

Theory and Research in Education

<http://tre.sagepub.com>

Educating for a just world without gender

Penny Enslin and Mary Tjiattas

Theory and Research in Education 2006; 4; 41

DOI: 10.1177/1477878506060682

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://tre.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/4/1/41>

Published by:

 SAGE Publications

<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Theory and Research in Education* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://tre.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://tre.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Educating for a just world without gender

PENNY ENSLIN AND MARY TJIATTAS

University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

ABSTRACT

In this article we examine Okin's ideal of a 'gender-free society' and its relations to central educational values and practices. We suggest that this ideal pervades her work on the family, culture and, more recently, her focus on the developing world, and gives her liberal feminist stance its radical bite. We contrast this ideal with the more standard notion of gender-neutrality (non-discrimination) and argue that Okin's more demanding concept (going beyond equal access to positions, benefits and opportunities as currently defined, to insist on the critical overhauling of the systems that determine them) far better accords with requirements of justice. We then go on to explore the contribution to a 'gender-free society' of construing women's rights as human rights which Okin saw as crucial to countering threats against gender equality from competing claims of both multiculturalists and economic development theorists. We consider implications for education (including schooling) arising from the commitment to bring about a 'gender-free society'.

KEYWORDS *autonomy, family, gender, liberal feminism, Okin, women's rights*

INTRODUCTION

SUSAN MOLLER OKIN'S ideal of a 'gender-free society' pervades her work, giving her liberal feminist stance its radical flavour. In much of her work she upholds liberal commitments in their strongest forms and resists cultural relativist pressures, insisting that the liberal ideal, properly realized, entails far reaching changes to the social structure of contemporary liberal-democratic societies, and makes possible new, more desirable, ways of life.

This is apparent from her early analyses in *Women in Western Political Thought* (1979), where she focuses on the history of political philosophy in order to '[lay] bare the assumptions behind deeply rooted modes of thought' (1979: 3) concerning the nature of women and their place in the social and political

Theory and Research in Education

Copyright © 2006, SAGE PUBLICATIONS, www.sagepublications.com

VOL 4(1) 41-68 ISSN 1477-8785 DOI: 10.1177/1477878506060682

order, which help to explain why women do not enjoy substantial equality even where they now enjoy formal equality (1979: 4) through *Justice, Gender, and the Family*, where she explicitly argues for greater justice of a future society free from gender (1989a: 171). Her numerous papers over the years can be seen as taking up and elaborating on the many aspects and implications of this ideal. In the meticulous consideration of empirical examples and evidence that is a hallmark of Okin's philosophical work she regularly comments on the significance of education. Her work has done much to expose the role of gender discrimination in education, unequal educational opportunities for women, and sheer lack of access to education in fostering gender inequality. Nonetheless, the question of what a gender-free world requires of formal schooling is underdeveloped in Okin's work, since she herself does not present an extended discussion of the role of education in fostering social justice. In her discussions of the restructuring of the public and private spheres and their interrelations, and the interventions, educational and otherwise, that this would require, she had more to say about the role of moral education, in schools and families, than about political education. But the latter surely has important contributions to make as well. How should education contribute to the full exercise of women's rights as human rights? Is learning about rights and democracy sufficient? What are the implications for both formal and non-formal education, with respect to adult women as well as girls?

Moreover, Okin does not address, nor explicitly relate her own discussions to, recent work in global justice. Her focus, for the most part, has been on changes to an account of social justice that is meant to apply to the 'basic structure' of a domestic state rather than to social structures globally. In so far as her concerns go beyond the confines of the USA, they centre on actual social and political movements and the activities of policy makers rather than on theoretical issues concerning globalization. With respect to global issues, her attention is on questions of democratic legitimacy rather than gender justice and equality. However, there are important questions about whether and how her arguments about the shortcomings of domestic arrangements with respect to justice apply globally, and whether her approach could be extended to yield a liberal feminism with a global scope.

In this article, we argue that Okin's ideal of a gender-free society is crucial to the attainment of social justice, both domestic and global. We maintain that this is the case even in the face of some evidence that Okin herself wavered in the face of worrying protestations by women in oppressed groups that gender equality was not always what they would choose, given other cultural values which they embrace. Moreover, we believe that the ideal needs to be systematically extended in its range (by addressing some of the requirements recently brought to the fore by theorists of global justice) and that more

emphasis needs to be placed on the implications of a gender-free world on children, who often have the most to lose from a society with a rigid gender-hierarchy.

WHY A GENDER-FREE SOCIETY?

The ideal of a 'gender-free society' may strike some as unduly perfectionist, not to say utopian. However, Okin's many clarifications make it clear that it is in line with mainstream liberal conceptions of social justice. Rawls famously argued that deep inequalities resulting from differential social structuring are those to which the principles of social justice must apply 'in the first instance'. No one should gain 'from his arbitrary place in the distribution of natural assets or his initial position in society without giving or receiving compensating advantages in return' (1971: 102). This is because natural endowments (talents, abilities, qualities) are undeserved, their possession a matter of luck, and so it would be arbitrary to make them the ascriptive basis for social distribution. Gender inequality counts as a case in point if any does.

By 'gender' Okin means 'the deeply entrenched institutionalization of sexual difference' (Okin, 1989a: 6; see also 1996b: 30). A gender-free society would be one in which there are no rigid sex-role prescriptions or expectations in either public or private life. This would greatly benefit both women and children, enhancing equality of opportunity, and, crucially, would result in a formative childhood environment where the development of a 'sense of justice' is much more likely to be fostered. As Okin sees it, working out the implications of what a gender-free society requires effectively transforms a patriarchal theory of justice into a 'humanist' one, 'the disappearance of gender is a prerequisite for the *complete* development of a non-sexist, fully human theory of justice' (Okin 1989b: 105), and crucially includes a critical evaluation of both the conception and the application of the private/public distinction.

Okin has repeatedly argued that the unquestioning acceptance of this distinction, both theoretically and institutionally, has led to the entrenchment of a 'spiral of vulnerability' to which women (and so children) are systematically susceptible. For a liberal theorist, there is a real dilemma here, since the distinction has been one of the most powerful tools in claims for individual freedom and protection from intrusive government measures. However, as Okin and others have repeatedly insisted, for women it has been a double-edged sword, since it has masked their confinement to the private realm, where they remain unprotected from abuse, without legal recourse, unable to exercise political rights.¹ Furthermore, the gendered structure of family life has further deleterious effects on women's place in the public realm.

In *Women in Western Political Thought*, Okin makes clear the wide-ranging

significance of her call for a gender-free society. She draws attention to a pervasive but virtually unrecognized obstacle to justice by crediting Plato's treatment of women in Book V of the Republic as being:

one of the very few instances in the history of thought when the biological implications of femaleness have been clearly separated out from all the conventional, institutional, and emotional baggage that has usually been identified with them. (Okin, 1979: 40)

She goes on to claim (with reference to Plato's markedly different views in the *Laws*) that it was his dismantling of the family (where woman's nature is defined by her function with respect to its needs) that led to his appreciation of woman's potential abilities (1979: 42–3).

Okin goes on to show that a particular kind of functionalism closely aligned with the private/public distinction infects legal thought (in the USA) as well, leading to a host of sexually discriminatory judicial decisions (1979: 247). She cites the much laxer standard of judicial review (up until the 1970s) applied to discrimination on the basis of sex than to discrimination on other grounds, the court's justification being that 'the Constitution does not require things which are different in fact or opinion to be treated in law as though they were the same' (1979: 253). She comments that, in supporting two distinct standards of judicial review for deciding whether laws differentiating between classes of persons are in violation of the Due Process/Equal Protection Clauses of the Constitution, the court explicitly took the pertinent question to be: what are women *for*? (Okin, 1979: 257), and answered it by saying that women are defined in accordance with their function within the family. As a result, it found sex to be a reasonable basis of classification. Okin argues that, despite the recognition in the 1970s by some high-court judges that sex, like race, alienage and natural origin is an 'inherently suspect' classification, so that sex discrimination can't be validated by the 'reasonable classification' standard (1979: 267), the implicit assumptions about the proper and natural role of women continue to underpin discrimination against them (1979: 272). Formal elimination of sex discrimination has not disabled the assumption that biological differences are inevitably and unquestionably tied to the set of characteristics and functions defining the conventional female sex role.

Although Okin does not go so far as to demand the abolition of the family, she does call for radical structural changes both in the family and in conditions of work in accordance with principles of justice (1979: 295). Most crucially this would call for a merging of the private/unproductive functions of family life and public/productive work of market economy, because 'Women cannot become equal citizens, workers, or human beings – let alone philosopher queens – until the functionalist perception of their sex is dead' (Okin, 1979: 304).

THE CONTENT OF THE IDEAL: WHAT A 'GENDER-FREE
SOCIETY' INVOLVES

A somewhat different, but evocative way to describe Okin's ideal is to say that it corresponds to what Sunstein (1995: 332) calls an 'anticaste principle,' one which would 'forbid social and legal practices from turning sex, a morally irrelevant characteristic, into a systemic source of social disadvantage'. Okin (1994a) explicitly endorses this principle as one that would deliver substantive equality.

For the notion of a 'gender-free society' to be effective in realizing a more just world, it needs to be more demanding than a concept of a society with *formal* equality between the sexes. Although women are now formally citizens in the Western and much of the non-Western world, 'enfranchised members of the political realm' (Okin, 1979: 3), these gains have fallen short of real economic and social equality. Women are still *de facto* second-class citizens. They trail behind men in terms of economic independence, education, occupational status and even more so in terms of political participation and power (Okin, 1979: 3-4). The 'gender-free' ideal demands more than formal equality of rights.

The notion is also more demanding than that of a gender-neutral or sex-blind society in which gender doesn't enter into the awarding of benefits, one unyielding in applying the principle of gender-neutral access to existing social benefits and opportunities. The reason this isn't sufficient to ensure a gender-free society lies in historical circumstances. Gender inequalities have been built into contemporary social structures and arrangements. Anti-discrimination measures on their own cannot discern and so redress inequalities that have arisen as a result of unjust practices in the past. Although gender-neutral on the face of it, that is, in their formulation, they can nevertheless be sexist in effect, because based on interests and values inimical to women or which burden them disproportionately, so setting back the cause of equality (Sunstein, 1995: 344-5). The ideal of a gender-free society then indicates that the account of sexual inequality needs to go beyond arbitrary discrimination to address a change in background conditions, that is, to the structures that generate inequalities. It demands more than non-discriminatory laws and policies.

The demands entailed by this substantive ideal, although extensive, are in line with contemporary accounts of egalitarianism, which accord considerable weight to the distinction between chosen and unchosen disadvantage in considering claims for redistribution. The historical record clearly shows that gender inequality cannot be held to be the result of women's choices. In fact, it constitutes strong grounds not only for formal equality but also for

compensatory measures. Moreover, if, as Okin (1995, 1999), Anderson (1999) and Young (1990) insist, egalitarianism also endorses the distinctively political aim of ending domination and oppression, it would require that hierarchical social orders be dismantled.

Both Young and Anderson focus on agency and in particular capabilities in this connection, complementing Okin's approach. Anderson says that, of all the capabilities, those which allow citizens to fend off attempts to oppress and dominate them are the most important, and Young draws our attention to the important role that capacities for deliberation and decision-making play. Okin's suggestions focus in the first instance on structural changes in institutions and in particular on achieving the 'internal justice of the family', elaborating on Rawls's discussions of the family both as the school of moral development, where a sense of justice is initially fostered, and as part of the basic structure, which has a pervasive effect on our life prospects and opportunities and on our conceptions of the good life.² The family, both historically and currently, is the site of a myriad of inequalities and injustices, which fall most heavily on women and children. This is so for the developed world, and the situation in poor countries is 'similar but worse'. The family's gender-structure causes vulnerability of women and children, one important aspect of which is the severe curtailment of opportunities for self-realization and the development of capacities required for living a more fulfilling life.

Okin is concerned to underline the point, which she thinks is not sufficiently foregrounded by Rawls, that the disappearance of gender would enhance justice:

the genderless family is more just . . . it is more just to women; it is more conducive to equal opportunity both for women and for children of both sexes; and it creates a more favourable environment for the rearing of citizens of a just society. (Okin 1989a: 183)

In particular,

children of both sexes in gender-free families would have . . . much more opportunity for self-development free from sex-role expectations and sex-typed personalities than most do now . . . children's attitudes and psychologies will become even less correlated with their sex. In a very crucial sense, their opportunities to become the persons they want to be will be enlarged. (Okin, 1989a: 184–5)

Okin makes several suggestions about what needs to be done (1989a: esp. Ch. 7 and elsewhere) by way of reforming basic institutions. Measures need to be developed to reduce the cycle of vulnerability that women experience both at home and at work. These include adopting public policies and laws that assume no gender differentiation with respect to parenting tasks (1989a: 175), and workplace reforms in accordance with the assumption that workers are parents (1989a: 176). More controversial, perhaps, but of particular

relevance to our concerns, are the elimination of sex stereotyping in schools (1989a: 177), and requiring that schools ensure that children 'become fully aware of the politics of gender' (1989a: 177). A curriculum constructed along these lines can be expected to go a long way toward developing the capacities that Young and Anderson envisage.

Universal access to schooling is an urgent priority; the goal of the Global Campaign for Education is primary schooling for all by 2015 (Netaid, 2005). This is a daunting commitment, since some 65 million girls worldwide are denied access to formal education (Netaid, 2003). But while it is widely held that gender equity is promoted by girls' access to schooling, there is a tendency to emphasize the benefits of girls' attendance for their families and communities at the expense of recognizing their effects on girls' autonomy and agency. Unterhalter's and Dutt's research (2001: 58) leads them to maintain that 'the inclusion of girls and women in formal education programmes has not necessarily led to an end of gender discrimination in education or any other social sphere'. Widened access to schooling alone will not take us far enough toward an education for a world without gender, though it is a necessary part of a set of strategies that must also include the promotion of curricula that address the role of cultural practices in gender discrimination. Given the flaws in a strategy focused solely on formal schooling, the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in promoting women's non-formal education and empowerment becomes all the more crucial.

In general terms, substantive gender equality, for Okin, requires that rights central to social justice be extended to women in both domestic and public realms simultaneously. If women are to enjoy the 'fair value' of their human rights, structural reforms are required to bring both in line with principles of justice. As Okin never tires of pointing out, the household, that 'most private sphere of life', is also the site of gender construction and inequality (Okin, 1998b), so generating and sustaining inequalities of the public domain as well. Breaking the 'cycle of vulnerability', realizing a gender-free society, requires an augmentation of the reach of human rights. Moreover, as we shall see in the following section, numerous human rights violations against women take place in the domestic realm where the perpetrators are other family members (see Okin, 1998a, 2003), further emphasizing the importance of bringing this realm into the purview of social justice.

A 'GENDER-FREE' SOCIETY AND THE IRREPLACEABILITY OF RIGHTS

It seems obvious that rectifying past injustices in line with the 'gender-free' ideal needs to marshal the resources attaching to rights, human and otherwise.

Construing a gender-structured society as violating essential human rights would provide the required leverage for women to insist on protections from government and international organizations.

An important development in this regard has been the recent movement for women's rights as human rights, which has taken a crucially important step in endorsing universal human rights (Okin, 2003). Emanating from grassroots women's organizations worldwide, the commitment to women's rights as human rights made at the Platform for Action, Beijing Conference of Women, September 1995, gives highest priority to the fulfilment of women's basic needs, and very encouragingly adopts explicit anti-relativist positions on the priority of women's human rights over claims from historical, cultural, religious backgrounds. This effectively ended disputes (at least in the activist arenas)³ about whether the circumstances of women varied too much to allow for any common concerted policies or actions. At the same time this movement extended the prevailing discourse of human rights, taking it beyond the UN's customary anti-discrimination paradigm (Ackerly and Okin, 1999: 142).

As Kaplan (2001a, 2001b), Peters and Wolper (1995) and others confirm, the endorsing of universal human rights went together with the decision to challenge the public/private distinction, opening the way to extending the list of human rights violations beyond the public sphere to such abuses as female genital mutilation, enslaving servants and child prostitutes, and domestic abuse. The more general effect has been to reshape the language of politics, placing the call for women's human rights at its centre. The motto 'Women's Rights as Human Rights' marked common ground between women from developed and developing countries.

Cultural differences were explicitly rejected as grounds for violating universal ethical human standards, and most countries endorsed the priority of international human rights for women over both national and customary law. Commitments to international platforms set moral standards, providing women's grassroots movements with leverage to apply to their own governments. In the Beijing Platform for Action, domestic violence, marital rape and rape during war were declared to be fundamental human rights violations in international law, and cliterodectomy a form of mutilation and so a serious kind of child abuse.

The Beijing Platform for Action, the document produced by official government representatives and passed by 132 of 185 governments, allowed for a broad definition of human rights, including social, economic and political rights. More specific calls were for an end to gender discrimination in education by 2005, and for women to hold at least 30% of all decision-making positions in government.

Activists have embarked on a mission to create a new global community, and the notion of women's rights as human rights is intrinsic to it. Women's human rights now promise the right to a good life, free from torture, intimidation, scarcity and pollution, with access to good education, health care, choices about childbearing, and meaningful work. (Kaplan, 2001b: 303)

Okin has commented favourably on this development. In Beijing 1995, she notes, the 'no cultural exemptions' clause adopted after considerable struggle, enabled the international community to put abuses of women as human rights violations on the table (Okin, 2003: 38). Third world feminists and grassroots activists and some Western feminists prepared to 'buck the tide' were working to achieve recognition by the international human rights community of women's rights as human rights and were coming to very different conclusions than were postmodernist and anti-essentialist academic feminists.⁴ Women across the globe, it was made clear, share many legitimate grievances: discrimination, gender-based violence and exploitation. This broad-based consensus accords with Okin's often-voiced caution not to allow cultural differences to 'lead to a slide towards relativism' (Okin 1994b: 5). Noting Nussbaum's warnings about 'the worship of difference', she says

This conclusion – that the problems of other women are 'similar to ours but more so' – is exactly the one I reach when I apply some Western feminist ideas about justice to the situations of poor women in many countries. (Okin, 1994b: 20)

It must have been gratifying to Okin to have had the grassroots movement supplying independent confirmation of this position, so supporting the feasibility of a 'world without gender'.⁵ The decisions at the Beijing Conference hold out the hope that the authority of rights-talk will lead to some measure of improvement in the lives of women with respect to domination and oppression.

Moreover, these events seemed to underline the importance of listening to 'the silent voices' of women in poor and otherwise oppressive circumstances in determining appropriate aid and other interventions. It also provided the occasion for her to engage more explicitly and at some length with democracy, writing with Brooke Ackerly (Ackerly and Okin, 1999) about the problems and the opportunities that globalization poses for democracy. While globalization has some anti-democratic tendencies that undermine the political and economic power of the poor, 'there are some aspects of globalization that, far from endangering democracy, present new opportunities for democratic participation and popular influence to merge and to affect international law-making' (Ackerly and Okin, 1999: 134).

Ideas generated at the grass roots spread to, and influence, international diplomats and policy-makers, and, in turn, ideas adopted in international fora are able to affect people's thinking and their daily lives with unprecedented speed. (Ackerly and Okin, 1999: 134)

Ackerly and Okin see NGOs as playing an increasingly vital role as a democratic influence, in transmitting ideas and information between the grassroots, regional representation, to international fora – and presumably back again. While making effective use of global communications to promote awareness of violations of women's rights as human rights, they do so in a way that promotes inclusion and deliberative inquiry among their members. Tactics of the NGOs and women's rights movements have included information gathering about discrimination and violence against women, challenging collective or group rights and traditional practices, supporting local activists, documenting and publicizing violations of women's rights, caucusing and lobbying.

The successes of these movements lead Ackerly and Okin to suggest that civil society can now be understood in international as well as domestic terms. They are probably right, but their observations prompt further questions, centrally about participation in politics by the masses of the poor, independently of the NGOs which have championed their cause. If democratic politics is to be opened to the poor – especially poor women – they need to achieve agency in the face of formidable odds that include repressive governments, the debilitating effects of poverty, and social contexts that discourage or even forbid female participation. In turn, this suggests an ambitious educational agenda which ought to offer those presently poor and undereducated the opportunity to acquire those sophisticated capacities now restricted to the NGOs and organized women's movements.⁶

The recent emphasis on women's rights by powerful agencies like the World Bank is important in this context. Obviously, their prodigious resources could be well used to promote the empowerment of women and so gender equality (Keohane, forthcoming). However, two considerations need to be kept in mind. First, the effects of World Bank and IMF (International Monetary Fund) policies in the past have not always been salutary. The structural adjustment programmes that they imposed on poor countries as conditions on borrowing have undermined egalitarian distributions of goods.⁷ Second, their recent promotion of women's rights treat these as means to other ends, justifying this endeavour as a remarkably efficient way of promoting economic growth, as a 'high-return investment' (Coleman, 2004). While studies focusing on the correlations between fostering women's rights (including implementation in the form of funding education and financing women's activities) and economic growth and poverty alleviation (World Bank, 2001) are strategically useful, and provide some reason to hope that women's rights will continue to enjoy the attention of development organizations, it remains somewhat disturbing nonetheless that economic growth is so insistently invoked as the predominant rationale for promoting rights. Aside from resting women's rights on a shaky foundation, effectively construing them as dependent goods, such

arguments also obscure the important connection between rights and fundamental values of justice and agency. Rawls (1971: 3) said it most strikingly: 'Justice is the first virtue of social institutions . . . laws and institutions no matter how efficient and well-arranged must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust.' From a moral point of view the importance of women's rights is first and foremost a matter of promoting women's agency. To present rights in the way the World Bank does might well have merited the criticism that Okin made in other contexts (Okin, 1979, 1996a), namely, that a significant contributor to gender inequality is the portrayal and treatment of women not as ends in themselves but as a mere means to the welfare of others.

CHALLENGES AND OBJECTIONS

In this section, we address some difficulties with the notion of a gender-free ideal. We discuss first difficulties of imaginability and then difficulties of desirability and feasibility.

A first set of difficulties concerns Okin's stringent conception of liberal justice, and involves the very idea of a gender-free world. Some theorists, otherwise sympathetic to feminist objections to traditional approaches to political theory, nevertheless express an inability to envision what Okin proposes. Susan Wolf (1995) remarks:

Perhaps . . . a genderless world would be wonderful. But I cannot really conceive such a world in any detail, and I haven't any idea of how speculations about the possibility and desirability of eradicating gender altogether could be defended responsibly. At present, our gender so deeply affects who we are, how we are treated by others and how we think of ourselves, that it is difficult to imagine what it would be like for one's sex not to be a deep part of one's identity. In light of this, it seems we should be reluctant to make larger or more general claims about these issues than we need. (Wolf, 1995: 113)

Wolf is right in observing how deeply gender affects who we are⁸ but her suggestion that rather than insisting on a single norm for men and women we should protect against exclusion of women from the definition of human nature by ensuring that women as well as men participate in the task of theory construction is troubling. In particular, it elicits worries concerning preferences formed under oppressive conditions. In addition, the ideal of a gender-free world need not make radical claims about changes in identity. As Okin explicitly said, she did not envisage the gender-free world as 'one inhabited by species of hermaphroditic looking beings'. As we have suggested, its content can be specified in more familiar (and widely understood) terms, for example of egalitarian principles of justice, or of an anti-caste principle. It does not seem to us that Okin was proscribing a conception of the good in which one takes 'one's sex seriously as a significant feature of one's identity' (Wolf, 1995:

114) as long as this is not due to one's upbringing in an unjust hierarchically structured system, or an uncritical acceptance of an 'ascriptive designation of positions and expectations of behaviour in accordance with the inborn characteristic of sex' (Okin, 1989a: 103). However, this condition is, for the foreseeable future, very difficult to satisfy, given that:

All of us have been affected, in our very psychological structures, by the fact of gender in our personal pasts, just as our society has been deeply affected by its strong influence in our collective past (Okin, 1989a: 171)

The feat of imagination that Okin encourages us to achieve is, parallel to that prefigured in Rawls's description of the 'original position', one which, as she points out, Rawls himself takes to be challenging, requiring a 'great shift in perspective' from the customary one (Okin, 1989a: 105).

Korsgaard's response to Wolf (1995) holds out hope that Okin's gender-free society is not as utopian as it might at first seem to be. Korsgaard (1995: 401) denies that 'gender has to be or should be a deep fact about the identity of a human being' notwithstanding that the pull of gender identification on many contemporary women is strong (since it meets the need for a 'sense of shared history and a shared fate'). But Korsgaard, in line with Okin's explanation of our attachment to gender identifications, attributes this to 'growing up under the same oppressive gender ideals, being assigned the same tasks, and having the same presumptive sexual orientation', and so predicts that 'The identification produced by this shared history will disappear to the extent that more arbitrary features of gender-identification are abolished from our lives' (Korsgaard, 1995: 403). Her diagnosis of the imaginability objection, then, is that what causes the cessation of gender identification to seem so 'science-fictional' is that the recent history of the two genders has *de facto* been so different, thus ensuring that gender remains a central component of our identities. However, she says, 'this is a fact about where we stand in history, not about our own nature. There are other tasks for human beings to perform and so to share. With luck we will move on' (Korsgaard, 1995: 403).

Although Okin has not addressed the question of imaginability in the abstract, many of her proposals about changes required for enhanced justice of social arrangements indicate how these problems might dissipate if they were implemented:

the example of co-equal parents with shared roles, combining love with justice, would provide a far better example of human relations for children than the domination and dependence that often occur in traditional marriage. The fairness of the distribution of labour, the equal respect, and the *interdependence* of his or her parents would surely be a powerful first example to a child in a family with equally shared roles. Second . . . having a sense of justice requires that we be able to empathize, to abstract from our own situation

and to think about moral and political issues from the points of view of others. (Okin, 1989a: 185)

The second set of difficulties that exercised Okin centred on challenges to feminist liberalism posed by cultural relativism. As long as the challenge is framed in terms of a clash between women's interests and those of cultural traditions, Okin's position is very close to Nussbaum's (Okin, 1995: 294): Nussbaum advises that in dealing with different cultures one should not be too hasty to relinquish critical distance and turn to the worship of difference.

In several of her papers (for example, Okin, 1999, 2002), Okin addressed the serious problem of accommodating diversity in a liberal democracy. What should liberal states do when minority cultures or religions make claims that clash with norms of gender equality that are (at least formally) endorsed by the majority culture? She brings out in a forceful way the deep tensions in liberal arguments for group rights (often in the form of exemptions for religious or other cultural practices) based on autonomy or tolerance (Okin, 2002). Okin acknowledges, that while autonomy or tolerance might well provide legitimate grounds for such exemptions, there need to be assurances, at the very least, that vulnerable members of minority groups (especially young women) are adequately represented in any negotiations for awarding group rights (Okin, 1999), and that the right to exit one's group of origin trumps any group right to mitigate the harm of group injustice/oppression.

However, she expresses scepticism about the actual protections afforded each of these restrictive measures, and about whether it is possible to allow 'all the voices' to be heard, and still come up with a coherent and workable theory of justice (Okin, 1995: 274). The worry, as she so clearly conveys in this paper, is that in many situations, women actively participate in and appear to endorse oppressive practices, thus rendering any proposed exertions on their behalf to end oppression appear paternalistic, an infringement of their autonomy. In response she suggests not that we take this to be merely a *seeming* case of oppression, but rather that we do not always find out what is just by asking persons who seem to be suffering injustices what they want (Okin, 1995: 292). She goes on to remind us that oppressed people use a vast range of psychological mechanisms to cope with their circumstances, and concludes

it would be ethically deeply mistaken to attach a correspondingly small value to the loss of people's well-being because of their using such survival strategies.⁹ Coming to terms with very little is no recipe for social justice. (Okin, 1995: 292)

Formal representation does not guarantee just outcomes in the absence of other important conditions being met.¹⁰

Neither is the 'right to exit' the panacea that some liberal theorists often claim. Even where there are formal rights of exit, in most actual circumstances

they are far from fully realizable, resulting in serious gender inequality. The problem is that conditions that are most likely to motivate women and girls to invoke this right are ones in which they have been treated in ways that restrict or undermine their capacities to break away or to be able to construct feasible alternative lives for themselves (Okin, 2002: 207). Extending special group rights has the predictable effect of exacerbating private-sphere discrimination against women and girls, which has deleterious effects on their current and future opportunities. What would it take for women to have a realistic right of exit? Much better education for girls, for one. In many of the world's cultures (especially in poorer countries and Muslim countries) girls receive less education than boys. Not surprisingly, illiteracy rates are higher for women in many countries. In addition, the kind of education that girls receive, both formal and informal, disproportionately affects their potential to exit. They are socialized into oppressive practices, and provided with education that fails to prepare them for alternative modes of life, which is essential for a realistic/substantive right of exit.

In general the conditions for 'meaningful' right of exit (namely, awareness of alternatives to current way of life, the ability to assess them, freedom from brainwashing and coercion in general, the ability to participate effectively in other ways of life) fail to be satisfied. Even if such conditions were to be satisfied, this would only be because many other basic human rights had already been secured. At least on the face of it, meaningful exit and group rights are in very deep tension.

Beyond the question of what it takes for a right of exit to be 'meaningful', Okin points out that even realistic rights of exit provide no help to women or members of other oppressed groups who are deeply attached to their cultures but not their oppressive aspects.¹¹

To call on the right of exit as a palliative for oppression is unsatisfactory for another reason, too, for in many circumstances, oppressed persons, in particular women, are not only less able to exit but have many reasons not to *want* to exit their culture of origin; the very idea of doing so may be unthinkable. (Okin, 2002: 207)

Even the realistic possibility of exit does not meet requirements of justice. Exit is always unfairly costly for the exitor, even in the most favourable circumstances, i.e. where conditions of 'meaningful' exit have been met.

Okin's tone in 'Multiculturalism and feminism: no simple question, no simple answer' (2005) is much more conciliatory with respect to culture-based claims when they are made by the affected women themselves, even allowing that such claims might be grounds for compromise on norms of gender equality, at least temporarily. Moreover, she accepts that the way tensions between multiculturalism and feminism are resolved should be at least partly

determined by specific contexts, and especially by heeding the ‘voices of women’ – particularly young and oppressed women. This leads her to concede that a democratic (rather than liberal) standard could be appropriate in determining what is legitimate or justifiable accommodation of cultural claims, saying that ‘the women of cultural or religious groups need to be consulted when any group rights are negotiated between such groups and liberal states’ (Okin, 2005: 76) and that acceptance of cultural claims should in part depend on whether the affected women consent to them or not. Moreover, she is wary of setting the standards for consent too high (see her criticism of Friedman) fearing that this might exclude non-autonomous women from deliberation and decision-making.¹²

It may be that the augmentation of subject matter in Okin’s later work (to include less developed countries (LDCs)) motivated a shift of normative ground. In dealing with LDCs she seems more inclined to evaluate practices and institutional structures in terms of democratic legitimacy rather than principles of justice. This may be a sign that she came to find it difficult to insist on her liberal egalitarian principles in the face of opposition from women, especially women who had been or were currently being oppressed.

In Okin (1995) she confidently asked the rhetorical question, *How can all the voices express themselves and be heard and still yield a coherent and workable theory of justice?* (Okin, 1995: 274), implying that this cannot be done, reminding us that we do not always find out what is just by asking persons who seem to be suffering injustices what they want, that oppressed people have often internalized their oppression so well that they have no sense of what they are justly entitled to as human beings (Okin, 1995: 292). And in Okin (1994a) she objected to Rawls’s political liberalism on the grounds that toleration of a wider range of comprehensive philosophical, religious, moral doctrines comes into conflict with important means by which greater equality between the sexes might be promoted (Okin, 1994a: 28).

However, by 1999, she expresses concern about the way in which cultural practices are transformed in the course of eradicating oppressive practices, on the grounds that they are often so closely tied to cultural identity, and in two later articles (2003, 2005) worries that autonomy conditions on the acceptability of cultural practices might undemocratically exclude non-autonomous women from decision-making in relation to their own cultural traditions (2005), urging scholars to ‘listen to the silent voices’ of those women (2003). These concerns are well captured in her discussion of women members of groups oppressed at the hands of colonial powers. Okin presents their predicament and the respect they are due as follows. These women

have many reasons to identify with their culture or religion (as well as with their sex). Thus they should be taken seriously if, when consulted in truly non-intimidating settings,

they produce good reasons for preferring to continue aspects of their traditional subordinate status over moving to a status of immediate equality within their group. (Okin, 2005: 87)

To long-time followers of Okin's work these stances may seem discordant.¹³ Does this reflect a major change in her theoretical positions, an unresolved ambivalence about the priority of values of justice over democracy, or is it due merely to a change of focus in her last works? Are these remarks to be taken as instrumental or pragmatic attempts to deal with particular real-world complexities, for example of implementing changes mandated by international human rights law in countries where legal and social practices and norms embody deep-rooted and thoroughgoing inequalities, or finding ways to engage respectfully and in culturally sensitive ways with women who do not (yet) share the ideal of a gender-free world?¹⁴

Okin clearly developed a strong interest in facilitating democratic participation of women in the making and implementing of international law (Ackerly and Okin, 1999), and was obviously impressed by the achievements of grassroots and international NGOs in the 'women's rights as human rights' movement. She came to share Ackerly's view that much of this success both in influencing social policy and in bringing about changes in local practices in accordance with international human rights law was due to the adoption of a 'feminist method of social criticism', respectful, yet critical, of diversity.¹⁵ Ackerly and Okin recognize that, to be effective, activists need to ensure that they come across, in their own countries, as speaking in ways that resonate in the local context, that don't sound foreign or 'Western' (Ackerly and Okin, 1999: 148), because success depends on the human rights paradigm being granted cultural legitimacy. At the same time they are involved in mandatory transformation of cultural practices, attempting to eradicate their oppressive aspects while preserving cultural identity. This is often difficult, but, as many political theorists have pointed out, cultures are not monolithic, so it is possible that cultural interpretations can be found or constructed that are compatible with fundamental principles of justice. But it is also clear that in many cases doing so would call for a very difficult, not to say impossible, balancing act. As Hill says, we can respect people for 'who they are' culturally and historically, but 'must not simply assume that to treat them *as their dominant culture dictates* is always respectful to *them*' (Hill, 2000: 79). While we need to take into account the meaning of their conduct with reference to their cultural context, to try to understand the features of their culture that they deem crucial to their own identities, and to be prepared to find our own views and attitudes partial or overly restrictive, 'to refuse to make any judgement at all about those in "other cultures" is disrespectful to them' (Hill, 2000: 79) and he would

presumably find the acceptance of subordination on cultural grounds cited by Okin (2005) problematic in its servility.

As we have argued in a previous paper (Enslin and Tjiattas, 2004), we believe that liberal feminism is able to accommodate a 'thin', and so defensible, form of multiculturalism which fosters understanding of norms and traditions of different ways of life while leaving room for a critical perspective with respect to them.¹⁶ Any attempt to accommodate diversity needs to be mindful of the pervasive way in which unjust social arrangements distort perspectives and give rise to diseased preferences of its oppressed subjects. Beyond this, even if we were to concede that respecting the autonomy of women implies that their desires be taken at face value, this does not extend to children. Children do not enter their families through choice, and their avowed interests do not need to be taken as definitive in order to meet anti-paternalistic principles. Neither should their opportunities be compromised by the decisions of the adults who happen to be their parents (see Brighouse, 2000). Even if it were Okin's settled belief that, under some circumstances, requirements of justice with respect to women need to give way to competing democratic demands, this would not extend to a similar suspension of educational requirements with respect to children. Educational institutions cannot renounce their obligation to foster autonomy, to promote the development of critical capacities that allow all children the opportunity to live autonomous lives, in the name of cultural, or even democratic, demands.

EDUCATIONAL LESSONS

What educational requirements are entailed by Okin's critique of the assumptions in political thinking and practice concerning the nature of women and their place in the social and political order, and by a commitment to her goal of a gender-free society? These questions are complicated by the recognition that education is both a systemic source of gender oppression and a means of ending it, as well as by the impact of Okin's concern to heed the voices of the silent/silenced women in LDCs on her commitment to a gender-free society.

An initial answer would begin by extending Okin's and Reich's suggestions in 'Families and schools as compensating agents in moral development for a multicultural society' (1999), where they argue that schools in multicultural societies have a duty to meet the crucial interest of children in the civic aspects of moral development, and to that end propose that children be prepared to carry out civic responsibilities and, by being taught social perspective-taking skills, to interact with people holding a range of different values (Okin and

Reich, 1999: 293). We think that as a response to the question of how to bring about a just world without gender, the suggestions in this paper are partial and leave open the possibility that inequality would be left standing as one viable position among others, if it happened to be culturally sanctioned.

We suggest that these proposals be augmented in line with the much stronger position Okin takes elsewhere (Okin, 1989a, 1999, 2002) leading to a clear endorsement of autonomy-promoting education and of educational institutions' duties to deliver on rights to equal opportunity to choose and live a good life, generally espoused by liberal theorists.¹⁷

More specifically, education (schooling and public education that goes far beyond literacy) ought to address, if we follow Okin's more radical and inspiring feminist ideas through to their conclusion, the kinds of issues that Wolf and Korsgaard raise (for example, educating about ascribed gender identities and opening up choice in interpreting gender and one's own gendered identity, encouraging critical reflection on the social construction of gender that would contribute to bringing about an increasingly less gendered world). Okin herself has explicitly advocated such an educational programme:

Children need also to be taught about the present inequalities, ambiguities, and uncertainties of marriage, the facts of workplace discrimination and segregation, and the likely consequences of making life choices based on assumptions about gender. They should be discouraged from thinking about their futures as *determined* by the sex to which they happen to belong. (Okin, 1989a: 177)

So far the educational implications of Okin's work emerge from her discussions of how to achieve a less gendered world in American or Western society. Awareness of different ways of life, and the ability to choose among them and live some of them, to exit those that are oppressive, demanding as it does the absence of indoctrination, requires a considerable degree of autonomy, especially the ability and confidence to evaluate different ways of life. Okin often comments on the fact that in many cultures, girls receive less education than boys, attributing this in large part to patriarchal structures (Okin, 2002). Moreover, she points out that it is not only a lack of education but the content of what is imparted that is a source of disadvantage. As a result of the 'education' they receive, girls are socialized into accepting practices that oppress them, internalizing their oppression, and being rendered incapable of discerning or articulating their own interests. If the problems of gender oppression are similar but more so in traditional societies, then the educational demands are surely also similar but more so.

This conclusion is clearly derivable from her discussions of 'other cultures' and can easily be extrapolated also from her discussions of liberal responses to cultural and religious minorities in the United States (Okin, 1999; see also Okin, 1998a), where she poses the interrelated possibilities of allowing sexist

cultures to become extinct (much misunderstood by her critics), cultural alteration through negotiation in which representation of less powerful members of cultural minorities is ensured, consulting especially with younger women, women exercising their rights, and exit. This set of remedies makes heavy demands on the capacities of participants and so on educational prerequisites. Insofar as it leads, in many contexts, to a call for political interventions, engaging with tradition, being able to discern in oneself and others alike what Nussbaum calls 'diseased preferences' (see below) it makes demands on educational policy and implementation as well.

Some of the demands will converge with requirements on education that follow from Okin's positive appraisal (Ackerly and Okin, 1999) of the ease of communication for both groups and individuals fostered by globalization discussed above. For this information sharing to work and be effective, if the worst-off women are to be included in the participatory practices they describe, the capacities underpinning agency (ability to initiate and carry out action) need to be developed and fostered. The capacity to exercise the social, economic and political rights defined in the Beijing Platform for Action suggest that the agency exercised by NGOs and activists has to be extended to popular influence for the masses of women in all countries, especially those less developed. As Pogge (1989: 180) notes, equalizing of educational opportunities is a particularly appropriate way of promoting global justice, since alleviating educational disadvantage avoids undesirable consequences of aid provision, such as instilling dependency, and breaks the cycle of deprivation directly by fostering capacity and autonomy.¹⁸

Although Okin did not elaborate on the connections between democratic inclusion and capacities for political agency, focusing instead (Ackerly and Okin, 1999; Okin, 2003), on the importance of listening to the voices of the worst-off women in the LDCs, her work provides strong support for acquiring the capabilities required for political effectiveness. Okin and Nussbaum disagreed about the details when it came to proposing a basis for educational reform that would empower women in LDCs. Okin did not endorse Nussbaum's full list of capabilities as a basis for educational reform, taking it to be too 'intellectual' for the purpose of empowering women in LDCs.

Focusing on literacy and poverty alleviation as appropriate responses to the perceived and voiced needs of the women themselves, Okin argues that actual needs reported by women are very different from those envisaged by Nussbaum:

[They] suffer from the lack of voice, power, and independence. They speak repeatedly of not being listened to or having no influence on or control over events around them, of the humiliation of being exposed to exploitation and to rude and inhumane treatment, of being harassed, of being without necessary documents because they lack connections, knowledge, or the ability to pay bribes. (Okin, 2003: 307)

Moreover,

they . . . see government at various levels as inaccessible, as ignoring them and ignorant about them . . . the poor frequently voice their need for basic infrastructure . . . They often voice their frustration with those in power . . . for failing to provide and maintain such public goods [as roads, safe water, affordable electricity]. (Okin, 2003: 308)

But, for these needs to be remedied, the capacities and resources to participate effectively in citizenship and to be eligible for desirable positions in the workplace would need to be developed. This is especially the case where options to exercise rights, exit and effect cultural alteration are to be achieved in circumstances where assertive behaviour would be regarded as inappropriate, especially for younger women.¹⁹ The requirements that Okin and Nussbaum respectively focus on here seem to be complementary rather than opposed.²⁰

While literacy and poverty alleviation (which Okin emphasizes in her later papers) are undoubtedly fundamental to meeting basic needs, Nussbaum's emphasis on the importance of literacy in cultivating powers of thought, expression, and imagination (Nussbaum, 2004: 335), and her advocacy of educational programmes likely to shift traditional attitudes (for example, public education to provide women with information about rights and opportunities, as well as 'images of worth and possibility' (Nussbaum, 2000: 288)), conveys more fully the extent of crucial educational interventions required to advance gender equality across the globe. It also reminds us of the programme that Okin herself described in her earlier work (which we quoted above), and which could be harnessed to expand on the suggestions she makes in her work on human development. This emphasis also dovetails with Korsgaard's discussion on what is involved in getting beyond a gender-structured identity. Education for less-gendered identities would also, in so far as it would empower women and girls to be effective in the public realm, simultaneously fulfil many of the requirements for developing capacities for political agency, and for escaping the confinements of the 'private' realm.

Nussbaum (1997) has also emphasized another crucial factor in disabling the discriminatory gender structures of societies, namely disseminating knowledge about preference formation (see also Buchanan, 2004).²¹ She argues that moral education should incorporate as essential the activity of 'debating preference formation', explicitly examining preferences and how they are generated. As Nussbaum cautions, choice-making is often 'diseased' by the influence of uncriticized preferences (1997: 218) many of which are the 'legacy of injustice'. As she says, they endanger not only personal autonomy but also the workability of democracy.²² Even if Okin (2003) chides Nussbaum for promoting an over-intellectual ideal of human functioning, she is cognizant

of the problem of adaptive preferences, having cautioned against taking the perceived needs of oppressed people at face value (Okin, 1995), and so surely would endorse Nussbaum's claim that 'Feminist argument continues this long tradition of analyzing the social formation of preferences' (Nussbaum, 1997: 219), a tradition which, as Nussbaum convincingly argues, is necessary if democratic procedures are themselves to be legitimating.

If, as Okin has argued, education in the USA and other Western countries should aspire to foster autonomy and to encourage critical reflection on the social construction of gender because that would contribute to bringing about an increasingly less-gendered world, then this should apply to other places where gender oppression exists, 'only more so'.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Rob Reich for many helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper. In addition we thank members of the School of Education, University of Sheffield, for their discussion and comments.

NOTES

1. It is arguable that liberals could nevertheless carve out a space for individual privacy even if the family were not taken to be protected from scrutiny on privacy grounds. Such a move might be welcomed by those who appreciate feminist worries that the private/public distinction has been used to harm vulnerable family members but resist opening the door to government intrusion into private matters. Kymlicka (2002: 398), for example, argues persuasively that the liberal conception of privacy need not be construed as defending a traditional domestic/public split. Another way of putting the point is to say that privacy rights-bearers are individuals, not families, notwithstanding the position of many political theorists.
2. Moreover, Okin (1989a: 46–7) points out that Rawls's notion of the 'basic structure' transcends state/society and public/domestic versions of the private/public distinction (in that it includes markets, property arrangements as well as distribution of political rights and legally protected liberties, the 'monogamous family' as basic institutions to which principles of social justice must apply). Thus Rawls cannot, on pain of inconsistency, exempt the family from his demands that the institutions of the basic structure be held to conform to requirements of justice. Okin (1994a) has, however, argued that Rawls's later, non-comprehensive liberal position no longer has sufficient resources to carry out this project, and that his various discussions of the family display a marked ambivalence with respect to its status (part of the basic structure or a non-political association?). He wants to have it both ways. '*Political liberalism* continues to give us mixed signals about Rawls's views on the application of his principles to issues of gender' (Okin, 1994a: 24). What seems particularly worrying to her is that his later view is unable to provide sufficient protection to gender equality, and that he is inclined to admit into the realm of the 'reasonable' views that are antithetical to equality. The only hope she

sees lies in Rawls's requirements for children's education (civic education in constitutional and civic rights). However, she wonders 'Whether it would suffice, however, to enable children whose primary environment taught them basic inequalities to question these inequalities deeply and successfully seems highly dubious' (Okin, 1994a: 32). Okin is also concerned whether political liberalism can generate an adequate account of the development of the civic virtues required for the stability of a well-ordered society.

3. An ongoing criticism of liberal feminist positions is that gender is itself a problematic category unless qualified by race, class, ethnicity, etc., on the grounds that it distorts the way women are presented by subsuming all women under a single category (Okin, 1995: 275). Okin's response is that 'the antiessentialist critique is overblown, and largely invalid' (1995: 275). And this is with reference to lives and circumstances of non-Western women.
4. Western academic feminism has not been as vigilant as it needs to be if it is to contribute to the protection and promotion of gender inequality. Okin attributes this to the anti-universalizing climate which has made it reluctant to embrace women's rights as universal human rights (Okin, 2003: 42).
5. Of course, there are questions that no doubt can and will be raised with respect to feminists' espousal of the 'language of rights'. However, Okin has addressed one of the most important potential difficulties in 'Feminism, women's human rights, and cultural differences' (1998a), where she focuses on the reconceptualization of human rights that needs to be undertaken, and on institutions they help to mould, such as families and religions. This male bias of human rights thinking has to be eradicated for women's rights to be recognized as human rights, especially to make room for recognizing rights violations committed by individual men (rather than governments). Once again this points to the reconceptualization of the public/private dichotomy.
6. As the literature on democratic deliberation makes clear, there have to be constraints in place if deliberation is to ground legitimacy. If the results of deliberation are to be taken as constituting (or at least uncovering) the 'general will' then, as Rawls (1995: 178) puts it, there have to be substantive moral guidelines which impose limits on what may be factored into collective decisions to ensure that the outcomes conform with fundamental moral and political values.
7. It could be argued that there are signs that the World Bank's recent commitments show greater sensitivity to equality and justice, and that one sign of this is the abandonment of the household as a basic unit of analysis and its explicit recommendation that data be disaggregated by sex and gender.
8. A point which Okin has discussed at length (Okin, 1989a: 170ff.). While advocating a world without gender in which public policies and laws 'should generally assume no social differentiation of the sexes' (1989a: 175), she recognizes that this would require massive changes in many institutions. Moreover, she stresses that social policies need to respect people's choices and must take into account that 'most people currently live in ways that are greatly affected by gender, and most still favor many aspects of current, gendered practices'

(1989a: 172). Even so, she believes that special protections should be provided through law and policy, restrictions on traditionalist positions that violate equal basic liberties, to ensure that gender based choices do not result in injustice.

9. Sunstein argues along the same lines:

the satisfaction of private preferences, whatever their content and origins, does not respond to a persuasive conception of liberty or autonomy. The notion of autonomy should refer instead to decisions reached with a full and vivid awareness of available opportunities, with all relevant information, or without illegitimate or excessive constraints on the process of preference formation. (Sunstein, 1995: 350)

In certain circumstances, it can be expected that voiced preferences will be 'adaptive' ones (pp. 350–52), and of the many factors which contribute to non-conducive conditions,

poverty itself is the most severe obstacle to the free development of preferences and beliefs . . . Severe deprivation influences and even closes off the development of desires. An important reason to respond to the deprivation is to promote freer and better processes of desire formation. (Sunstein, 1995: 352)

10. The difficulty of meeting these conditions is presumably why Okin took one of the most hopeful and significant innovations emanating from the Beijing Conference to be the unprecedentedly strong rejection of 'cultural' justifications for violating women's human rights. The call to 'respect cultural differences', is often used, as Okin points out, as a euphemism for restricting and denying women's human rights.
11. Rob Reich (2005) looks more directly at the way cultural exceptions and accommodations that many liberal theorists are willing to extend to illiberal groups can endanger the interests of children. He takes one of the most prevalent sites of this to be the 'culturally centric' curricula followed in separate schools. Such educational arrangements undermine the capacity of children to exit their restrictive cultures.
12. It is important to note that this sanctioning of the democratic principle is highly qualified. As Okin says explicitly further on, she would in general favour a liberal response, and certainly whenever the groups in question (for example, Southern Baptists) can make no good claims of past oppression. She favours democracy over liberalism only in the case of groups that have recently suffered from oppression, on the grounds that this better serves the interests of women members of the culture. It is also important to note that the 'democratic principle' taken over from Deveaux is, at least weakly, normative, specifying conditions of participation that protect against coercion and oppression and for inclusion in the deliberative setting.
13. And understandably so, since they seem to fall into the realm of what Okin previously ruled inadmissible for consideration:

We need not, and should not . . . admit for consideration views based on the notion that women are inherently inferior beings whose function is to

fulfill the needs of men. . . . We need not, therefore, consider approaches to marriage that view it as an inherently and desirably hierarchical structure of dominance and subordination. . . . Even if there were no other reasons to refuse to admit such views, they must be excluded for the sake of children. . . . Marriages of dominance and submission are bad for children as well as for their mothers. (Okin, 1989a: pp. 174–5)

14. Okin (1989a: esp 180–183) has addressed problems arising from attempting to urge the adoption of principles of justice in an unjust world, putting forward a number of transitional measures to handle intransigent defenders of gender differentiation. Citing especially the interests of children, she urges that even where gendered institutions are tolerated, there should be legal requirements that they must meet in order to protect the vulnerable.
15. This method attempts to weld together quite disparate elements, namely deliberative democracy, culturally relativist communitarianism, and essentialism with respect to a conception of universal human goods. In order to render these compatible it introduces significant restrictions on the acceptable form each is to take. The model of ‘deliberative inquiry’ is one that does not require or presuppose equality or near-perfect knowledge. ‘Sceptical scrutiny’ of cultural practices and interpretations are encouraged to alert members to the dangers of domination and subordination, and the list of human goods, while in a sense universal, is left open to local interpretation. Since these elements and their relations are not further discussed it remains unclear whether it amounts to a workable approach.
16. Cultural diversity brings with it well-recognized benefits. It expands one’s horizons, prodding examination of unexamined assumptions and prejudices, and provides opportunities for dialogue between different traditions. A multiculturalism which focuses on the way in which diversity fosters understanding of norms and traditions of different ways of life while leaving room for a critical perspective with respect to them is well within the parameters of liberal theory. As Kymlicka (1999: 34) points out, liberal feminism and multiculturalism are allied in their struggles for a more inclusive conception of justice. Both Okin and Nussbaum envisage a role for negotiated cultural change in reducing gender inequality. But it is crucial that there be limits to the claims of pluralism, based on such considerations as the protection of human rights, the exercise of autonomy and requirements of reasonableness with respect to interactions in the public realm.
17. For an elaboration of what might be included see Brighouse (2000: 66ff). He mentions, *inter alia*, teaching methods for evaluating the truth or falsity or relative probability of claims about the world, differences between anecdotal and statistical evidence.
18. Okin’s concern that the ‘feminization of global poverty’ has not been well served *inter alia* by standard economic measures that take the family as a unit and do not disaggregate data with respect to individual members, and that fail, as a result, to notice the extent of gender inequality, that gender is a significant differentiator of abject poverty, is well-grounded. Economic measures instituted by Sen, Okin believes, improve on the standard models but are still

not able (at least on Nussbaum's description of capacities) to discriminate well enough between capabilities that are crucial to living a tolerable life, and those which though desirable may not realistically be realizable under relatively deprived conditions. She argues that universal human rights be appealed to in order to effect such a discrimination. This will better serve the interests of women in the less developed world, who do not share Nussbaum's conception of a full human life, which includes as necessary components the development of intellectual capacities and sensibilities (Okin, 2003: 296). But several issues have been run together in this response to Nussbaum. Okin's point that capacities should be ranked with reference to human rights is independent of her argument for privileging the avowed interests of silenced women.

19. Our considerations, in this article, of what it would take for women to have a meaningful right of exit suggest that very considerable development of a capacity for autonomy is required for such a right to be exercised. But the right of exit, as a protection against oppression and domination, while no doubt important, has significant limitations. It does not address the question of why, when women do not feel that their circumstances allow the possibility of exit (unrealistic for the vast majority of women in LDCs), they should be expected to exit at all (internally or externally), rather than exercising their rights and so effecting cultural alteration, even if this is not systematic, through explicit negotiation around traditions that oppress.
20. Agreement with Nussbaum on these issues does not require an endorsement of her capabilities approach in general, nor even accepting her own take on what it would mean to promote imaginative or creative activities in different cultural contexts. She herself has emphasized that the capacities on her list are subject to different specifications in different contexts.
21. Buchanan (2004) provides an extended account of how the social inculcation of false beliefs (especially racist, sexist ones) distorts not only our cognitive but also our affective constitutions. He also points out that among such beliefs the most fundamental, most far-reaching, and so most difficult to eradicate, are those about fundamental moral status. His own focus is on institutions that might be expected to minimize such indoctrination and provide corrective measures, while Nussbaum's remedies are educational.
22. Brighouse (2000: 66ff.) provides an extended and instructive analysis of the relation between autonomy and preference formation. He shows that coercive practices that restrict options, manipulation, the presence of apparently unchangeable circumstances, and the predilection to accommodate preferences to unjust background conditions all undermine autonomy. He suggests that capacities of critical reflection and claim-evaluating skills are effective in both preempting and remedying the effects of autonomy-inhibiting factors.

REFERENCES

- Ackerly, B.A. and Okin, S.M. (1999) 'Feminist social criticism and the international movement for women's rights as human rights', in I. Shapiro and C. Hacker-Cordon (eds), *Democracy's Edges*, pp. 134–62. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Anderson, E. (1999) 'What is the point of equality?', *Ethics* 109(2): 287–337.
- Brighouse, H. (2000) *School Choice and Social Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Buchanan, A. (2004) 'Political liberalism and social epistemology', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 32(2): 95–130.
- Coleman, I. (2004) 'The payoff from women's rights'. *Foreign Affairs* May/June 2004 (accessed 23 August 2005).
- Enslin, P. and Tjiattas, M. (2004) 'Liberal feminism, cultural diversity and comparative education', *Comparative Education* 40(4): 503–16.
- Hill, T. (2000) 'Basic respect and cultural diversity', in T. Hill, *Respect, Pluralism, and Justice. Kantian Perspectives*, pp. 59–86. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kaplan, T. (2001a) 'Women's rights as human rights: Grassroots women redefine citizenship in a global context', in P. Grimshaw, K. Holmes and M. Lake (eds) *Women's Rights as Human Rights: International Historical Perspectives*, pp. 290–308. New York: Palgrave.
- Kaplan, T. (2001b) 'Women's rights as human rights: Women as agents of social change', in M. Agosin (ed.) *Women, Gender and Human Rights*, pp. 191–204. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Keohane, R.O. (forthcoming) 'Reinventing globalization to reduce gender inequality'.
- Korsgaard, C.M. (1995) 'A note on the value of gender-identification', in M.C. Nussbaum and J. Glover (eds) *Women, Culture and Development*, pp. 401–4. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Kymlicka, W. (1999) 'Response to Okin', in J. Cohen et al. (eds) *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kymlicka, W. (2002) *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction*, 2nd edn. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Netaid (2003) 'Global lesson on girls' education promises to break world record'. Available at <http://www.netaid.org/press/releases/2003> (accessed 30 August 2005).
- Netaid (2005) 'Youth worldwide lobby for access to education'. Available at <http://www.netaid.org/press/news> (accessed 30 August 2005).
- Nussbaum, M.C. (1997) *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defence of Reform in Liberal Education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Nussbaum, M.C. (2000) *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nussbaum, M.C. (2004) 'Women's education: A global challenge', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 29(2): 325–55.
- Okin, S.M. (1979) *Women in Western Political Thought*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Okin, S.M. (1989a) *Justice, Gender, and the Family*. New York: Basic Books.
- Okin, S.M. (1989b) 'Humanist liberalism', in N.L. Rosenblum (ed.) *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, pp. 39–53. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Okin, S.M. (1994a) 'Political liberalism, justice, and gender', *Ethics* 105: 23–43.
- Okin, S.M. (1994b) 'Gender inequality and cultural differences', *Political Theory* 22(1): 5–24.
- Okin, S.M. (1995) 'Inequalities between the sexes in different cultural contexts', in M.C. Nussbaum and J. Glover (eds) *Women, Culture, and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities*, pp. 274–96. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Enslin and Tjiattas: Educating for a world without gender

- Okin, S.M. (1996a) 'Feminism, moral development, and the virtues', in R. Crisp (ed.) *How Should One Live? Essays on the Virtues*, pp. 211–29. Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- Okin, S.M. (1996b) 'Sexual orientation, gender, and families: Dichotomizing difference', *Hypatia* 11(1): 30–48.
- Okin, S.M. (1998a) 'Feminism, women's human rights, and cultural differences', *Hypatia* 13(2): 32–52.
- Okin, S.M. (1998b) 'Feminism and multiculturalism: Some tensions', *Ethics* 103: 661–84.
- Okin, S.M. (1999) 'Is multiculturalism bad for women', in J. Cohen et al. (eds) *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Okin, S.M. (2002) "'Mistresses of their own destiny": Group rights, gender, and realistic rights of exit', *Ethics* 112: 205–30.
- Okin, S.M. (2003) 'Poverty, well-being and gender: What counts, who's heard?', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 31: 280–316.
- Okin, S.M. (2005) 'Multiculturalism and feminism: no simple question, no simple answers', in A. Eisenberg and J. Spinner-Halev (eds) *Minorities within Minorities: Equality, Rights and Diversity*, pp. 67–89. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Okin, S.M. and Reich, R. (1999) 'Families and schools as compensating agents in moral development for a multicultural society', *Journal of Moral Education* 23(3): 283–98.
- Peters, J. and Wolper, A., eds (1995) *Women's Rights, Human Rights: International Feminist Perspectives*. New York, London: Routledge.
- Pogge, T. (1989) *Realizing Rawls*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Rawls, J. (1971) *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Rawls, J. (1995) 'Reply to Habermas', *Journal of Philosophy* 92: 132–80.
- Reich, R. (2005) 'Minors within minorities: a problem for liberal multiculturalists', in A. Eisenberg and J. Spinner-Halev (eds) *Minorities within Minorities: Equality, Rights and Diversity*, pp. 209–26. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sunstein, C.R. (1995) 'Gender, caste, and law', in M.C. Nussbaum and J. Glover (eds) *Women, Culture, and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities*, pp. 332–59. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Unterhalter, E. and Dutt, S. (2001) 'Gender, education and women's power: Indian state and civil society intersections in DPEP (District Primary Education Programme) and Mahila Samakhya'. *Compare* 31(1).
- Wolf, S. (1995) 'Commentary on "Human capabilities, female human beings" by Martha Nussbaum', in M.C. Nussbaum and J. Glover (eds) *Women, Culture and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities*, pp. 105–15. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- World Bank (2001) *Engendering Development*. New York: World Bank/Oxford University Press.
- Young, I.M. (1990) 'Displacing the distributive paradigm', in I.M. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Differences*, pp. 15–38. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

PENNY ENSLIN is Professor of Education in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. She teaches philosophy of education and her research interests lie in the areas of democracy and citizenship

education, gender, liberalism, peace education and higher education. [email: enslinp@hse.wits.ac.za]

MARY TJIATTAS is an Honorary Research Associate in the Department of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Her main academic interests are in moral psychology, philosophy of the human sciences and political philosophy. [email: marytjattas@yahoo.co.uk]