Gender, Sexuality and Curriculum Studies

The Beginning of the Debate

For many people the manifestations in recent years of the feminist movement and of the movement called 'gay' have represented nothing more than does any other protest by a group of people who might have reason to feel themselves less than equally treated in political and cultural terms. Others dismissed the intentions of these movements as abhorrent alternatives. The tendency of the public to superficiality notwithstanding, the literature emerging from these movements demands careful consideration. The serious prospect opened up in this paper is that definition by sexuality may be a fundamental underlying criterion for the entire curricular structure of an educational system.

Pinar discusses three key writers and draws conclusions that will map his future inquiry into the basis for certain curricular assumptions concerning the relative merits of subjectivity and objectivity. Pinar finds, in the differences between the mother's and the father's biological relationships with a child, both a fundamental symbol and an explanation of the relative status in education of subjectivity and objectivity. This lies in the contest of the sexes over a child's growing identification - a contest that ought to be resolvable in peaceful, collaborative ways.

In this paper I will review recent work depicting the relations between gender, sexuality, and curriculum focusing, particularly upon papers by Madeleine R. Grumet and Peter M. Taubman. This review will be followed by a discussion of Guy Hocquenghem's Homosexual Desire. Concluding the paper will be my sense of "next steps" in this beginning debate concerning gender, sexuality and curriculum.

Oedipus, anti-Oedipus: psychosexual dimensions of curriculum

Grumet begins her essay by acknowledging the dominance of correspondence theory in the sociology of education and in politically
and economically oriented curriculum theory. She shifts the focus from the political and the economic to the sexual and biological, arguing that "What is most fundamental to our lives as men and women sharing a moment in this planet is the process and experience of reproducing ourselves." (Wallerstein, 1981, pp.186-190). She notes that the word "concept" is derived from the Latin concipere semina, meaning to talk to oneself, to take together or to gather the male seed. (Miller, pp. 238-246) "Both the child and the idea are generated in the dialectic of male and female, of the one and the many, of love." (Grumet, forthcoming) The generation - and reproduction - of concepts and of children are linked semantically. There is the biological reproduction that is conception and birth; there is cultural and political-economic reproduction through the workplace. As well, there is

The reflexive capacity of parents to reconceive their own childhoods and education as well as their own situations as adults and to choose another way for themselves expressed in the nurturance of their progeny. It is this last, critical interpretation of the phrase that I wish to address in this essay because I see curriculum as expressing this third intention. Curriculum becomes our way of contradicting biology and culture. (Mitrano, 1979)

Her argument proceeds as follows. Paternity is "uncertain, inferential, transitive," while maternity is "direct". (Mitrano, pp. 211-220) Paternity exhibits an ambiguous quality, and is always mediated through the woman. Therefore the relation between subject and object experienced on the biological level of reproduction is "concrete and symbiotic" for the mother, "abstract and transitive" for fathers. If "other" or object is the child, then each parent's experience of the "other" is different. The mother identifies with the infant, as the child comes from her own body. The infant is an extension of the mother's self, but for the father the child is always an "object". There exists always distance - physical and psychic - given that the infant came to form from inside not his but his mother's body. If subjectivity refers to that which is identical to myself, to the Self, then subjectivity is understandably associated with women; it arises in the experience of childbirth, of experiencing the "object", the child, as continuous with the Self. If objectivity is other than myself, what exists "out there", discontinuous with the Self, then it is understandable that objectivity is typically associated with men. (Macdonald and Macdonald, 1975) Further, in order to achieve manhood, achieve a masculine identity, the male child must repress his identity with the female (he is an extension of her and thus identified with her) and construct an identity with that object which is always distant from him - the father. (Grumet, p. 12)

Grumet then proceeds to link materialism and idealism to the specific pattern of psycho-sexual development in the male child. The dyadic structure of materialist and idealist epistemologies is suggested by the harsh repression of the son's identification with his mother, and the tenuous and fabricated quality of the identification with the father.
Gender, Sexuality and Curriculum Studies

(p.13), whereas constructivism suggests that triangular bond that post-oedipal female child experiences (the symbiosis of the mother-daughter relationship extended to include the constructed bond with the father). "Masculine epistemologies are compensations for the inferential nature of paternity as they reduce pre-oedipal subject/object mutuality to post-oedipal cause and effect, employing idealistic or materialistic rationales to compensate as well for the repressed identification that the boy has experienced with his primary object, his mother." Thus the curriculum, as it functions to perpetuate the law of the father, attempts to contradict the inferential character of paternity. (p.14)

Molnar and Zahorik, in their introduction to the Milwaukee proceedings, use the term "control theorists" to describe those traditionalists and conceptual - empiricists whose interest is in manipulation of circumstances in order to achieve a predetermined objective. (Molnar and Zahorik, 1977, p. 5) Bauman in his study of hermeneutics correctly assesses the social scientific interest in prediction as an interest in control - which is obviously political as well as methodological. (Bauman, 1978) Never before in the curriculum literature has this drive to control been linked to the inferential character of paternity, and to the male's attempt to contradict it. This linkage - while not to be accepted uncritically - represents a considerable "step forward" in our understanding of the complexities of curriculum. To date we have attended to the political, economic and psychological functions and possibilities of curriculum. Now introduced are gender considerations which link, in Grumet's paper, autobiographical method with psychological, political, and economic issues. In this regard Grumet's essay is a remarkable achievement.

Grumet concludes the paper with two points. The first is a warning against homosexuality, a topic we will consider later. The second concluding point concerns the aspirations of a "feminist social theory". She agrees with Dinnerstein (1977) that we must reorganize patterns of childrearing to include more-or-less equal participation by fathers and mothers. Such participation "will preclude the harsh, deforming repressing of the rich and powerful pre-oedipal experience. The felt presence of both mothers and fathers in the infant's world may diminish the crippling dichotomy of the internal and external, dream and reality, body and thought, poetry and science, ambiguity and certainty." (Grumet, pp. 25-26) It may be that such syntheses will reflect themselves characterologically as well, in the development of androgynes. It may be that such individuals who incorporate both masculine and feminine elements of personality represent the next stage of revolutionary potential. With such thoughts we anticipate Taubman's Gender and Curriculum: The Politics of Sexuality and Hocquenghem's Homosexual Desire. (Hocquenghem, 1978)

Taubman begins summarizing feminist and gender work to date:

1) the methodology used (in the social sciences and disciplines generally) has prevented the elicitation of certain kinds of material;
whole areas of inquiry have been overlooked because they have not been considered worthy of study;
3) generalizations to both sexes have been made based on the study of men only;
4) the research itself, while claiming objectivity, is value laden;
5) knowledge has been seen as something external to human consciousness;
6) the difficulty of introducing new ideas has been exacerbated because the extant "knowledge" and modes of inquiry produced knowledge consonant with what is already accepted and with methodology itself;
7) what is considered knowledge is knowledge of "men", not human beings;
8) women have been devalued in all the disciplines;
9) a dualistic perspective, highly rational and technological, has guided much extant research. (p.10)

We see Grumet's association of male gender and objectivism in points four and five, and the tendency to create dualism - based on repression of the female identity and construction of a male one - in point nine.

But Taubman's interest is not psychoanalytic. In fact, he is anti-oedipal. (Deleuze, Gilles, Guattari, 1977) He utilizes the "discursive analysis" (Taubman, pp. 18, 19, 20) of Michael Foucault to detach an interpretive system such as psychoanalysis from the phenomena it presumably signifies. Phenomena (such as "pre-oedipal identification with the mother", which figures so prominently in Grumet's view) tend to be viewed as products of discursive systems. One is reminded of Szasz's critique of "mental illness" in which he insists pathology is created by the use of the term. Such concepts represent the "medicalization" of socially-unacceptable behaviour. The use of psychiatry to imprison political dissidents in the Soviet Union suggests the extreme political uses of the medical discursive system.

Taubman makes a roughly similar critique of sexual politics, arguing that the very concepts of "feminist movement" and "gay liberation" solidify and create social, political and gender divisions which do not inherently exist, and which have troubling consequences politically. Clearly, Taubman is as interested in language as he is in sexual politics, and in this regard his work continues Huebner's earlier (and apparently suspended) investigation of curricular language. (Huebner, 1974, pp. 36-) Huebner was interested in remaking curricular language so as to escape the narrowness of traditional language, a language which borrowed uncritically from social science, and in particular from behaviorist psychology. At this point Taubman appears less interested in remaking curricular language than he is in "diversifying" the language of sexual politics. But this work is significant to us in two respects. First, it raises the question of the function of the languages which constitute curriculum discourse. Do they "create" phenomena in ways similar to the way Szasz insists medical categories create mental illness, or to the way Hocquenghem
argues homosexuality is created by the term itself? Second, Taubman's essay raises an important question regarding the function of the gender work now beginning to enter curriculum discourse. Will it function to stake out and articulate hitherto unexplored domains? Will it reduce the curriculum domain by pulling us away from it, toward explicitly gender domains? Will we import uncritically -- as Huebner showed we did with behaviorism -- the assumptions of a flawed discursive system? If the very concepts which "create" the oedipal crisis are arbitrary and linked to a politico-economic-cultural system we are committed to transform (this argument is developed by Deleuze and Guattari, and extended by Hocquenghem), then their use (as in Grumet's paper) in the delineation of epistemological issues in curriculum is problematic. By implication, Taubman's thesis questions Grumet's.

There seems to be a haunting problem in the Taubman essay, however. As he reaches the logical extreme of his argument, it threatens to dissolve into silence. That is, if meaning and interpretation reside in the discursive system itself, and not in the phenomena which they symbolically portray, if theory bears no necessary or consensually determinable relation to the phenomena it purports to describe and explain, then theoretical depictions become capricious, perhaps exchangeable. Epistemology seems to become a matter solely of politics or taste. This is a different view from Giroux's point that knowledge has its political determinants and consequences. (See, for example, his "Dialectics and the Development of Curriculum Theory," The Journal of Curriculum Theorizing, 2:2, forthcoming.) For Giroux, knowledge and curriculum retain a "relative autonomy" in the social system; they can be critiqued and assessed according to their internal features, such as logicality, cohesiveness, and comprehensiveness. Such features do not constitute final or definitive criteria by which to judge curriculum, as questions of political consequences must still be asked. I do not sense such a relatively autonomous status for curriculum (or a discursive system) in the Taubman view. One senses that politics and economics themselves may be creations of specific discursive systems. We need to hear more from Taubman on this matter.

The next work I wish to examine is not curricular in nature. It extends, however, the scope of gender considerations raised in the Grumet and Taubman papers, and asks a myriad of important questions, questions to be answered over the coming years. This work was published in France in 1972 and in England in 1978; it is Guy Hocquenghem's Homosexual Desire.

Gender studies have achieved increasing attention and importance over the past ten years, and this fact is probably related to the increasing visibility and importance of the feminist movement. Issues related to homosexuality have also become more visible in the past ten years, and the homosexual rights movement is dated by Taubman as beginning with the famous Stonewall riot in 1969. (Taubman, p. 15) Hocquenghem notices that "The women's movement and the gay movement have coincided. It is as if society could not bear to see
in man what it demands to see in women, as if to dominate women and to repress homosexuality were one and the same thing." (Hocquenghem, p. 126) If misogyny and homosexual repression are co-extensive, it may be that the feminist movement may result in not only increased visibility of homosexuals, but in increased homosexual activity. Let us consider the broad outlines of Hocquenghem's thesis.

Late in the book he quotes Huey Newton approvingly: "...It is more than likely that a homosexual will be among the most revolutionary of the revolutionaries." (p. 131) Hocquenghem seems to believe that those on the "margins" of society, estranged and culturally free from the mainstream, represent most explicitly "revolutionary potential." As Weeks comments in his preface: "Only in the activity of autonomous, spontaneous groupings outside the social order, can revolution be achieved." The result, which is central to Hocquenghem's project, is a worship of the excluded and marginal as the real material of social transformation. (p. 19) Weeks observes that this view appears to ignore the reality of political process and the real power of established political authorities, a point Elizabeth Fox-Genovese makes regarding feminist separatists, especially lesbian separatists. (Fox-Genovese, pp. 94-113) To appreciate Hocquenghem's belief, some backtracking is necessary.

As the reader may recall, Freud regarded human beings as inherently bisexual. "The most important perversion, homosexuality, hardly deserves the name. It comes down to a general disposition to bisexuality... All human beings are capable of making a homosexual object-choice and have in fact made one in their unconscious." (Freud, quoted in Hocquenghem, p. 61) Further, Freud did not regard heterosexuality as self-evident or self-explanatory. "The exclusive sexual interest felt by men for women is also a problem that needs elucidating and is not a self-evident fact based upon an attraction that is ultimately of a chemical nature." (p. 61) Hocquenghem accepts this view -- that heterosexuality is not chemical or biological or "natural", and that bisexuality probably is "natural" - and wonders why homophobia is so pervasive and intense.

Hocquenghem notes that Freud saw homosexual repression as essential to the maintenance and development of civilization. In Freud's view, homosexuality denied and sublimated was the fuel for compassion and social services generally. Hocquenghem appears to take this view and turn it upside down. "Capitalist society can only organise its relationships around the jealousy-competition system by means of the dual action of repression and sublimation of homosexuality." (p. 61) That is, economic and political exploitation are the other side of compassion and social service: both are fueled by homosexual repression. In this sense capitalism and totalitarianism are complex symbolizations of male-male relationships, relationships characterized by homosexual repression and misogyny. Competition and jealousy both create and follow from these forms of economic and political organization. Hocquenghem notes, "The sublimation of homosexuality, as the basis for the functioning of the great social machines, corresponds to the oppression of the molecular by the molar
... As the collective desire, this sublimation is a means of transforming desire into the desire to repress." (p.58) Repressing homosexual desires becomes symbolically expressed in fascism.

This matter of desire becomes central for Hocquenghem. He writes

The question which the gay movement raises is not so much of the particular sexual object as that of the functioning mode of sexuality... Homosexual desire is related in particular to the pre-personal state of desire. To this is linked the fear of loss of identity, as it is experienced by the imaginary in the repressed state. The direct manifestation of homosexual desire stands in contrast to the relations of identity, the necessary roles imposed by the Oedipus complex in order to ensure the reproduction of society. p. 92).

To sire means to "bring into being," to "originate". The notion is that the male initiates the reproductive process; it is his seed which becomes the child. If the child is male, he identifies with the father, his identity represents the extension of patriarchal authority. The mother may "carry" the child, nurse it after birth, but the patriarch "owns" the child. The mother acknowledges that she is "carrying his baby." The notion of siring reminds one of Grumet's sense of the inferential quality of paternity. That is, because there cannot be definitive proof that the woman's baby is in fact sired by a particular male - this fact must be inferred - the male attempts to compensate by claiming the initiation of procreation for himself. He attempts to contradict the ambiguity of fatherhood by claiming to possess the child, by aggrandizing his procreative role, and by insisting on his authority in the family, thus precipitating the oedipal crisis. The archaic meaning of the noun "sire" is in fact "authority" or "patriarch".

To de-sire is to refuse authority, specifically the Law of the Father, law which includes for the male child repudiation of the mother and identification with the father. The homosexual may retain all or some aspects of his pre-oedipal identification with his mother. He may refuse to accept possession of the female in exchange for being with and part of her. He may refuse to exchange what Freud views as an inherent desire for his father for machismo, misogyny, and competition, characterological qualities resulting from homosexual repression. In this oedipal sense male homosexual desire attacks political authority, economic competition and misogyny. At the very least we may observe with Freud,

The behavior towards men in general of a man who sees in other men potential love-objects must be different from that of a man who looks upon men in the first instance as rivals in regard to women. (Freud, quoted in Hocquenghem, p. 91)
The story is different for the girlchild. As Chodorow and Grumet note, the female need not abandon her mother. She retains her identification with the mother, but learns to desire the father. In this way, she is complicit with her mother's acceptance of male authority, and accepting of her father's assertion of it. In the act of heterosexuality she accepts misogyny; she internalizes it. The homosexual girlchild refuses the authority of the father, refuses to accept her mother's inferior status, and undercuts his claims to power and position by remaining in love with the one who gave her birth. (For a complete and convincing account see Nancy Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978)

As Wexler has argued, representational theories of the curriculum, that is, correspondence theories of the curriculum (Henry A. Giroux has critiqued correspondence theory as well. See his "Beyond the Correspondence Theory: Notes on the Dynamics of Educational Production and Transformation," Curriculum Inquiry, forthcoming), function to diminish the autonomy of the subject. Curriculum as reflection or representation of socio-economic hierarchies and interests "...is naturalizing. It prevents awareness of tenuousness, disjunction, interruption, and possibility." (Wexler, forthcoming) What is necessary, Wexler shows, is a mode of analysis which makes

The tenuousness of the object apparent, not by contextualizing it, but by deconstructing it. To deconstruct the object...means to show how it is itself an outcome of its own composition, a result of its own internal production, and not an entity among other self-generating entities. (Wexler, p.7)

Curriculum as gender text risks this representational fallacy. To the extent curriculum is viewed as mere reflection or representation of gender, curriculum becomes a moment in a larger system, and the possibilities of anything but systemic change are obscured. (Wexler, p. 8) This risk acknowledged, curriculum as gender text can function as "deconstruction". In fact, these papers function to de-naturalize curriculum, make it appear more contingent and historically constructed, and necessarily subject to political and psychological critique. More specifically, these papers bring to light a series of significant questions regarding the importance of gender in curriculum research. These can be categorized so:

1) How influential is the pre-oedipal period, the oedipal crisis, and its resolution in the determination of fundamental cognitive tendencies?
   a) Is there and/or can there be a "women's" or "feminist" epistemology, and relatedly, a feminist curriculum?
   b) If so, what would it look like?
   c) Is there a male epistemology, and is "objectivism" in its various forms a symbolic male cognitive form?

2) How significant would a change in child-rearing patterns be in the development of character in children and in the learning styles and
successes of these children? What are the political and cultural problems and possible consequences of such changes?

3) Does the incipient discussion of gender borrow uncritically languages which create rather than portray psychological phenomena?
   a) To what extent does the language of psychoanalysis "naturalize" curriculum as gender text?
   b) In what ways does psychoanalytic language oedipal theory in particular advance our understanding of the functions and possibilities of curriculum?
   c) What are the relationships between gender analyses of curriculum and autobiographical curriculum theory, and between gender analyses of curriculum and political and economically-oriented curriculum scholarship?
   d) What conceptual form ought such analyses to take, and how can they be employed to advance curriculum theory?

4) To what extent does curriculum represent and reproduce heterosexuality and repress homosexuality?
   a) What are the relations between heterosexism, homophobia, capitalism, and totalitarianism?
   b) In what ways can homosexual desire as political insurgency "de-construct" curriculum as cultural and political text?
   c) What political issues will educators encounter as they study issues of gender and sexuality?

There are other questions as well. However, these suffice to suggest the scope and multi-dimensionality of the issues raised by these three publications. I have concluded this review with questions for two reasons. This domain is just now being "staked out" in the curriculum field. As a field, we are just beginning to decide which questions are central. Acknowledging this state of affairs, I offer these questions as illustrative, as initiating the debate which is necessary to establishing, as a field, which questions are fundamental and what methods will be employed in attempting to answer them. Secondly, I have listed questions because I have not settled on answers to them. It is work to which I intend to devote myself during the next several years.

For me there is a direct link between this inchoate interest in curriculum as gender text and my interest in autobiography as curriculum research, in the methodological and thematic shape of the reconceptualized field. I became interested in autobiography partly in protest against the "hegemony" of "conceptual-empiricism" or "theoretical paradigm" in Schwab's schema; see William H. Schubert, "Recalibrating Educational Research: Toward a Focus on Practice," Educational Researcher, pp. 314-315) in curriculum and in education generally, and partly due to its failure to solve urgent political, ethical, and epistemological problems. Gender as curriculum text continues this effort to reconceptualize curriculum studies, and continues the resistance to the "colonizing" of curriculum by "conceptual-empiricism." It is noteworthy that John McNeil in his Curriculum: A Comprehensive Introduction (pp.314-315) characterizes...
autobiographical work, and the reconceptualist movement generally, as "soft", an adjective typically associated with the female and what is feminine. The imagery of so-called empirical work ("hard" data, rigour) suggests a gender relationship. The Grumet and Taubman papers seem to confirm, at least in an initial way, these connections between gender and research. As well, they begin to provide a gender critique of objectivism in social science, in curriculum studies specifically, simultaneously providing a gender rationale for so-called "soft" methods.

As Kuhn (1970), Brown (forthcoming), and others (Forman, 1971, pp. 1-115) have demonstrated, fields do not proceed in political and cultural vacuums. It comes as no surprise to observe the relationships between major political-cultural movements in society of the past twenty years and recent curriculum research. The political emphasis of the nineteen sixties is seen in the work of Michael Apple (1979), Barry Franklin (forthcoming), Henry A. Giroux (p.20-46), Philip Wexler (Wexler, forthcoming), Jose (Rosario, 1:1, pp.136-154), Landon Beyer (9:1, pp.13-'), and others. The focus upon consciousness, autobiography and action found in Grumet (1:1, pp.191-257) and Pinar (2; p.71-92) may be related to the rise of the "new religions," or unfavorably viewed as the rise of a "culture of narcissism." (Lasch, 1979) Attacks on "scientific" models of curriculum and instruction seem to have succeeded to the extent that we now observe an important humanities and arts movement exemplified by the work of Elliott Eisner (1979), Gail McCutcheon (McCutcheon, 1:2, pp.5-25), Elizabeth Vallance, (1978), Robert Donmoyer (forthcoming), Ronald E. Padgham (1:1, pp.155-179), Jose Rosario (2:1, pp.156-177) and Francine Shuchat Shaw (2:1, pp.178-202) This trend is not related to any specific politico-cultural movement, but represents an "internal" development. The work of Florence Krall (1:1, pp.180-185, and forthcoming) exemplifies the ecological movement. The work reviewed in this paper bears obvious resemblance to the feminist and gay movements of the past twenty and ten years respectively.

Students of a discipline are historical beings as well as specialists. Understandably they are not immune from the issues which constitute the historical moment. The question concerns the relationship between issues in the culture generally and issues in the discipline. Especially in the past, curricularists have tended to employ contemporary issues journalistically, reporting them to school people. This has meant that a theoretically coherent field failed to develop. We must abandon this traditional function, reconceiving both it and the field so that our work "accumulates", increasing and diversifying our understanding of curriculum. Only with the progressive formulation of such understanding can we hope to contribute to the transformation of the school.
REFERENCES

Fox-Genovese, Elizabeth, "The Personal is not Political Enough," Marxist Perspectives, 8.