

## Statement of Intended Research

For my MPhil research I wish to study feminist activism at British universities in the 1960s and early 1970s under the supervision of [REDACTED]. The preliminary title of my research is “British Student Daycare Activism in the Late 1960s and 1970s”. The period of the 1960s and 1970s was marked by several trends that make it an important era for research. Firstly, the education opportunities for women were expanding. The ‘new universities’ at Keele and Sussex attracted female students in droves for the first time.<sup>1</sup> After 1970, the number of women attending university steadily increased.<sup>2</sup> At almost the same time, Margaret Thatcher as Minister of Education and Science put forward a White Paper in 1972 entitled *Education: A Framework for Expansion* to provide childcare for all three and four year olds in the country.<sup>3</sup> Previously, the Plowden Report of 1967 had also called for expanded childcare to meet demand.<sup>4</sup> Married women were entering the workforce in large numbers. In 1961, only 35% participated in with workforce; by 1981, 62% did.<sup>5</sup>

In my MPhil research I would like to investigate the connections between student activism, second-wave feminism, and childcare. This research project has ramifications for the modern understanding of childcare policy and of grassroots activism in general. Several national feminist campaigns for childcare provision during the 1980s failed to produce universal childcare, largely because of government resistance and internal conflicts in the feminist

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<sup>1</sup> Carol Dyhouse, *Students: a Gendered History* (London: Routledge, 2006), 102.

<sup>2</sup> Carol Dyhouse, *Students: a Gendered History*, 98.

<sup>3</sup> Anna K. Danziger Halperin, “‘Cinderella of the Education System’: Margaret Thatcher’s Plan for Nursery Expansion in the 1970s Britain,” *Twentieth Century British History* 29, no. 2 (2018): 285.

<sup>4</sup> Anna K. Danziger Halperin, “‘Cinderella of the Education System’: Margaret Thatcher’s Plan for Nursery Expansion in the 1970s Britain,” 291.

<sup>5</sup> Jane E. Lewis, “The Failure to Expand Childcare Provision and to Develop a Comprehensive Childcare Policy in Britain During the 1960s and 1970s,” *Twentieth Century British History* 24, no. 2 (2013): 251.

movement.<sup>6</sup> I would like to study the conflicts between activists and the government at the time when the welfare state was growing, student activism was at its height, and the second-wave feminist movement was infiltrating the education system. I will attempt to uncover answers to the following research questions; how did women at university understand the need for childcare? What methods of childcare were they using? Were there any student movements at the university-level to demand affordable and accessible childcare? Why did activist groups fail to bring about fully accessible and affordable childcare?

I propose to focus on a number of case studies at universities in the U.K., starting with Cambridge. In the Cambridge archives there is a dissertation entitled “Student Feminism in the late 1960s” written by Margaret Dyson. This dissertation explores the ideology of university feminist groups through archival research and interviews with former students involved in the groups.<sup>7</sup> Dyson’s dissertation will guide my focus. In addition, the Girton Papers include a folder on the Nursery Action Group at Cambridge along with other material from the feminist movement. The dissertation and archival materials will set up a basis for me to build a strong argument about feminist childcare activism at Cambridge.

For another case study, I would like to take a sample from one of the ‘new universities’. These universities saw a massive increase in the number of female students in the 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>8</sup> I would like to see if this resulted in strong feminist activism on campus forming childcare groups. These universities will also provide a different geographical and socio-economic case study from Cambridge. It will be interesting to compare and contrast these two

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<sup>6</sup> Joni Lovenduski, and Vicky Randall, *Contemporary Feminist Politics: Women and Power in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993): 299.

<sup>7</sup> Margaret Dyson, “Student Activism in the Late 1960s.” This dissertation is located in the Girton College Archives under the reference number GCIP CWLA 0/21, (2010).

<sup>8</sup> Carol Dyhouse, *Students: a Gendered History*, 102.

