

Abstract

The Discourse of 'Permissive' Sex Education in the UK -- Representing a New Moral Code: Autonomy --

HIROSE Hiroko

This paper illustrates the discourse developed in 'permissive' sex education in the UK in the 1960s and 1970s. This helps to understand the reason why progressive sex education was able to be employed in the compulsory school programme planned by the Conservative Government in the 1980s.

The findings are summarised as follows.

1. 'Permissive' sex education was developed in the 1960s and 1970s, underpinned by liberalism. This criticised the old repressive moral framework and tried to provide pupils with a new moral code that would help them to fulfil their sexuality and avoid unnecessary troubles. For this, it was thought to be necessary to teach them the 'truth' of sex and the pleasures of sex.

2. 'Permissive' sex education was criticised not only by the Moral Right but also by Feminists and the Gay Liberation Movement.

3. As the basic view of the Moral Right was that sex education should not occur in schools, their criticism bypassed suggesting an alternative sex education but expressed hostility against it. They emphasised their view that the development of 'permissive' sex education destroyed the family and social order.

4. The criticism against liberal sex education by Feminists and the Gay Liberation Movement was based on the understanding that the liberal movement in sexuality only freed heterosexual males and made women readily available as sex objects.

5. 'Permissive' sex education absorbed some of these criticisms and developed its framework into a more comprehensive one.

6. Four concepts symbolise the nature of the discourse of 'permissive' sex education: freedom, choice, satisfaction, and responsibility. The purpose of the education manifesting these concepts was to foster autonomous individuals.

7. The promotion of autonomy may bring negative consequences when this is practised in a way without considering class and gender subcultures. It should be suggested that the high rate of unwanted pregnancy among working class girls was one of these negative aspects.

8. The prime factor that enabled the coalition of 'permissive' liberal sex education and a welfare cutting conservative policy was the fact that the both parties commonly held the belief that autonomy was a major good.

9. Autonomy would help individuals to cherish their tastes and decisions and, at the same time, would secure members of society who adapt themselves well to the changing environment.

The content of this paper is as follows.

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