

TAKING UP A POSITION: Discourses of Femininity and Adolescence in the Context of Man/Girl Relationships

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The relationship between mainstream femininity and resistance to it has been theorized in a number of ways. In one approach, mainstream femininity is identified as a patriarchal set of public texts that women accept, negotiate, or resist in practice. Another view sees mainstream femininity as a dominant cultural practice to which there are resistant subcultural responses. Taking a poststructuralist view, this article offers an alternative to these models. The focus of the article is the differing ways in which a set of interviewees validated their participation in a type of relationship that is socially constructed as a departure from mainstream femininity, namely, a voluntary sexual relationship between an adult man and an adolescent girl.

This article deals with the social construction of gender from the perspective of poststructuralism. Poststructuralism sees people as agentic and as gendered subjects who make choices within a range of socially available discursive positions, molding and creatively adapting discourses as they act (Davies 1989; Davies and Harre 1990; Smith 1988; Weedon 1988). The article also takes two related approaches to the social construction of gender. The first is the work of Dorothy E. Smith. Smith (1988) conceives of femininity in two ways. On the one hand, femininity is a set of public texts which women “do not organize or produce” (1988, 39); they are organized and for the most part controlled and defined by men. On the other hand, femininity is the way in which “women’s skills and work enter actively into textually mediated relations.” There is a dialectic between “the active and creative subject and the organization of her activity in and by texts” (1988, 39).

This approach avoids the view that women are the “passive products of socialization” through patriarchally controlled public texts (Smith 1988, 39).

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GENDER & SOCIETY, Vol. 8 No. 1, March 1994 48-72
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Talking about “codes” of femininity, Smith (1988) makes the claim that women “use, play with, break with, and oppose them” (p. 53). Although the production of the public texts of femininity is controlled by men, femininity is also more than this—it is the use women make of these texts. Furthermore, this use forces alterations in the public texts, thereby eluding total patriarchal control. Accordingly, Smith argues that femininity as an overarching public discourse is used by those who are acting as agents of patriarchy and by those who resist it.

Another approach that has influenced this study is that of Connell (1987). Connell’s analysis of gender rests on the model of a hegemonic patriarchal culture confronted by subordinate resistant subcultures. Within dominant patriarchal culture femininity is “emphasized femininity” which, he theorizes, is an ideal of conduct and a set of related practices by which women comply with men’s power. Emphasized femininity is a cultural construction promoted in a mass media “organized, financed and supervised by men” (Connell 1987, 188). One of the main aims of those promoting emphasized femininity is to prevent other types of femininity from becoming culturally powerful. For example, excluded from emphasized femininity is “the experience of spinsters, lesbians, unionists, prostitutes, madwomen, rebels and maiden aunts, manual workers, midwives and witches.” These are “marginalized forms of femininity” which radical sexual politics validates and recovers (Connell 1987, 187-188).

This article combines the insights of these two positions. Like both of these authors I see the social construction of femininity in terms of compliance with or resistance to patriarchal power. Like Smith (1988), I argue that femininity is constructed through discourse and that discourses of femininity are not readily or finally attached to patriarchy or resistance to it. Like Connell (1987), I argue that there are different versions of femininity.

However, whereas Connell conceives these versions of femininity within the model of dominant culture and resistant subcultures, this article sees compliance and resistance as more fragmented and ubiquitous. Emphasized femininity is not a coherent unified “culture” but arises from practices occasioned within a variety of discourses—for example, motherhood, beauty, or romance. These do not come together as a watertight package, but individually they provide a range of subject positions which may well contradict each other in a particular situation. As well, the construction of gender occurs in the context of other seemingly unrelated discourses, such as adolescence, health, or sporting achievement which may contradict those offered within dominant discourses of femininity. Opposition to patriarchal femininity may borrow from discourses without any apparent gender mes-

sages or take up unaccustomed positions within discourses that more usually support emphasized femininity.

The focus with which these issues are addressed is the topic of sexual relationships between adult men and adolescent girls. It is suggested that voluntary participation in such relationships is socially constructed as a departure from aspects of emphasized femininity. By examining the way in which young women in these relationships validate their participation, it is possible to consider how codes of emphasized femininity are challenged or adapted.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This article is based on a small-scale interview study ($N = 19$) of the experiences of girls who were or had been in sexual relationships with adults. It is confined to relationships that were considered by the younger parties to have been voluntary and, in general, positive. The subjects were drawn from the social networks of the two interviewers. We made it known that we were interested in hearing about voluntary relationships of this type. The interviewees wanted to make their positive experiences of such relationships public in view of the widespread opinion that all such events are harmful to the younger parties involved. The interviews were taped and transcribed. All the interviewees were living in Australia at the time of the study.

Seven of the interviewees had been involved in sexual relationships with men as adolescent girls (11 to 15 years old). At the time they were interviewed, the youngest of these interviewees was 16 (Sharon). The rest were all over 20; the oldest were in their early 40s. The interviewees were white and from a range of class backgrounds. At the time of the relationship, Bobbie and Isobel were from upper middle-class families; Sharon, Wendy, Denise, Angela, and Joanne were from working-class families. At the time the interviews took place, Sharon was the only interviewee who was working-class since the other four interviewees from this background had become middle class in the intervening years. All interviewees to a large degree identified themselves as feminists. Consequently, the sample cannot claim to be representative and the study must be considered a pilot study (Rossmann 1985; Sandfort 1982; Wilson 1981).

One of the methodological problems of such a study is that people have only a partial recall of events in the past and may have constructed a particular type of account to fit the interview context. Insofar as this article concerns the ways in which interviewees currently negotiate their construction of

gender, such selective recall is not necessarily a problem. However, insofar as the article is concerned with the ways in which these events were experienced at the time, the reader and researcher must regard the interview as a version of what took place occasioned by the interview situation. An advantage of this procedure is that the events in question were being considered after mature reflection and after many years in which the interviewees had had a chance to evaluate their experiences in the light of critiques of such relationships.

POSTSTRUCTURALISM AS A MODE OF ANALYSIS

In Foucault's historical writing (e.g., Foucault 1977, 1980) discourse refers to a socially constructed system of statements—a linked set of terms, interpretations, meanings, evaluations, and causal analyses. There is no clear and automatic relationship between a discourse and social practices; social actors do not put into practice the ideas theoretically contained within discourses (Smart 1983). Foucault believes that social practices are informed by discourses. As well, practices are themselves a part of the discursive field, in the sense that actions are situated within and enunciate specific discourses (see, e.g., Scott 1988; Smith 1988).

A second relevant concept from poststructuralist approaches is the concept of "positioning." Explaining this concept, Weedon (1988) argues that when we think, we place ourselves within one or other of a number of possible historically created discourses. Furthermore, in doing this we take on a "subject position" and this subject position is offered to us within a discourse as part of the overall discursive field. Our sense of ourselves—our subjectivity—is constituted through the adoption of these subject positions. As well, she argues, we are not unified in our subjectivity, but take up contradictory positions on different occasions (Weedon 1988).

Within much recent poststructuralist writing there has been an attempt to reconcile the concept of agency with poststructuralism (e.g., Davies and Harre 1990; Silverman 1985; Smith 1988; Weedon 1988). People are not passively recruited into subject positions by discourses that constitute them willy-nilly. Instead, people as agents take up subject positions. A discourse constrains the range of subject positions that are available, but individuals can also choose between discourses, choose from a variety of possible subject positions within a particular discourse, or create new subject positions. In making these choices, people participate in the creation of new discursive possibilities.

This study looks at the constitution of gendered subjectivity in terms of a number of discourses that were salient in the interview material. Preeminent among these is the discourse of romance. As I will show, interviewees both transgressed against this discourse and adapted it to their own uses. Some of the other discourses that are considered are the discourse of girlhood purity, the discourse of adolescence as a life stage, the discourse of adolescent friendship, and the discourse of feminism. This research illustrates how these discourses operate in the lives of young women and shows that usually conservative discourses are not necessarily taken up in terms of the prescriptions of emphasized femininity. The study also demonstrates how these discourses may conflict with each other, opening up spaces through which women negotiate and resist patriarchal definitions of femininity.

EMPHASIZED FEMININITY AND MAN/GIRL RELATIONSHIPS

Man/girl sex is transgressive from a variety of points of view. It can also be constituted as conforming to various popular cultural ideals. Man/girl sex may be viewed as a transgression against emphasized femininity. Within adolescence, girls are invited to enter relationships with boys within the framework of dating as a form of miniromance. They are urged to see each new relationship as lasting, monogamous, and forever (Carrington 1986). The ideology of romance and marriage is invoked as a discursive position from which to interpret adolescent relationships (Griffin 1982). Participation in a sexual relationship with an adult man may disrupt this positioning because the relationship is secret and the adult cannot be viewed as a potential husband.

A voluntary relationship of this type may also be considered to transgress emphasized femininity by breaking with the requirement of girlhood purity. The adolescent girl is supposed to indicate her suitability as a future wife and mother by displaying her submission to the requirements of the double standard. She is required to prolong the asexual state of childhood into adolescence and avoid an active and assertive sexuality (Lees 1986). In this context voluntary intergenerational sex is seen as precocious sexualization, leading to promiscuity and a future inability to be a faithful wife and a good mother (Baker 1983; Fraser 1981). Alternatively, a different use of the same ideological positions sees intergenerational sex as equivalent to promiscuity and as indicating a failure of appropriate adolescent femininity—a failure presumed to derive from underlying psychological problems (Hudson 1984).

Such relationships may be conceived of as a threat to the structure of male authority over female sexuality. The adolescent girl who takes it upon herself to initiate a relationship with an adult challenges the father's right to control her sexuality. The adult power of her lover is seen as a challenge to the proper authority of her father and his control over her sexual contacts. She seeks sexual expression outside of the protected spaces defined for her (Willis 1984).

In all these ways voluntary participation in man/girl sex can be constituted as a transgression against the requirements of emphasized femininity for adolescent girls. This study provided ample evidence that the relationships that the interviewees described were perceived as transgressive within the context of emphasized femininity. Interviewees were aware that what they were doing marked them as sexually despoiled by their relationship. They spoke of the conflicts they experienced with their parents, either through their own guilt about these relationships or through direct and open disputes. However, establishing the transgressive nature of these relationships is not the main purpose of this article. Instead, I will look at the ways in which the interviewees validated and understood these departures from emphasized femininity.

EMPHASIZED FEMININITY AND ADOLESCENCE

Dominant ideas about appropriate behavior in adolescence are at variance with hegemonic cultural prescriptions for femininity; adolescent girls have to tread a difficult path between these conflicting requirements (Hudson 1984). Hudson (1984) claims:

In matters of sexuality the discourse of adolescence is clearly at variance with the discourse of femininity: according to the terms of the adolescence discourse, adolescence is a time of shifting allegiances, rapidly changing friendships; whereas femininity involves the skill to make lasting relationships, with the ability to care very deeply for very few people. Thus, the teenage girl has to tread a narrow line between "getting too serious too soon," and being regarded as promiscuous by her elders and as a "slag" by her peers. (P. 47)

This conflict between adolescence and emphasized femininity informs ideas about age disparities between adolescent girls and their boyfriends:

Having an older boyfriend is considered a danger signal by most adults; yet since the expectations of adolescence would lead a boy . . . to change girlfriends frequently, having a boyfriend of her own age would, presumably,

therefore, not afford the girl the opportunity of demonstrating her developing feminine skills of making deep and lasting relationships. (Hudson 1984, 47)

This passage suggests that girls might prefer a relationship with an older boyfriend as a way to pursue the requirements of emphasized femininity. The relationship is a serious relationship in which skills of empathy and nurturing can be developed. However, such a relationship is also likely to be criticized according to the discourse of adolescence; relationships should be experimental and a learning experience rather than becoming a quasimarrriage—"getting too serious too soon." The following study confirms the relevance of such issues to the experience of man/girl relationships. Some interviewees balanced emphasized femininity and adolescence whereas others more clearly rejected emphasized femininity in terms of an adolescent subject position.

THE BALANCING OF ROMANCE AND ADOLESCENCE

Romance is one of the discourses through which emphasized femininity is constructed. Although a textual analysis of romance may identify it as a conservative and patriarchal ideology, it is also possible to consider the ways in which women position themselves within romance in real life. The lived experience of romance is constituted by the activities of people who organize what they do in relationship to romantic texts. Women are not just the "passive products of socialization" through such texts (Smith 1988, 39).

The social messages of romance novels have been a hotly contested issue within feminist analyses of the media. Although analyses that stress the patriarchal content and uses of the form are very common (e.g., Christian-Smith 1987; Gilbert and Taylor 1991; Greer 1972), there are also many analysts who suggest that these novels are ambivalent or even subversive in their appeal to women (Modleski 1984; Radway 1987). I focus on the types of text that we may regard as conservative or even "old fashioned," and on the analysis of romance as a conservative patriarchal genre. This assumes that this meaning of romance is thoroughly familiar to the interviewees and is regarded as a benchmark against which their positions can be assessed. The established and conservative ideal of romance is adapted and challenged by the interviewees. I shall consider each of the interview narratives in turn, and then summarize key points.

Wendy met Paul when she was 12 years old. He was in his mid-20s. She lived in a small beachside town on the South Coast of New South Wales and

was introduced to Paul by older friends of her brother. Their relationship lasted more than a year and ended partly because her father forbade it and partly because Wendy herself wanted to end it.

From her account there is little doubt that Paul was in love with Wendy and showed this affection by his emotional support and understanding of her emotional needs at the time. A statement that stands as a summary of their relationship is the following:

He was just really . . . he was much more sensitive than most people I've known. He's much more concerned. He just had . . . the cup runneth over with love and affection. He was really attentive all the time and that sort of attention I've not had from, really from anybody. Just that depth of sensitivity and asking me how I felt about things all the time.

This is an instance of "romantic recognition," accompanied by a feeling of being special (Christian-Smith 1987, 374). Paul is described as the first person who validated her as an adult. Their relationship allowed Wendy to develop her femininity through experience of a deep and caring relationship (Hudson 1984).

Paul revealed his love through overt declarations of romantic feeling, as well as through textually referenced signs of romantic love. One of many examples was the night of Wendy's 13th birthday:

Like I remember he was the first one to actually take me to a restaurant. He took me for my 13th birthday to the Copenhagen Cafe. And it was really funny. It must have been a Sunday or something because we arrived there and it was closed and we'd all sort of got dressed up after the beach. Paul was staring in the window and this man came out and Paul started speaking to him in Danish and the man spoke back and Paul told him this was such a special occasion because it was my 13th birthday and the man said "Come in. The restaurant can be yours tonight." Just for the two of us. That was really sweet, it was really lovely. All of 13!

Paul was considerably older than Wendy and also came from a social group with higher status than Wendy. He and his friends were middle-class university students. A common theme of romantic texts is that the hero provides the heroine with a point of entry into a higher social status group (Christian-Smith 1987; Greer 1972). Wendy's account fits this theme; she claims that Paul and his friends encouraged her to see herself as capable of undertaking university study and that this had a major impact on her life. Wendy also comments on the way in which Paul's wealth as an adult enabled him to set the scene romantically.

Wendy and Paul's sexual relationship did not include penetration but was confined to tongue kissing and petting. According to Greer, the ideal romantic

hero displays strong sexual desire held in check by tenderness and an understanding of the heroine's emotional needs (Greer 1972). In her account, Wendy describes Paul's behavior in these terms:

I mean he did want to. He wanted to be sexual, he wanted to be physically close and I felt that. I remember rubbing up against him when he had a hard on and things like that but most of the time it felt like he just wanted to be really close and warm. . . . We used to cuddle a lot and kiss and things. It got vaguely sexual for a while. Tongue kissing . . . a great wet beard. He was really really really gentle. More gentle than I think anyone else I've known as far as that goes. He was obviously being really careful. That was Paul too, because he was that sort of person anyway, it wasn't just because I was young.

There are instances in the interview where she characterizes her relationship with Paul in accordance with Greer's definition of the romantic hero as a paternal, guiding, and protective figure (Greer 1972). At one point she comments on the feeling of protection she felt when Paul carried her in his arms.

We can see that Wendy validated and understood her experiences in ways that do not depart from an established and conservative discourse of romance. However, she also distanced her experience from this model of romance in important ways. The most central of these is that Wendy does not describe herself as having been in love. She points out that Paul often declared his love for her but that she rarely reciprocated:

I felt like . . . I don't know. It's really hard to tell how I felt then because I guess I've thought about it so much since. But I guess I felt like he was giving more than I was and he was being really really nice to me and I really liked him. I really really did. I thought he was just wonderful but I didn't feel like it was that head-over-heels, you know, all time love affair.

In statements on this topic Wendy explains her position in terms of popular ideas about the status of adolescence as a transition to adulthood. She was happy to try out a romantic relationship with Paul but her youth provided her with a reason for not taking it too seriously:

I just think he wanted something more than I had to offer at the time and I think that was really unfair of me but I just didn't know, you know. I just didn't have enough experience to realize that that's what he wanted . . . In fact I used to flirt with him all the time sort of giving him the come on but stopping when it got a little bit too passionate but that was all part of the game too. I could get very poetic and say he was showing me my blossoming womanhood or something. Just the fact that I could attract somebody and how to actually do it and have someone respond without them just diving on me which is what would happen if it was somebody my own age if I did some of the things that I did to Paul. But in fact, I don't know, perhaps they just wouldn't even notice because

the communication was much more subtle. He was much more responsive and much more concerned about me than the boys of my own age.

Here the phrase "something more than I had to offer at the time" could stand for something sexual but it also refers to a fully realized romantic relationship in which both parties are deeply in love and the sexual contact expresses this. That may have been what Paul wanted out of their relationship but Wendy saw herself as finding out "how to actually do it"—a romantic relationship—without actually wanting to have one at the time with Paul. This distancing is framed within the discourse of adolescence. Her behavior was experimental, a learning experience. She was learning how to "do femininity." Wendy also situates herself as an "adolescent" in accounting for the end of her relationship with Paul. She implies that the relationship was a phase in broadening her social experience within adolescence, saying that by the end of the relationship she was more interested in spending time with Paul's friends "going off in the landrover, going on trips and things."

Another significant departure from romantic ideology is given in Wendy's picture of the distribution of power and authority in her relationship with Paul. Whereas conservative romantic texts require that the male leads and the female follows, Wendy suggests that she prized and insisted on an equality of authority in her relationship. She did not hesitate to oppose Paul. In rejecting his suggestions she did not rely on "persuasion, fragility and seeming helplessness" to get her own way, which Christian-Smith (1987) found to be the only resort of romantic heroines in the texts she studied (p. 374). A striking example was an incident in which Paul attempted to persuade her to try some hash:

The only time that I felt like I got any pressure at all from him was that day he offered me some hash and I said no, and he had made this great build up that it was really important and hash was wonderful stuff. And they'd all smoked before when I was around and I didn't and I said no. He didn't withdraw any favors or anything from me for that but he did storm off.

In the above incident Wendy did not behave like the heroine of romance in awe of her hero's worldly experience. Nor was their relationship compromised by her independent judgment in this instance. Wendy maintains that she prized the equality of their relationship rather than looking for the guidance and paternal leadership expected of the male hero of romance. She commends Paul as the first person to treat her as an adult and have a respect for her point of view and her opinion. In an oblique way, this departure from romance is also framed within the terms of adolescence. Adolescents are leaving childhood and claiming adulthood. To demand equality as a sign of

being treated as an adult is to see oneself as an "adolescent" demanding entry to adulthood and civic equality.

Joanne began a relationship with a man in his late 20s at the age of 12. He was a single father in her neighborhood who employed her as a baby-sitter. Their relationship lasted until she was 16 when she moved with her parents to another city. Although her older boyfriend asked her to marry him, she turned down this offer.

Their relationship was romantic both as a quasi-marital arrangement and by its emotional flavor. Joanne looked after the daughter as the baby-sitter and she started cooking some of the meals and doing some of the shopping and other housework. On weekends they might go out together as a trio. In the evenings the daughter would be put to bed and they would retire to the kitchen for a cup of tea and a cigarette.

Joanne speaks often in the interview of the emotional support she received in this relationship, contrasting this to the bleak situation at home. Like many romantic texts, he could be seen as "rescuing" her from a difficult family situation. Although she says her friend was "not the romantic type," he did remember her birthdays with presents and gave her boxes of chocolates and bunches of roses. By the time she was 15 he was declaring his love directly. He took a typically romantic role in initiating Joanne into sexual experiences. She had her first orgasm with him. There was no penetration sex. Nevertheless, their sexual relationship clearly went further than is envisaged in romantic texts for adolescents and in the novels described by Greer (1972); petting to orgasm was the normal pattern of their sexual contacts.

As in Wendy's interview there were two respects in which the relationship did not fit the conventions of established romantic genres. The most significant departure lies in the fact that Joanne does not regard herself as having been in love. When asked whether she felt in love with him, she replied that it was "more of a caring warmth than that feeling of love that I have actually had since." She goes on to argue that a person of 16 or younger is unlikely to experience love, that being in love depends on knowing oneself and this is very rare in someone of that age. As with Wendy, a crucial discussion concerns the ending of the relationship. Joanne's parents decided to move to another city when she was 16 and her boyfriend asked her to marry him. She did not accept this proposal and went with her parents. Explaining how she felt about this at the time she remarks:

It was quite an attractive proposition at the time, as I'm sure marriage is when you're 16, you know, bliss and all that sort of stuff, but I think there was something in me said I'm only 16. You know I think I had a voice in my head that was going that I was only 16. . . . It's out of my control when I marry you.

She affirms this decision in retrospect. Her life since then, her lesbianism and independence, would have been unlikely if she had been tied to an early marriage and child care. When she speaks of a voice in her head which said she was only 16, she places herself within the discourse of adolescence.

In another way, too, Joanne's departures from conservative views of romance are identical to Wendy's. Joanne, like Wendy, claims that her relationship with an adult man was premised on a sharing of power within the relationship. She claims that her older boyfriend did not exercise a paternal or patriarchal authority over her.

The third of the romantic narratives is that of Isobel. Isobel was the daughter of professional parents. When she was 14, she met Martin (aged 48) at a sculpture workshop. He was the instructor and also a friend of her parents. Martin lived in the country and they conducted their liaison on the frequent occasions when he visited the city where she lived. They would meet at his motel room and go out to galleries and exhibitions together. The relationship ended when Isobel was 17 and began seeing a much younger boyfriend.

Unlike Wendy and Joanne, Isobel claimed that she was in love in this relationship. She also indicated that she had good reasons for thinking that Martin was in love with her. They wrote to each other about three times a week, long letters based on their "mutual obsession with the arts" signed "with love." She speaks of the way they would find things of interest to each other and share their enthusiasm for the arts by going to exhibitions and galleries together. Although Isobel and Martin were in the same socioeconomic class, their relationship fit a romantic picture in which the man is older and has a higher social status. She speaks of the pleasure she found in attending his lectures and sculpture classes, being in the audience and watching him, aware of their relationship even though others did not know about it.

The sexual aspects of their relationship also fit within the conservative romantic ideology I have been considering. As in the interviews I have just described, their sexual contacts were confined to kissing and petting. He initiated sexual contacts, she was reserved and avoided touching him. She was not interested in having intercourse but she was aware that he wanted it. She did not feel any pressure on his part to take their sexual relationship any further and believes that he respected her desire to avoid penetration sex because of her age.

Despite Isobel's romantic engagement in this relationship, she did not present it as an ultimate once-and-for-all true love. This became particularly obvious when she described an occasion when Martin seemed to be about to

break up his marriage to pursue his relationship with Isobel. They were together at his hotel room and he was due to meet his wife's plane that afternoon. He decided that he would not meet it and this would be the end of his marriage:

And I at that point having any . . . having it made aware to me that I was going to be responsible for the break up of their marriage, I freaked out completely and cut off towards him and just insisted that he get dressed, have a quick shower and get dressed and then go.

Isobel's behavior in this instance could be taken as a sign that she did not want their relationship to be redefined as something more significant than an affair. She was not prepared to commit herself to becoming a replacement for Martin's wife. The effect of what she did was to maintain the status quo of their relationship because Martin did not leave his wife.

Like Joanne and Wendy, Isobel resists an interpretation of this relationship in terms of the male partner having the kind of guidance and authority that Greer (1972) and Christian-Smith (1987) see as typical of romantic texts. When asked whether she might have been unduly influenced by his status as an adult, she replied:

Not really. No not really, even though . . . actually even though we might talk about superior status, because I've been since a young child . . . always had an intellectual connection with people who are adults and that sort of thing. . . . Umm, I don't really think that the status thing was all that important 'cause I think that I was always aware of myself as being quite . . . I actually told Mary [a close childhood and adult friend] that I was going to do this interview with you and she sort of said "Oh, you weren't a child at the time," you know.

Bobbie, the last interviewee in this set of narratives, was introduced to her uncle when she was 11. Although this relationship can be regarded as incestuous, it is presented in a way that makes it analogous to the other relationships described above. He was the brother of her deceased father and their sexual relationship was conducted on occasion when she visited and stayed at his house. Her uncle shared her radical politics and she sees him as an important figure in assisting her to develop the political and social analysis she now has. It was this political connection which led to the end of their relationship after several years. Her conservative mother and stepfather were dismayed by her growing and increasingly articulate radicalism and vetoed the friendship, preventing Bobbie from having any further connections with her uncle.

Bobbie has no doubts about her uncle's genuine fondness for her, and indicates a concern for her on his part which is consonant with the model of romance offered by conservative romantic texts:

It was so caring and considerate, I s'pose, which most adult sexual relations aren't because there's more of an equal, supposedly there's more of an equal power base so you don't . . . I've never found that sort of catering for again but I treasure having been, not nurtured, but having been cared for that much and eased into it slowly and all those sorts of things.

Discussing their sexual contacts, she speaks of her lack of focused sexual intensity as against his clear sexual drive, a drive held in check:

We experimented with what I found pleasant but there still wasn't, I didn't feel like there was anything I was really after. . . . And I could see the glint in his eye that there was something he was after but it didn't completely overtake him, it wasn't the be all and end all of our relationship.

Like Joanne and Wendy, Bobbie argues that she did not experience herself as being in love in the relationship, despite its many romantic features. Rejecting a conservative romantic ideal of male guidance, she stressed the egalitarian nature of their relationship:

We had a pretty equal sort of relationship anyway. He was exceptional in the adults that I knew in that he would consult with me about what we would do and things like that.

Bobbie's distance from the romantic model is premised on popular social constructions of adolescence as a transition to adulthood. This is particularly apparent in the way in which Bobbie presents her uncle as a teacher, someone who conveys adult sexual information, rather than as an embodiment of the romantic hero:

The experiences I had with an uncle whom I liked a lot and with whom I had a very important intellectual relationship were really important in terms of the development of my sexuality, like in terms of educating me basically. Telling me what things were and how they worked and what people did.

The idea is that adolescence is a stage of life in which one learns about and discovers sexuality and in which one is in a period of transition.

To summarize these four relationships, the adult is in each case seen as someone who showed a deep care and consideration for the younger partner. In many cases this was revealed in declarations of love and in tokens of romantic interest. However, the younger partner is always portrayed as somewhat ambivalent about the romantic significance of their relationship. In most cases the younger partner clearly reveals that they interpreted their relationship within a discourse of adolescence. It was an experience in which they were learning about sexuality and relationships. They never had any intention of becoming involved in a deeply romantic relationship and rejected any attempts by the adult to make the relationship more than an "affair" or a

friendship. The relationships hovered somewhere uneasily between the socially established conventions of a truly romantic experience and the feelings and behavior that might be considered appropriate to an adolescent sexual liaison.

At the same time, these interviewees contrast the intensity of romantic experience that was possible within these relationships with the shallowness of adolescent/adolescent relationships. In doing this they confirm Hudson's suggestion (1984) that girls may seek a relationship with an older boyfriend to realize a hegemonic ideal of femininity in which relationships express caring and intimacy.

A significant departure from conservative models of romance within these interviews relates to the disposal of power within the relationship. As Greer (1972) puts it, the male role in romance is that of someone who "guides" and has power by making decisions in the relationship (Greer 1972, 180; see also Christian-Smith 1987). This is not the picture drawn by these interviewees. They speak of the mutuality of decision making in the relationship and the extent to which the man respected the opinions of the girl and listened to what she had to say.

This emphasis on equality can be related to the significance that interviewees placed on the relationship as a relationship with an adult. The older partner was seen as the person who first recognized the interviewee as an adult. As Baker (1984) points out, adults are preeminently defined as those who can authoritatively judge claims to adulthood on the part of those defined as "adolescents." Adolescence is socially defined as a period in which one moves from a childhood dependency into the independence and equality expected of adults. Within these interview narratives, the younger parties validated their relationship with an adult in these terms, as their own entry into the status and authority expected of an adult, with the adult party as someone who recognized and respected this claim.

ANTIROMANTIC POSITIONS

A number of studies have examined girls' resistance to the discourse of romance. Gilbert (1988; see also Radway 1987) maintains that it is wrong to assume that girls passively accept the prescriptions of romantic ideology, despite the fact that they are avid readers of romantic texts. Research has also suggested that countercultures of girls resistant to schooling are often equally resistant to dominant notions of femininity associated with romance. Griffin (1982) summarizes the opinions of the girls she interviewed:

Most of the young women with whom I talked “saw through” the dominant presentation of true love as the source of their salvation. They had a low opinion of their male peers, and a pragmatic approach to the role of romance in heterosexual relationships. (P. 7)

She argues that white working class girls’ countercultures actively resisted notions of the “nice girl,” undermining images of the “passive, docile young woman waiting for her ‘fella’ found in teenage magazines and romantic fiction” (Griffin 1982, 11).

Another way to look at adolescent girls’ resistance to romance is to follow Hudson’s (1984) suggestion that the available discourse of adolescence positions girls in opposition to emphasized femininity. What is seen as typically “adolescent” is also seen as more appropriate behavior for boys, the “restless, searching youth, the Hamlet figure; the sower of wild oats, the tester of growing powers” (p. 35).

A third way to view such forms of resistance is to suggest that girls who oppose the requirements of emphasized femininity may take up a position from within romantic texts; they may speak a counterdiscourse made available from adolescent romantic narratives themselves, taking up the position of the “other girl” or bad girl (Christian-Smith 1987).

Denise and Angela were two interviewees from working class backgrounds who were involved in a number of dating sexual relationships with older boyfriends (18 to early 20s) from the age of 13 and moved on by the age of 15 to a pattern of picking up younger middle-aged men for casual sexual liaisons. By 18 both had become part of a more politically motivated radical counterculture.

Denise, like the girls of Griffin’s (1982) study, did not see romantic love as a “salvation” (p. 7). Her critique of romantic relationships is quite explicit; she defends what she recollects as an instrumental approach to her adolescent relationships with adult men:

I always hated romanticism. I have never been a romantic. I’m not one now. I can’t gear myself up to be. So if you take away that air of true love and romanticism then what are you left with? You are left with something mutually pleasant and convenient to both people involved and something that’s working.

She gives a critique of romanticism informed by feminism. She says that relationships based on mutual convenience are often a lot healthier “than relationships based on incredible romanticism where romanticism can overshadow all else and you can hang around and get abused.”

Looking back on her adolescence, she sees her behavior as apt in terms of this analysis. She sees her choice of an older first boyfriend, when she was 13, as pragmatic; his high status, his age (18), his car, “a nice gold Kings-

wood" (a big GMH car favored by working-class young men in Australia), and his job were useful:

I suppose looking back on it I was a cynical little manipulator really because it wasn't love or anything like that. I didn't see it in those terms at all. It was just handy.

Denise constitutes herself in a way that resembles "the other girl" of teenage romances. She is someone who knew what she wanted and was determined to get it. She was a "manipulator" or someone who consciously influenced the course of romantic relationships. Like the "other girl" of Christian-Smith's (1987) account, she avoided emotional commitments (p. 385).

Christian-Smith's (1987) characterization of the "other girl" as someone who sees romance as a trade between boys who provide entertainment, companionship, and social advancement and girls who provide support and sexual favors can be readily applied to Denise's account. She sums up the benefits of these relationships with older boyfriends in terms of status, cuddles and kisses, dancing, picnics, and going to the drive-in.

In describing her own side of the exchange, she obliquely mentions emotional support by saying that if she liked them a lot she would go to watch them play football. She speaks about the provision of sexual favors on a number of occasions. Discussing the sexual contacts, she says that she did not find them intensely exciting after the first occasion, although she liked the cuddling and kissing. On the other hand, she remarks "They wanted to do it, it made them happy. It didn't make me unhappy." When asked directly about whether she thought she was exchanging sexual favors for other services, she said:

I often look back and think about that. I think I was maybe prostituting myself. And I think well OK. That's fair enough. It was my choice to do that really. Hmm I mean in some respects you could say that. They tended to be sort of I-used-them, they-used-me type relationships. It was kind of a mutual, whatever, and all parties were involved in this.

In addition to seeing sexual contacts as part of an exchange she also nominates them as entertainments by placing them alongside other forms of entertainment suitable to adolescents. This remark and what follows definitely endorses the view that sex can be pursued for its own sake, as "fun":

I loved the cuddles and kisses. I loved going out dancing, I loved going to picnics, going to the drive-in . . . it was good. Do you want to hear about when I began to begin enjoying sex?

She goes on to describe an incident while camping when she and her friend met some male travelers. When she slept with one of the travelers, she had her first orgasm:

Well this just mysteriously happened and so I was a bit excited about all of that. It took me another year or so myself to figure out I could do it by masturbating which was pretty good. So I kept hanging around this guy for the whole two weeks and the experience repeated itself a couple of times. I don't know how he did it.

This narrative is the antithesis of conservative romantic ideology about women and sex; "love and commitment to a male" is not here seen as a prerequisite to any "expression of sexuality" (Christian-Smith 1987, 379). The mythology of sexual awakening is subverted by the suggestion that her orgasm was a lucky accident.

As in Griffin's (1982) account, Denise was a member of a girls' peer group that endorsed her own viewpoint on romance at the time. The pragmatic evaluation of relationships for what they had to offer and the preference for relationships with older boyfriends were shared by her peer group; "only the dags had boyfriends their own age."

The "other girl" of Christian-Smith's account (1987) is someone who is assertive with boys and has many boyfriends. Denise unequivocally describes herself in these terms. Explaining her assertiveness, she claimed:

I've always been a fairly assertive woman and I was an assertive teenage girl as well. I always used to get my own way, what movies we saw, whether we went dancing or went to someone's place and played cards or I'd get my own way if I was tired and wanted to go home at 10 instead of when I normally got taken home at 12. I'd say I want to go home and they'd take me home. If they didn't take me home at 10 I'd piss them off. Simple as that. In those days when I was young and straight and playing games "Oh, there are plenty more fish in the sea!" so they shaped up or shipped out. And they shaped up. They thought it was good—they were getting sex. I thought it was good. I was getting what I wanted.

She indicates that she used her awareness of the exchange between sex and entertainment to ensure that her terms were met. In describing the nights when she and her sister picked up men at a disco, she makes it quite clear that she took the initiative and was effective in getting what she wanted:

So about 1 o'clock we would hang around a bit and really check out the talent and move into operation mode. We had to pick someone up who could drive us home. And we would always successfully do this . . . We liked nice guys in tight jeans with Italian leather shoes and trendy haircuts. Good dancers. We

liked guys who were uninhibited enough so that they would dance with each other. . . . The gay guys were usually the cutest but we weren't into rejection but into success. . . . Success was the key to the whole operation. We operated as a team. They were good days actually.

The attitudes to sexuality that Denise attributes to herself in this period are clearly encompassed by a sexual code usually considered appropriate for adolescent boys and seen as a departure from femininity where girls are concerned. She was an adolescent who was trying out various sexual options without becoming deeply committed within romantic relationships. More than this, Denise explicitly adopts the masculinist framework of this version of adolescence—presenting herself and her sister as appropriators of the gaze, and as a team working together to pick up men as though participants in a military exercise.

As Hudson and others argue (Carrington 1986; Griffin 1982; Hudson 1984), emphasized femininity prescribes the dating relationship as a preparation for marriage and even as a kind of minimarriage in itself. Denise indicates that she did not conceive sexuality in these terms and did not construe her future as an inevitable transition to marriage and maternity. This became an issue when she became pregnant at 15 and her boyfriend at the time wanted her to have the baby and marry him. She explains in the interview that she was intending to develop her education with a view to a career and had no desire to settle down to maternity at such an age.

Angela's account is remarkably similar to Denise's. Like Denise, she speaks of relationships in terms of an exchange in which she gave sexual favors and enjoyed companionship and access to entertainment. Speaking of a period when she and a friend picked up men at a bar, she argues that they engaged in this practice partly for the sheer adventure and excitement that it offered. She describes the air of romance that these men created and says that it was a bit irrelevant in that she and her friend were not interested in courtship but "wanted to find men to sleep with really." Like Denise, she found the sex nonorgasmic but still enjoyable.

THE DISCOURSE OF FRIENDSHIP AS FEMININITY

Sharon's interview is unique. In many ways she works within a subject position that is analogous to Denise and Angela. As in their interviews, the claims of adolescence take precedence over the demands of romantic ideology. She consistently describes her relationships in this period as learning

and experimentation. She never talks about being in love and never implies that the male partner was in love with her. There are few of the more blatant textually referenced signs of romance—no declarations of love, candlelit dinners, chocolates, or cards signed with love. Like the “other girl” of teenage romances (Christian-Smith 1987), she sees relationships in terms of companionship. Like the “other girl,” she describes herself as assertive and making choices about sexual expression. However, this is where the similarity ends.

If Hudson (1984) is right that girls in adolescence are expected to develop femininity through “caring relationships” (p. 46), then Sharon undoubtedly manifests femininity in this sense. All of her relationships, both nonsexual friendships and sexual relationships, are evaluated and presented in terms of this moral ordering. She divorces sexual relationships from the claims of romantic ideology altogether and instead evaluates sexual relationships as “friendships,” using this term to include both sexual and nonsexual connections. She says, “People that I had affairs with were my friends, umm, and also, I guess, lovers.”

In answer to a question about whether she ever felt she was manipulated into a relationship by a knowing older person, she gives a very clear picture of what she insisted on in a sexual relationship and also explains what she means by the term “friend”:

I don't think that I was ever professionally sweet talked into any relationship I . . . I . . . Because I know that the people that I've had relationships with felt for me as much as I felt for them . . . And if, if they don't, if people don't feel for you as much as you do for them, it's not really worth having a relationship because then that's when you're manipulated.

This construction of gender in heterosexual relationships is quite distinct from the antiromantic position of Denise and Angela. Sharon does not propose sexual relationships as an exchange between sexual favors and support on the one side and companionship and entertainment on the others. Instead, she argues that there should be an equivalence of care and concern on both sides. Describing her relationship with Robbo, who was 17 when she was 14, she talks about the ease with which they could talk to each other, the intimacy and openness which was a feature of their sexual contacts, and the sharing which characterized their companionship—riding trail bikes, Robbo teaching her how to fix cars, going to movies, and smoking marijuana. She makes a similar analysis of her relationship with Jeffrey, whom she met through Robbo. Jeffrey, who was 40, began a sexual relationship with Robbo and was later introduced to Sharon. On the first day when Sharon met Jeffrey, she decided to join in and in this way began her sexual contacts with Jeffrey. In answer to a question about why she liked Jeffrey, she said:

I don't know. He was, he wasn't forceful and he came across that he really cared. And he did . . . Jeffrey wanted to spoil every kid you know. But often didn't have enough money to. So he would make it up by walking around some place or going somewhere that was free to go or you know, he was always occupied, he kept our minds busy and made sure we were happy which was the main thing . . . we'd really do enjoyable things . . . It never got boring. I can't stand boredom.

She makes it clear that this companionship was just as important as the sexual elements of the relationship:

Sometimes we wouldn't have sex. Sometimes we would. Like it wasn't as if we'd take a trip out there and just to have sex with him. I mean sometimes, I think most of the time we were just there to be with him to have his company. It was really good.

Sharon adopts a strategy in which sexual relationships are evaluated according to the norms of friendship that are expressed within girls' subcultures and which can be readily seen to be derived from common cultural norms of femininity (Carrington 1986; Gilligan 1982; Griffin 1982; Nilan 1991). She presents her relationships with older boyfriends as friendships and indicates that she insisted that her sexual relationships work according to the moral code found relevant in nonsexual friendships.

Her position is also related to common cultural constructions of adolescence in its emphasis on entertainment and shared spontaneity. In describing her sexual encounters with Jeffrey, she also accounts for her actions in terms consonant with a popular ideal of adolescence as sexual adventure and spontaneity. She explains, "No, I didn't know what sort of, what it could lead into but I never had to see Jeffrey again in my life if I didn't want to that first day so it was just easy come, easy go."

The social construction of adolescence is also manifested as the claiming of autonomy and independence:

When I was 14 is when everything happened. I wanted to try everything . . . I let my body go to my feelings. Because other people's attitudes and other people's ideas can make you change your mind and maybe you don't really want to change your mind. So really to let yourself go and to really discover because the only way you can find out is by doing it yourself and, and feeling it firsthand. Like feeling this emotion.

Her use of these discourses of adolescence puts her in contradiction to romantic ideals of feminine conduct within heterosexual relationships. She presents a fairly unromantic attitude to sex; penetration is not treated as the crossing of a great divide between childhood and adulthood. She indicates a pragmatic attitude to contraception. Before 15, she used condoms with

spermicidal gel and after that she took the pill. Unlike Denise and Angela, she did enjoy sex a great deal and had orgasms in these relationships.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has suggested ways in which it may be possible to move beyond the somewhat schematic analyses of gender construction present in Smith's (1988) account of "femininity" as a textually mediated discourse or Connell's (1987) account of "emphasized" and marginalized cultures of femininity.

A poststructuralist analysis of the type offered in this article indicates that conservative, mainstream, or emphasized femininity is constituted by a number of overlapping discourses, which may have contradictory implications in specific actual situations. For a number of the interviewees in this study, the discourse of romance from within emphasized femininity was itself posited in opposition to other discourses of emphasized femininity—the discourse of girlhood purity for example. In other words, their actions in taking part in a man/girl relationship were validated within one discourse of emphasized femininity, while they clearly transgressed against other discourses from the same overall framework.

We can also see that some discourses of "femininity"—taken in the broadest possible sense—have institutionalized and established uses on either side of "emphasized femininity." The example provided by this study is femininity seen as nurturance and care. Institutionalized within conservative romantic ideology as a requirement that women subordinate themselves to romantic and domestic relationships, it is also institutionalized within girlhood peer subcultures as a requirement of mutual care providing a ground for girl/girl solidarity and, on occasion, for overt feminist resistance to patriarchy (Nilan 1992). Moreover, as I have suggested here, this second egalitarian usage can be detached and can reinfect the site of heterosexuality against the grain of conservative romantic notions.

In addition, it becomes clear that people constitute their gendered subjectivity in contexts in which subject positions from within a variety of available and relevant discourses may well have a bearing. These other discourses provide alternatives through which conservative gender prescriptions are negotiated or resisted. As might have been expected, feminism as an articulate strategy of resistance to patriarchy informed some of the anti-romantic positions taken up by interviewees in this study. In a less predictable way, popular views about adolescence were clearly central to the way

interviewees constructed their gendered subjectivity in opposition to emphasized femininity.

Presented in dominant culture as an innocuously natural transition between biologically defined age categories, "adolescence" was used here to locate the interviewees in reference to dominant discourses of gender. The first set of interviewees used "adolescence" to negotiate their way around the traps laid within conservative versions of romantic love. The distance that they established from romantic commitment was validated within the terms of adolescence as experimentation. Likewise, the equality they sought in these relationships as "adults" was established in terms of adolescence as a transition to adulthood. For the other interviewees, a popular view of adolescence as a period of transitory and experimental sexual discovery became primary and was taken up instead of or in opposition to romantic versions of heterosexual dating.

As Connell (1987) has argued, one way to look at resistance to conservative versions of femininity is to see resistance in terms of resistant subcultural alternatives. However, so far the discussion shows that resistance may occur that is not framed in terms of any obvious subcultural guise. To that extent, this study confirms Smith's (1988) point that women negotiate and play with the conservative textual positions offered within emphasized femininity. On the other hand, there is no doubt that resistance can take a subcultural form. Within this study, Angela and Denise certainly spoke from the position of participants within a working-class adolescent girl subculture, resistant to aspects of emphasized femininity. They located man/girl sex in this context—"only the dags had boyfriends their own age." Using a poststructuralist analysis, I argued that these subcultural narratives were in fact created from materials made available within dominant discourses of romance and adolescence; the narrative of the "other girl" in romantic texts and the masculinist narrative of the adventurous youth in popular ideas about adolescence. What this suggests is strong analogies between subcultural forms of resistance to emphasized femininity and more partial revisions of the dominant discourses that constitute femininity.

The study confirms the usefulness of poststructural approaches to the social construction of gender in a number of ways. Subjects construct gender as an ongoing process by taking up positions from within a range of available and relevant discourses. These include discourses that on the face of it make no claims about appropriate gender behavior. This process is not stable or fixed at either the individual level or at the social level and continually operates to transform existing discourses and create new subject positions. It makes sense to look at the flexibility with which people adapt discourses to

a variety of political uses. In the light of this claim, emphasized femininity is a conservative use of overlapping but discrete discourses. In various ways many of these constitutive discourses may be broken loose from their conservative context and reused to validate alternative and resistant constructions of gender.

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