has offered explanations only in the form of labelling or blaming individuals (c.f. Kessen, 1979).

From development to developments

What then is to be done? I think we have a responsibility to highlight the partial and exclusionary character of our available models; their conceptual limitations and the ways our methodological procedures covertly maintain these. But let me be make myself clear: I am not claiming we can dispense with development, or eliminate images of (either societal or individual) 'progress'. We are stuck too deep in modernist thinking and practices to imagine we could escape so easily. So this means that I am not in the business of reconstructing another (improved) version of development - for as Foucault (1977: 230) notes, 'to imagine another system is to extend our participation in the present system'.

Rather, the project is to draw attention to the partiality and limitations of all available developmental accounts, and to resist accounts of developmental completion (including that of ourselves as – perhaps - antidevelopmentalists – for that implies a finished and closed position). Moreover there are of course limits to such conceptual critiques. Any general model tends to obscure the complexity of practices and contexts of development, and the structurally diverse character of the economic, cultural and interpersonal relationships that produce these varied developments (see Cherry, 1995).

So what I am proposing is that we resist the totalizing claims to abstraction that maintain the privilege of dominant understandings of development. If we start with an understanding of development as plural, as developments, then this may foster the conditions for better images and practices around children and social relations to arise. I think that this approach corresponds to Cindy Katz' (2004) call for a 'countertopological' approach to investigating children's lives under globalization. This means that instead of focusing on generalities and normative prescriptions we should instead be attending to, documenting and publicising developments that do not fit our models and expectations. By such means we can begin to show the limits of the English-language developmental models that have structured so much developmental psychology, and open the question of what else 'developments' might be.

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