

## Gender Bias in Women

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### Abstract

The philosophical anthropologist Dorothy Dinnerstein, in her 1976 work *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise*, argued that in order for us to address the excesses of male-dominated rule in society (militarism, rapacious consumerism), we must attack the root cause of patriarchy – women’s domination of early childcare. In Dinnerstein’s analysis, dangerous and unsustainable excesses of male and “masculine” authority in adult life (excesses linked to men’s domination of political and economic institutions) arise from dangerous and unsustainable excesses of female and “feminine” authority in childhood (women’s domination of childcare). Our misogynistic tendency to make women second-class in the highest-status areas of political and professional leadership arises from our lingering, childhood resentment of women’s power over us as we experienced it in childhood. Therefore, in order to get rid of our misogyny, we must give men half of the work, responsibility, and authority associated with childrearing, according to Dinnerstein. While men’s resistance to such anti-sexist reform is well known, women’s resistance anti-sexist change is, perhaps, less generally understood. Therefore, this article draws from Dinnerstein’s philosophical framework in critically examining and comparing various manifestations of gender bias in women, including the following: scholarly documentation of maternal gatekeeping behaviors (behaviors of women in the home that may prevent men from having equal authority and responsibility in childrearing); women’s sometime tendency to discourage other women from advancing in workplace status; women’s historical resistance to political innovations, such as the Equal Rights Amendment in the United States, that would advance women’s political and professional status; and the misguided effacement of the “feminine” work of childhood educators by some “child-centered” women scholars in the education field.

### Introduction

In many ways, society today is turning away from gender bias and sexism more than at any other time in history. People in the social mainstream believe that we must encourage achievement by girls and women in traditionally “masculine” fields like politics, business leadership, science, mathematics, engineering, and technology, and that we must encourage boys and men to do traditionally “feminine” work like childrearing, nursing, and housework.

However, we have not abandoned traditional gender roles. Around the world, men comprise the great majority of political leaders, business leaders, and leaders in science and technology. And women still dominate childcare work, nursing, and elementary education.

This continuing gender segregation seems increasingly strange. Our perceptions of gender are shifting as we see more men and women who are very good at work that doesn’t fit traditional gender expectations. We are seeing more women CEO’s, women legislators, and women

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scientists; we see gay male couples successfully raising children together; and we see male nurses successfully caring for our sick and our elderly; to list just a few examples. And researchers have been searching in vain for evidence of inherent differences between male and female abilities to lead, think rationally, care, and nurture. Again and again, the evidence points to the conclusions that women can think and lead just as well as men,<sup>i</sup> and men can care and nurture just as well as women.<sup>ii</sup>

Given this situation, my question is: Why are things not changing faster? In the education courses I teach for college students preparing for jobs teaching children, why are most of my students still women, instead of being half women and half men? Why aren't the United States Congress, other national legislatures, and top business leadership anywhere near to being half women by now? Clearly we still have within us some deeply rooted gender bias, and I want to look at the roots of that gender bias in this article.

In critiques of sexism and gender bias, it often seems assumed that sexism and gender bias come only from men, or mostly from men. Men certainly do uphold and perpetuate gender-based discrimination on a massive scale. But women do it too, and it seems to me that thinking about sexism and gender bias, and about how to confront gender bias, is often impaired by failures to examine and understand gender bias in women. Therefore, I have chosen to focus here on gender bias in women.

### Dorothy Dinnerstein's Critique

To aid in my critique of gender bias in women, I will call on my favorite critic of gender bias, the psychologist and philosophical anthropologist Dorothy Dinnerstein, who wrote the 1976 book, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise*. Dinnerstein writes of how men "cling hard to their right to rule the world," and how women and men both "balk" "at any concrete step that is taken to break the male monopoly on formal, overt power." She goes on to assert – perhaps more surprisingly – that "Men's balking...could hardly matter now if women were not balking, too."<sup>iii</sup> For Dinnerstein, women's commitment to retaining male dominance is essential to continuing the male-dominated, militaristic forms of government that, in our age of nuclear weapons, threaten to destroy the human race. (Dinnerstein was an ardent anti-nuclear-weapons activist, and human survival is always in the forefront of her thinking about gender.)

What women are doing wrong, according to Dinnerstein, is dominating early childcare. She argues that we must abolish the female monopoly on early childcare because it is in reaction to women's great power over our childhood experience that we women and men create our crazily over-dominating, militaristic patriarchies. No matter how much we love our mothers and other female childhood caregivers, we also resent them because they have so much power over us when we are little; as a result, it feels good to us to create male-dominated adult institutions. However, even though patriarchy feels good, it is irresponsible and dangerous because it is rooted in a child's fantasy-laden view of women, and not in a grown-up, accurate view of women. In real life women are not the super-dominant and awesome, goddess-like creatures

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they seem to be from a child's perspective; instead they are just ordinary humans with some limitations and some exciting talents and potentialities. In real life women's power is no more threatening than other people's power, although we treat it as if it were more threatening, and as something that needs to be repressed and beaten down.

In our sexist behaviors, we do not seek to crush female power once and for all, however. Instead, when we operate in sexist ways, we do the following things: We seek to contain it by confining it to less-than-fully-adult manifestations. We prefer not to do the difficult, grown-up work it would take to see women as ordinary humans. Instead, we like thinking of women as children think of women. We see them as magical and mysterious creatures who have super-human, distinctively "feminine" powers of seduction, caring, nurturing, and comfort-giving. Even as adults, we want to believe that women can keep giving us the perfect joy and physical and emotional gratification that they could give when we were children. However, we also need to be sure that this mythically understood women's power doesn't get out of hand. We keep "feminine" power confined to unpaid work at home and to low-paying, low-status work, and we demean and under-compensate "feminine" work such as childcare and childhood education, denying it the full respect and grown-up status that we give to men's work.

Dinnerstein offers the following description of how this plays out in conventional male-female relationships:

...the complementary male and female forms of childishness help guarantee [that the history-making, public realm of human activity remains male-dominated]. Preoccupied with her shaky she-goddess bluff, with trying to embody for [human males] the magic power that the early mother embodied for both of them; sensing that [her male counterpart], by comparison, feels in fuller possession of the more finite powers that he is expected to embody; intuiting that to the tiny child in himself he looks more comfortably like papa than she, to the child in her, could ever look like mama; feeling these things, she is glad enough to see her bluff succeeding, relieved to find herself accepted by him as the one whose blessing is vital, the life-giving witness for whom he performs and whose infinite private female authority he strives to counterbalance with public male achievement. Often this performance of his seems to her comical, childish. But it is important to him, she sees, to believe that what he does would be beyond her powers; and maybe – how can she, without testing herself, be sure? – he is right. In any case, why should she challenge his bluff, since he seems disinclined to challenge hers? She is apt to be concerned not with displaying the human powers that he assumes she lacks, but with continuing to seem in command of the superhuman ones that he assumes she possesses.<sup>iv</sup>

Here, Dinnerstein usefully emphasizes the way gender bias comes from relationships we create between male and female, between "masculine" and "feminine." Following Dinnerstein, I will consider gender bias as relationally developed, and not as individually developed, in the examples I look at in the remainder of this article. I will show how gender bias is rooted in

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unhelpfully hierarchical thinking about male-female relationships – thinking that not only places men above women in hierarchies, but also sometimes places women above men in hierarchies (such as hierarchies of attributed skill in caring, nurturing, and emotional intelligence). I will move from historical examples to contemporary examples in the following discussion of women’s gender bias, ending with a critical discussion of so-called “child-centered education.”

### Women against Women’s Rights

There is a long history of women fighting to keep women locked into traditional gender roles. For some especially vivid examples of this women’s advocacy, I will now turn to women’s campaigns against women’s suffrage in the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In 1905, the Women’s Anti-Suffrage Association of the Third Judicial District of the State of New York published a book of pamphlets entitled “Arguments against women suffrage.” One of these pamphlets, entitled “Mrs. Creighton’s appeal,” was authored by the wife of a London bishop. (The women’s anti-suffrage community was transatlantic.) Mrs. Creighton was also an author of biographies and history books, and hers is one of the most eloquent among the women’s arguments against women’s suffrage. Here is what Mrs. Creighton had to say:

The power of women’s influence cannot be measured. When I speak of influence, I do not mean a conscious definite desire to guide another in some particular direction, but the effect produced upon man by a nature which he believes to be purer, nobler, more unselfish than his own. Sex is a fact – no act of Parliament can eliminate it – and woman, as woman, must be a power for good or evil over man. In her hands rests the keeping of a pure tone in society, of a high standard of morality, of a lofty devotion to duty in political life.

It is given her to make or mar a man’s life; she may not care for the power she may wish she did not possess it; but she cannot escape from its responsibilities. Would not the wise course be, to try to make herself such a woman that her influence may lift all those with whom she comes in contact? She need not have wealth or position to do this. Beside the struggling, toiling women are struggling, toiling men; each lonely worker is a power in her little sphere; she will be a greater power if she is not struggling for her rights, but is trying to live her own life nobly and unselfishly.’

Mrs. Creighton is a fine example of a woman “preoccupied with her shaky she-goddess bluff,” to use Dorothy Dinnerstein’s words. Her eloquent, almost lyrical advocacy against women’s suffrage is suffused with evocations of “woman” as having the super-human qualities that a

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mother seems to have from the perspective of a small child. For Mrs. Creighton, woman's power over men is mysterious and enormous. This power "cannot be measured," and it is the power "to make or mar a man's life." Further, women derive from some ethereal source the insight needed to keep "a pure tone in society" and "a high standard of morality," and to inspire in men a "lofty devotion to duty" in their political activities. And crucially, this power of women's is linked to women's self-sacrifice. Instead of fighting for their rights, Mrs. Creighton says, women should behave "nobly and unselfishly," presumably to retain their credibility as men's pure and lofty moral guides.

Mrs. Creighton's image of woman recalls the popular, Medieval-era and Renaissance-era European tale of "patient Griselda," and the feminine ideal that Griselda represents. In several versions of this tale, Griselda uncomplainingly submits to her husband as he takes away her first two children and tells her they will be killed, renounces her, announces that he will take a new young wife, and orders her to be a servant at his second wedding. In the end, Griselda is rewarded for her submissiveness and self-sacrifice by having her children and her wifely status restored to her by her approving husband. A message to be found both in the Griselda story and in Mrs. Creighton's anti-suffrage appeal is the following: through sacrificing all her rights and utterly effacing herself, woman is rewarded with everything she could desire.<sup>vi</sup>

A similar imagining of woman's rewards for virtuous self-sacrifice informed the activism of the women who fought to defeat the Equal Rights Amendment in the United States in the 1970's and 1980's. The proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, or ERA, would have stated that "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." The U.S. Congress passed the ERA in 1972, setting a ten-year window for the 50 U.S. state legislatures to vote on the amendment. If 38 state legislatures had voted to ratify the ERA, it would have become part of the U.S. constitution. However, although the majority of U.S. citizens approved of the amendment according to surveys conducted between 1972 and 1982,<sup>vii</sup> in the end only 35 states of the required 38 voted to ratify the ERA, and the amendment failed.

Its failure has been attributed to a highly organized group of conservative women, led by lawyer and activist Phyllis Schlafley, who campaigned vigorously against it. Like Mrs. Creighton, these conservative women feared that in fighting for their rights, women would give up the supposedly great rewards that come from virtuously self-sacrificing subordination to men. They feared that if women had equal rights such as, for example, the rights to freedom from job discrimination and equal pay for equal work, men would no longer feel obliged to be the primary breadwinners, or financial earners, in husband-wife households.<sup>viii</sup> Also at stake for these women was men's distinctively "masculine," protector role in a military capacity; the conservative women were alarmed that passage of the amendment could lead to women and men being equally required to serve in the military in the event of a draft. Women had to virtuously concede social superiority to men, it was argued, in order to receive the reward of being protected and provided for by their husbands. Again, the idea was that in sacrificing herself, woman ends up gaining all that she could desire.

## Maternal Gatekeeping and “Child-Centered” Education

In the present day, we continue to see examples of women upholding gender-biased hierarchies. Gender bias in hiring decisions was recently proved among female (as well as male) science university faculty members.<sup>x</sup> The issue of women’s gender bias in the allocation of childcare work in the home has also received researchers’ attention. It has been found that men are less likely to share childcare work equally in homes where women hold gender-traditional views, and men are more likely to share childcare work equally in homes where their wives hold gender-nontraditional views. Researchers argue that it may be that gender-traditional women have been engaging in “gatekeeping” behaviors that prevent men from doing equal childcare work.<sup>x</sup>

Women’s attachment to an unhelpful ideal of self-sacrifice can also be seen in the field of education, and specifically in the female-dominated area of childhood education where the ideal of the “child-centered” classroom often prevails. In some versions of this child-centered ideal, the teacher supposedly effaces herself or himself, and it is only the child who is important. The destructiveness of this ideal lies not only in its demeaning of educators, but also in its reprehensible failure accurately and responsibly to represent the far greater power that adult teachers (even female adult teachers) have in comparison with the small children in their care. In the classic, 1938 educational philosophy text, *Experience and Education*, John Dewey made the following, still-relevant critical remarks about educational settings where the child-centered ideal is taken to an unhelpful extreme:

Since freedom resides in the operations of intelligent observation and judgment by which a purpose is developed, guidance given by the teacher to the exercise of the pupils' intelligence is an aid to freedom, not a restriction upon it. Sometimes teachers seem to be afraid even to make suggestions to the members of a group as to what they should do. I have heard of cases in which children are surrounded with objects and materials and then left entirely to themselves, the teacher being loath to suggest even what might be done with the materials lest freedom be infringed upon. Why, then, even supply materials, since they are a source of some suggestion or other? But what is more important is that the suggestion upon which pupils act must in any case come from somewhere. It is impossible to understand why a suggestion from one who has a larger experience and a wider horizon should not be at least as valid as a suggestion arising from some more or less accidental source.<sup>xi</sup>

Essential here is Dewey’s affirmation of the teacher’s important role as guide for the students, and the teacher’s important responsibility to judiciously and appropriately draw upon her or his “larger experience” and “wider horizon” (and adult teachers inevitably will have larger experience and wider horizons than children) in guiding her or his students.

One representative example of a recent, “child-centered” educator’s failure responsibly to acknowledge the teacher’s necessary role, and power, as a guide to students may be found in Beverly Falk’s 2009 book, *Teaching the way children learn*. Identifying Jean-Jacques

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Rousseau's *Emile* as a source of child-centered educational thought, Falk writes: "Education, said Rousseau, should begin not where some adult has decided is appropriate, but where the child begins" (Rousseau, 1762).<sup>xii</sup> The flaw in this statement (leaving aside for the moment its misrepresentation of Rousseau's thought) lies in the idea that education can ever be initiated in the context of child-adult interactions without adult decision-making, and the assertion of inevitably superior adult power, occurring. As Dinnerstein emphasizes in her analysis of gender, we are deceiving ourselves if we ever for a moment imagine that children in the care of adults possess powers of decision-making or action-instigating on a level comparable with the adults' powers. Adults' power is always inescapably greater than children's power, whether or not "child-centered" educators choose to acknowledge it. It ultimately lies within the power of adults to decide whether or not the impulses and desires of small children are going to be respected. It is adults, and not children, who make decisions about where and whether educational opportunities will emerge. Adults, and not children, determine whether children will be alone or with other children, at home or at school, indoors or outdoors, playing with art supplies or sporting equipment or sticks, leaves, and rocks found outside, etc. As Dewey implies in the above quotation, the very provision of educational materials by an adult teacher is itself an educational instigation, an instance of adult guidance.<sup>xiii</sup> A teacher who, in cooperation with other adults, draws together children in a designated, educational space and provides educational materials cannot seriously claim not to be a source of educational decisions or educational instigation. Such falsely self-effacing claims by teachers are in bad faith, bad for child-adult relationships, and bad for education.

Rousseau himself (in contrast to the view Falk represents him as holding) offered the following, more accurate statement about the exercise of influence and power in interactions between adults and children:

The sphere of both [the possible and the impossible] being equally unknown to [the child], they can be expanded and contracted around him as one wants. One enchains, pushes, and restrains him with the bond of necessity alone without his letting out a peep. He is made supple and docile by the force of things alone without any vice having the occasion to germinate in him, for the passions never become animated so long as they are of no effect.<sup>xiv</sup>

Unlike the "child-centered" conception that Falk represents, in which education-instigating decision-making by adults is thought to be able to disappear, in Rousseau's conception we see greater clarity about the greatly superior power and influence that an adult has in relation to a child. Unlike Falk, Rousseau is direct about the fact that, due to the adult's vastly superior experience and intellectual powers, the adult can make it seem to the child as if behavioral constraints arising from deliberate adult decisions are not outcomes of decisions at all, but rather, simply the result of unavoidable necessity. As an example, we might think of the parent who, when confronted by a child's angry demand for ice cream at meal time, calmly replies, "Well, I wish we could have ice cream too, but right now it's time for string beans. We need to eat a healthy meal that is good for our bodies." Such statements can be effective with children and

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can arguably be an appropriate use of adults' responsibly acknowledged superior power, experience, and intellectual development in relation to the children who need their guidance.

Falk's perspective resembles those of other "child-centered education" advocates. For example, Cindy Dell Clark has asserted that, in research that serves "child-centered education," it is necessary to take an approach that is "devoid of adultist slant and charged with connecting to the voices of the young."<sup>xv</sup> Related to this, Clark cites with approval a 1991 article by Nancy Mandell that "challenged adult participant-observers to totally embed themselves in children's worlds, and to model their behavior after children's ways so that their language and actions would align with kid's roles. Mandell practiced what she preached, embedding herself within preschoolers' peer groups and inhibiting her own adult habits of dominance. In the preschool where she conducted research, she refrained from reporting children's transgressions, played whatever the kids were playing, and wouldn't come to a child's aid by doing such 'adult' things as tying shoes or pushing swings or reaching high objects. Mandell's article struck a chord with a central issue for child-centered investigators, since it addressed what practices might bring an adult into attunement with children's experiences. Mandell felt more able to notice, comprehend, and frame child-relevant meanings through the least-adult role."<sup>xvi</sup>

The error here lies in taking an effacing and pejorative attitude towards the adult role in children's lives, viewing adults who behave like adults around children as "adultist" (a word that calls to mind the word "racist"). It is difficult to see how an adult pushing children on swings and helping small children tie shoes and reach objects on high shelves constitutes oppressive "dominance." To give that connotation to those needed, adult activities is excessively to stigmatize adult power in relationships with children.

What is needed for the good of children is not the (pretended) effacement of adult power, but rather relationships between children and adults in which adults responsibly own their power as adults (instead of diminishing themselves or pretending to be children) *and* childhood experience is respected and made rich through (necessarily adult-supported) opportunities for independent thought and creativity. From a child's perspective, it is potentially terrifying, and abusive passive-aggressive manipulation, when an adult caregiver falsely poses as though she has no more power than a child. Children unavoidably need adults to behave like adults in adult-child relationships, owning and using their greater power with full, adult consciousness and responsibility in response to children's needs.

Another clear-sighted representation of adults' power is offered by Dorothy Dinnerstein, for whom such clear-sightedness in this area is necessary since her philosophy turns on the necessity of changing people's childhood experience of women's power in order to root out people's sexist reaction to women's power in adulthood. The following is an example of her thought on this subject, and on the fact that there is no denying mothers' superior power in their relationships with their children:

Mothers vary enormously, to be sure, in their use of force; some use it in only the



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gentlest and subtlest way, and some deny that they use it at all. But inescapably, they do use it: the adult must act to ensure the infant's survival, and to protect its growth, without applying beforehand for the infant's consent.<sup>xvii</sup>

Like Dinnerstein, childhood educators must be honest about the nature of the power that adult caregivers hold over children instead of being in denial about it. Child-centered approaches such as Falk's, Clark's, and Mandell's irresponsibly deny the existence of this power, pretending that a teacher can conduct herself in such a way as to make it nearly cease to exist. As educational thinking, this is misguided. Rather than being motivated by concern for what is in children's best interest (relationships in which adults fully and consciously assume adult roles, and children fully assume the role of children, in their necessarily unequal relationship), these child-centered authors are continuing the anti-women's-rights women's tradition in which women, and by extension workers in "feminized" professions such as childhood education, cultivate and act upon the delusion that their greatest and best empowerment lies in refusing to own, and to come to terms with, their status, power, and responsibilities as adults. The anti-women's-rights women held that women embracing their full adult status was a betrayal of "feminine" virtue as manifested in submission to a system giving them lesser political and economic rights compared with men. Similarly, the child-centered education advocates implicitly hold that if women (and "feminized" men) working in childhood education were to embrace their full adult status in their work, it would be a betrayal of "feminine" virtue as manifested in submission to an inappropriately diminished, semi-infantalized role in their relationships with the children they teach.<sup>xviii</sup>

## Conclusion

The movement from gender hierarchy to gender equality is impeded not only by men's sexism, but also by women's attachment to traditional gender roles. Women's attachment to the "feminine" shaky she-goddess myth must be critically challenged by women and men if we are going to work together effectively to overthrow the many forms of gender bias that continue to constrain possibilities for human self-actualization and stunt human growth in our world today. In the area of childhood education, it is especially important to challenge this attachment to sexism on the part of female (and "feminized" male) childhood educators. Honesty about, and full embracing of, childhood educators' *adult* power in their relationships with the children they teach is a necessary step in the process of challenging and overthrowing sexism that Dinnerstein indicates – a process in which we must see clearly women's great power over children and the enduring, sexist resentment of women's power that it engenders in predominantly woman-raised adults. Only when we are clear on that point can we focus, with full consciousness and purposiveness, on the necessary anti-sexist work of ensuring that childcare work (including childhood education) (1) becomes shared equally between men and women, (2) becomes better paid and more competently executed, and (3) is elevated to a high social and cultural status commensurate with its actual significance in human life. Such focus is well-served by an

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historical consciousness of women's effacement of women's power in past rights struggles, and by vigilantly critical responsiveness to new instances of that effacement that continue emerging in our time.

- i On the topic of the intellectual abilities of girls and women in comparison with those of boys and men, it has been found that, worldwide, there is no clear difference between girls' and boys' scores on high school math tests; see N.M. Else-Quest, M.C. Linn, and J.S. Hyde, "Cross-national Patterns of Gender Differences in Mathematics: A Meta-analysis," *Psychological Bulletin* 136 (2010): 103-127. Evidence has also been found that women in the workplace do not perform less well than men in the area of leadership; see A.H. Eagly, M.C. Johannesen-Schmidt, and M.L. van Engen, "Transformational, Transactional, and Laissez-faire Leadership Styles: A Meta-Analysis Comparing Women and Men," *Psychological Bulletin* 129 (2003): 569-591.
- ii For evidence pointing to the conclusion that men can nurture as well as women, see the following: L.B. Silverstein and C.F. Auerbach, "Deconstructing the Essential Father," *American Psychologist* 54 (1999): 397-407; L.B. Silverstein, C.F. Auerbach, L. Grieco, and F. Dunkel, "Do Promise Keepers Dream of Feminist Sheep?," *Sex Roles* 40 (1999): 665-688; L.B. Silverstein and V. Phares, "Expanding the Mother-Child Paradigm: An Examination of Dissertation Research 1986-1993," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 20 (1996): 39-53; and B.J. Risman and D. Johnson-Sumerford, "Doing it Fairly: A Study of Postgender Marriages," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 60 (1998): 23-40.
- iii Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (New York: Other, 1999), 160.
- iv Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*, 208-9. For other discussions of Dorothy Dinnerstein's thought in connection with education, see the following: Gregory Bynum, "The Critical Humanisms of Dorothy Dinnerstein and Immanuel Kant Employed for Responding to Gender Bias: A Study, and an Exercise, in Radical Critique," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 30 (2011): 385-402; and Gregory Bynum, "How to Grow Up, According to Immanuel Kant and Dorothy Dinnerstein" (online commentary), *Teachers College Record* (2013), accessed January 27, 2014, ID Number: 17286.
- v *Arguments against women suffrage: Pamphlets printed and distributed by the Women's anti-suffrage association of the third Judicial District of the State of New York; headquarters at Albany, NY, 1905.* (No page numbers are provided in this book of pamphlets, which may be found in the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.)
- vi The tale of patient Griselda may be found in a variety of European sources from the Medieval and Renaissance eras, and later. The last story in Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* is a version of the Griselda story. It inspired Petrarch to write his own version of the story, and Petrarch's version is in turn cited as inspiration for "The Clerk's Tale," another retelling of Griselda's story, in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. The Griselda story also appears in Renaissance visual art and in operas by Alessandro Scarlatti and Antonio Vivaldi. In the late twentieth century, playwright Caryl Churchill made Griselda a guest in the dinner party scene in her play, *Top Girls*.
- An interesting feature of the Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Chaucer versions of the Griselda story is that in all three versions the narrator, while holding up Griselda as an ideal of virtue, also expresses the wish that no other woman should have to go through the trials that Griselda endured. In Boccaccio's version the character of Dioneo, who tells Griselda's story, says: "I should like to tell you about a marquis and not about a generous act of his but, rather, about his insane cruelty, which, while good did result from it in the end, I would never advise anyone to follow as an example" (Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. Mark Musa and Peter Bondanella (New York: Penguin, 1982.) 672. Similar, negative comments about the marquis's cruelty appear in Petrarch and Chaucer. The authors seem torn to the point of almost representing Griselda, paradoxically, as an undesirable ideal. She lives the logical implications of imperatives to ideal feminine virtue (obedience, docility, sweetness, submission), and in doing so seems to exemplify the highest Christian virtue for all humans, male and female. (Petrarch particularly emphasizes the connection to Christianity in his version of her story.) Yet, in achieving her highly virtuous status, she makes the narrators who praise her uncomfortable. One senses that the ascription of virtue to Griselda, while emphatic and (in Chaucer) prolonged in the text, is also uneasy. In Petrarch and in Chaucer there is an intriguing representation of Griselda as having lost full consciousness, full aliveness, and awake-ness to the world, in the period of her trials (although, eerily, she is also represented as having been a highly competent and cheerful helpmeet in that period). When her husband finally tells her that she is restored to her former status and returns her children to her alive, Petrarch and Chaucer's Clerk describe her as having seemed to have awakened from a dream. Chaucer's text also represents a less-than-sublimely-virtuous male response to the Griselda story – the Merchant, whose tale follows the Clerk's, simply views Griselda as a woman who compares favorably with his hated, shrewish wife. He wishes he could have a wife who is sweet and obedient like Griselda simply for the sake of his own home comfort and not for the sake of any higher ideal of virtue. If the Merchant's response to the story is typical then, the reader might wonder, what value does the story have as a moral lesson, if any?
- For Petrarch's version of the tale, see Francis Petrarch, "Tale of Griselda: A Tale of Wifely Obedience and Faith" (The Geoffrey Chaucer Page), accessed September 15, 2014, <http://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/special/authors/petrarch/pet-gris.html>. For Chaucer's version and the Merchant's remarks on Griselda, see Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Clerk's Tale," in *The Canterbury Tales: Nine Tales and the General Prologue: Authoritative Text, Sources and Backgrounds, Criticism*, ed. V.A. Kolve and Glending Olson (New York: Norton, 1989), 136-169.
- vii Jane J. Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 1.
- viii Phyllis Schlafly *Report (November 1972):1*, as quoted in Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA*, 90.
- ix [Corinne A. Moss-Racusin](#), [John F. Dovidio](#), [Victoria L. Brescoll](#), [Mark J. Graham](#), and

[Jo Handelsman](#), "Science faculty's subtle gender biases favor male students," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 109 (2012), 16474-16479, accessed September 15, 2014, doi: 10.1073/pnas.1211286109.

x See the following: Sarah M. Allen and Alan J. Hawkins, "Maternal Gatekeeping: Mothers' Beliefs and Behaviors that Inhibit Greater Father Involvement in Family Work," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 61 (1999): 199-212; Jay Fagan and Marina Barnett, "The Relationship between Maternal Gatekeeping, Paternal Competence, Mother's Attitudes about the Father Role, and Paternal Involvement," *Journal of Family Issues* 24 (2003), 1020-1043; and Brent A. McBride et al., "Paternal Identity, Maternal Gatekeeping, and Father Involvement," *Family Relations* 54 (2005), 360-372.

xi John Dewey, *Experience and Education: The 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition* (West Lafayette, IN: Kappa Delta Pi, 1998), 84-85. Robert B. Westbrook has noted that, during his later years when he was a highly lauded public intellectual, "Dewey devoted the greatest energy to distinguishing his position from that of the "child-centered" progressives with whom he was most often mistakenly identified...The child-centered romantics, Dewey argued, had responded to the defects of traditional educational practice with methods of instruction that simply negated those traditionally employed without establishing a positive pedagogy of their own" (Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 502).

xii Beverly Falk, *Teaching the way children learn* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2009), 22. Falk cites Rousseau's *Emile*. Her citation reads as follows (with no translator mentioned): "Rousseau, J. (1762). *Emile*. New York: Dutton" (Falk, *Teaching the Way Children Learn*, 188). Perhaps this inadequate citation is meant to refer to the edition published by E.P. Dutton publishers in 1921 and translated by Barbara Foxley; I do not know. In any case, the Dutton publishing company of New York certainly did not publish Rousseau's *Emile* in 1762.

xiii Falk, in addition to misrepresenting Rousseau, also misrepresents Dewey's thought. She asserts that, according to Dewey, "the interests of the learner must guide curriculum development" but neglects to mention that, for Dewey, the interests of the learner are not the only influence on curriculum development (Falk, *Teaching the Way Children Learn*, 23). Equally important, as Dewey discusses at length in his writings, are the guidance and expertise of the teacher and the expertise of intellectual, social, and technological leaders with whom children should interact as much as possible, whether in person or indirectly. Far from wanting to create an isolated educational environment where children only experience and act upon their own interests, Dewey wants exactly the opposite – a world where barriers between school and society are broken down, schooling becomes a much less medieval-style, cloistered experience, and there is greatly increased interaction between children and adult professionals who are experts in a wide range of different fields of endeavor. Falk could not be more misguided in her representation of Dewey as advocating a curriculum in which nothing but children's interests are influential. (See John Dewey, *The School and Society* and *The Child and the Curriculum* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990).)

xiv Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 92.

xv Cindy Dell Clark, *In a Younger Voice: Doing Child-centered Qualitative Research* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2011), 17.

xvi Clark, *In a younger voice*, 17; Clark references Nancy Mandell, "The least-adult role in studying children," in *Studying the Social World of Children: Sociological Readings*, ed. Frances Chaput Waksler (New York: Falmer, 1991).

xvii Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*, 166.

xviii Arguably, childhood educators' submission to an economic system that pays them far too little for their work, which is thought of as "feminine"-virtuous self-sacrificing work, is another, related instance of childhood educators embracing an inappropriately self-effacing, sub-adult role.