

“How did I get this lucky?”

**Issues of Power, Intimacy and Sexuality in the Construction of Young Women's
Identities within their Heterosexual Relationships.**

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to explore how young, educated and seemingly liberated women construct their identities and make sense of their futures around their heterosexual relationships. Using the experiences of eight women participants engaged in long-term heterosexual relationships, combined with relevant secondary literature, issues of sexuality, identity, power and intimacy are discussed. Emphasis is placed on the implications of their identity construction and how they 'perform' their roles as women in society. How their sexual stories reflect their positioning in society is premised by the phrase, 'the personal is political'. Through analysis of the participants' experiences mixed with theoretical arguments, this thesis finds that young women are apparently sexually, economically and intellectually liberated but locked into discourses that provide highly unequal, limiting, disempowering and oppressive understandings of masculinity, femininity and sexuality. They live and experience a reality which is far from liberated.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

I woke up early this morning and watched my baby sleep. He is the most beautiful man you'll ever see... he is perfect in every way... I just kept thinking 'How did I get this lucky?' He is more than I deserve (P3).

This thesis shows that subtle, yet deeply embedded ideologies and practices within heterosexual relationships serve to keep women in 'their place' and ensure that they do not fulfil their individual potential, in the workplace, but also as empowered citizens in society. I have chosen to do this using the experiences of heterosexual women in intimate relationships because it is these experiences that in many ways shape women's experience of and interaction with the public sphere.

Connell (2002:68) points out that gender is historical. By this he implies that there is no natural difference between the sexes, but rather differences have been constructed through carefully imbedded processes that have developed over time and can be traced historically. For example, patriarchy is a historical institution, not a natural one. Similarly, gender is *political*. While historically based, one can also argue that it is politically relevant and in fact, history in the making. Gender relations have developed over time and can be recognised by understanding historical patterns.

This also implies that external factors influence our understanding of gender. As Butler (1989) points out, gender categories are not fixed or determined, but rather unstable. They are subject to change according to current discourses and political climates. For example, with the development of the liberal state and free market economy, women are more able to occupy positions of wealth separate from men. However, at the same time men act as gatekeepers to prevent women from being as independent as they could be. Here other means of coercion become important, such as psychological and social coercion. For example, if a woman is a mother, society tells her she is neglecting her children by having a career

This subtle coercion begins with the socialisation of children. Children are taught to assume certain gendered positions in relation to each other and to society. This continues throughout adolescence and proceeds into adulthood. People thus come to assume certain characteristics and positions determined on the grounds of their sex. Thus the phrase, 'the personal is political' is important for this thesis and for feminists everywhere.

Coercion is a political and social reality and results in women not being taken seriously outside of their gendered positioning. Traditionally women were socialised into assuming their positions in the home, as caregivers and unpaid household labourers. Women

are still relegated to positions of inferiority and are not embraced in traditionally male spheres, such as the public domain. Therefore many women, though educated and qualified, do not go on to translate their success into achieving economic and social independence and many still rely on the men in their lives for such securities. The control of sexuality is one such means by which women come to occupy positions of subordination.

It is important to recognise that while such social coercion may not be violent, it is powerful and has repercussions that echo through society. Some theorists have suggested that women's economic dependence on men lies at the root of their subordination. While many women are dependent on men for economic security, I have chosen to conduct this thesis with women who are educated, financially secure and do not have the responsibility of a family. Technically then, these women have the capacity for economic independence as they are part of an educated elite. The thesis explores ways in which, despite apparently having access to the conditions of empowerment, these young women continue to position themselves, and be positioned as, subordinate to men and socially inferior.

Method

The study investigates heterosexual relationships at an elite South African university by examining how women in such relationships construct themselves through their interactions with their boyfriends. The participants are not bound by family commitments, are not financially dependent on men, are intelligent (they are well into degrees and have performed well so far) and potentially successful and employable women. Participants were gathered through word of mouth. They were asked to keep 'relationship diaries', describing their day-to-day interactions with their boyfriends, as well as any thoughts or feelings or conversations about their relationships. I asked the participants not to share their entries with each other, or with their boyfriends, because I wanted them to be as individual and unscripted as possible. The diaries were anonymous, either hand-written in A5 exercise books or emailed to me weekly. I gave the participants the opportunity of setting up alternative email accounts for them so I would not recognise their names on the email addresses, but all declined. I also bought and gave out the exercise books and told them not to write their names on them. I wanted to make them feel as comfortable as possible despite the intimate details they were disclosing to me.

I held an initial meeting with all the participants to ensure they were at ease with the process. I also asked them to 'free-write' for eight minutes about their boyfriends. Free-writing is an exercise whereby one's pen does not leave the paper or stop throughout the eight

minute period to allow a flow of thoughts through the person without self-censorship or analysing what one is writing i.e. one just writes whatever comes to mind. The idea is that one is more open and honest. The participants began writing in their diaries for me immediately. Participants handed in their diaries weekly and I read through them, asking various questions if I did not understand something or wanted them to expand on a statement or description.

I was not sure what kind of material I would be getting. I had described the content of the study in brief and general terms, not wanting to influence what they may write or cause them to censor themselves. I did expect some self-censorship in the diaries, as they were what Linda Bell (2000:72) refers to as 'solicited diaries'. Solicited diaries are kept at the researcher's request and specifically for use within a certain project. The idea is to "tap into material recorded by the diarist which may be regarded as private or personal" (Bell, 2000:73). She adds that the diaries draw

... [d]irectly upon *personalised diary accounts*, which reveal emotions and attitudes as well as activities, changing day to day. The *interpretation* of private meanings then becomes an explicit and crucial research issue (Bell, 2000:74, original emphasis).

Solicited diaries give me access to the construction of these women's identities within their relationships, which would otherwise be difficult to obtain because I cannot follow them around and view how they interact with their partners. Therefore, these diaries give me access to areas where I am not physically able to be. I am also able to 'read' their thoughts as I read their diaries. They are letting me in, in ways they do not even let their boyfriends in.

The use of solicited diaries is not without shortcomings. Certainly, in these solicited diary accounts I am present as the researcher, especially when I asked questions each week. Participants were fully aware that they were not just writing for themselves, and this could have had a constraining effect on their entries. However, the participants seemed to relish the opportunity to diarise. I found that the diary entries became longer for some participants as the weeks went on and they became more comfortable with me. On the other hand, one or two who had initially disclosed personal experiences in the diaries, held back more in the weeks that followed, possibly experiencing discomfort at divulging the more intimate details of their lives to a total stranger, one who they could run into at any moment in a small university town. However, I found all participants to be very open with me about their relationships, in a fashion that I had not expected. For example, one participant was not shy about diarizing her and her boyfriend's sexual experiences. Two of the participants wrote of having been raped, another two mentioned their problems with their fathers and all allowed me access into their intimate personal experiences.

I do not feel that they would have been as open with me in a face-to-face encounter. I did not want to have structured interviews where there would be specific questions asked to all the participants, as there is little flexibility in this process (Fontana and Frey, 2000:649). This also treats all the respondents as the same, and I view them as having their own experiences and thus requiring a particular, individualised research process. Such structured interviewing forces the researcher to adopt a neutral role, whereas I prefer to adopt an empathetic, yet participatory role. Mama refers to the 'masculine' nature of formal interviews. Certainly, traditional interviews are about creating a "highly artificial social relationship" (Mama, 1995:71) which I wished to avoid.

I also did not conduct focus groups or group interviews. Again, I wanted to know how each participant constructs herself and is framed according to discourses in her specific situation. I did not want the participants to influence each other. Focus groups also have the potential for one person to dominate the group (Fontana and Frey, 2000:652) and I wanted to ensure that not only was each participant comfortable, but also that each person had an opportunity to express herself as fully as she wished. I am interested in their individual narratives, not a potential group narrative.

I do feel that more follow-up interviews may have been helpful and should indeed have been conducted if this was a larger project, perhaps a PhD. I have already formed relationships with each participant in the diary process, which I could have taken further in interviews, which could have been spontaneous and exploratory: what Fontana and Frey (2000:655) call "unstructured interviewing".

Once the material had been gathered the analytical process began. This process seemed to take on a life of its own. I was a facilitator allowing the diaries to speak for themselves. Therefore, analysis of the diaries was by no means a discourse analysis in the traditional understanding. Discourse analysis assumes discourse to be a 'social text'. According to Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000:203), in discourse analysis, "people are assumed to be inconsistent and language is not seen as reflecting external or internal (mental) conditions". Here discourses are 'systems of statements' within conversations or texts, not the texts themselves. Discourse analysis is then a discursive practice. The discourse analyst 'extracts' him/herself from living within a certain set of social discourses and must instead reflect on them.

Discourse analysis assumes that language is primary. The belief is that through language people construct their world. As Alvesson and Skoldberg point out, discourse analysis starts with the premise that,

[t]he constructive and flexible ways in which language is used should themselves be a central subject of study (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000:205).

While humans are socially constructed to the degree that our experiences, communication, behaviour etc. is constructed through discourse, I regard it as important to see that discourses themselves are determined by social and historical circumstances. I view language as the tool with which we express such constructions. I am looking for meaning in language, but am not focusing on language specifically. Thus there is a difference between discourse analysis used more traditionally in the psychological realm and what I will be doing in this thesis. I am literally analysing discourses, as opposed to reconstructing meaning through the use of language. It is a matter of emphasis. Plummer (1995:5) clarifies this when he says “sexual stories can be seen as issues to be investigated in their own right”. He insists that the culture of sexual story telling has become centre stage in social studies (Plummer, 1995:18). In his book ‘Telling Sexual Stories’ he aims to “develop a sociology of stories” taking the topic “*the personal experience narratives of the intimate*” (Plummer, 1995:19- original emphasis). This is the kind of approach that I too have taken. It is a process of story telling conducted around issues of sexuality.

Amina Mama’s use of research methods has also influenced this project. Specifically, I turn to her use of discourse. According to Mama (1995:98) discourses are,

...Historically constructed regimes of knowledge [that] articulate and convey formal and informal knowledge and ideologies. They are constantly being reproduced and constituted, and can change and evolve in the process of communication. A discourse is a shared grid of knowledge that one or more people can ‘enter’ and through which explicit and implicit meanings are shared.

Mama notes that the concept is derived from Foucault, but states that while Foucault focuses on the power/knowledge relationship, she uses his definition of discourse to rather analyse subjectivities (Mama, 1995:98). The research in this thesis uses discourse in both ways, to recognise the power relations within intimate relationships, and to study the individuals themselves and how they make sense and construct their identities through the discourses that regulate them. The idea is that we construct and *make* knowledge instead of discovering it. We invent tools to help us make sense of experience and these tools shift according to what we discover through each experience (Schwandt, 2000:197). We are constructed within and through historical, social and conceptual frameworks that shift and vary over time. There is no real, no one representation, rather many that shift and change. Representation and description are constituted in discourse.

My intention was to analyse the data looking for themes and commonalities. I approached the data with the belief that we are socially constructed and that we communicate this through language, thus I am assuming the participants give meaning in everything they say, even if they are not aware of it. The idea is to think of these entries as mini stories reflecting the discourses of society. As social constructionists point out, we are constructed in and through language. I was not interested so much in how the participants behave but in their construction of their actions. For Foucault (1976), we reinforce the dominant discourses without even realizing it. It is this interplay of power that we need to become aware of in order for any change to come about.

In my thesis, participants are themselves constructing meaning and it is this meaning that I am looking for. Their meanings are my 'data'. Although I refer to my project as participatory research, I do acknowledge that at some point I am still holding the power because I will be the one doing the interpreting and the write up. Mama also acknowledges this in her research:

It was not a fully participatory research process (if such a thing can be said to exist) because the further development of the ideas started in the discussion process, the background research and all the writing up were undertaken by me, with no participation from the rest of the participants (1995:80).

I have to ensure that I am fair to my participants, but at the same time use their intimate experiences in my study to highlight power relations. As Olesen points out,

Participatory research confronts both researchers and participants-who-are-also-researchers with challenges about women's knowledge; representations of women; modes of data gathering, analysis, interpretation, and writing of the accounts; and relationships between and among collaborating parties (Olesen, 2000:234).

I admit from the outset that I am approaching this thesis from within a certain social context. I am a middle-class heterosexual woman, studying middle-class heterosexual women. The similarities between me and the research participants are both valuable and constraining. I do feel though, that I am able to understand the discourses at work, because essentially we are imbedded within similar discourses. I feel that because I have been exposed to the existence of such discourses, I am able to occupy a position as a heterosexual woman, but also as the researcher in this arena. Mama (1995:83) refers to this as the capacity "to occupy several social positions" and too feels that this is a valuable thing.

However, this could also mean that certain discourses could be difficult to recognise and interpret. I feel however, that this is more of an advantage because I am able to 'empathise' more readily with their experiences because I have had similar ones. I do run the

risk though, of projecting my own views onto their experiences and thus need to be aware of my own intentions every step of the way.

I respect the participant's privacy and have tried to ensure that throughout the study and especially now, I maintain that respect and do not betray my sources, either in disclosing their identities or being derogatory about their experiences in my thesis. The latter is something that I have had some difficulty with. Being a heterosexual, potentially employable woman myself, I can identify with these women, yet I have also found some of their entries and views frustrating.

I notice similar patterns of behaviour in some of the participants as I have had in my own life. While I can in no way state that any of these women are bound to experience the same outcome as I did, I still find myself berating them in my mind, as I have myself. Despite this, I feel I have used my personal experiences to enrich this study by being able to relate to the participants experiences and thus have a greater understanding of the meanings they make of their individual sexual stories. This in no way means that I am projecting my own personal experiences onto the participants, but rather allows me insight into aspects that others without similar experiences may overlook.

This thesis is as much about men as it is about women. It is about the society we live in, a society that influences us all, men and women. I have chosen to take this study from the perspective of women, but there are many studies of men within feminism (see for example the work of Robert Connell). Therefore, a feminist discussion of sexuality should no longer assume that heterosexuality is contradictory in any way to feminism. In other words, a heterosexual can still be a feminist. As Hollway (1995:90) discusses, feminists have been divided over the issue of agency and the idea that women within the heterosexual matrix do not have the ability to break out of hegemonic constructs. Rather, as Foucault (1976) points out, women do have the power within them to resist and to change discourse, but first need to become aware of the constructs that hold them back. In assuming that heterosexual women choose to be subordinated, one is actually doing a disservice to feminism and the advances made by so many researchers and feminists world-wide.

This thesis tries to understand how educated and seemingly liberated women remain locked into discourses that provide highly unequal, limiting, disempowering and oppressive understandings of masculinity, femininity and sexuality. How they construct their identities through the lens of their heterosexual relationships have far-reaching implications for the roles they begin to play in society. An essentialist understanding of sexuality remains central to their heterosexual relationships enforced by the women themselves as well as their

boyfriends. Following on from such understandings are also idealised constructions of what they feel their relationships should be like, couched in notions of a romantic love ideology. They measure themselves and their relationships according to an ideal they have held onto since their youth. The implications of this include: their inability to feel secure within their relationships; reliance on their boyfriends for their physical safety and emotional well-being; use of sex as a form of power, or as an expression of their love, such that when their boyfriends don't appear to place the same stock in it they feel used and unloved; arranging their lives around their boyfriends, the notion of 'quality time'; the idea of a family and a career as being in direct opposition; idealised conceptions of the role of the mother; masculine ideas of 'success' as well as the de-legitimization of their emotions, among others.

In the end these women are facing conflicting discourses which leave them confused. They have access to information and the opportunity to be financially and physically independent, but are emotionally reliant on men for their self-esteem, self-worth and approval. They are in essence, far from liberated.

CHAPTER TWO

A Theoretical Discussion

I just haven't gotten irritated with him, but he is Male and I am female, obviously and we are essentially different which will at some stage become a problem or cause issues... (P4).

This chapter will begin by exploring the writings of Foucault, specifically his use of 'discourse' and his understanding of power. These notions form the foundation of this study and thus Foucault is an important place to begin. An overview of the specific discourses relevant to this study will be discussed, including the sex/gender distinction, essentialist assumptions of the male/female binary, the internalisation of hegemonic discourses and subsequent self-regulation as well as the relevance of notions of romantic love. Following on from this, a discussion of sexuality and the culmination of sexuality and power are central in understanding the subordination of women. It is also vital to recognize the political relevance of all the above and why sexuality is such a pertinent issue to address in the political arena. Explorations of the 'normalcy' of heterosexuality through social construction will also be discussed in order to understand how sexuality becomes a controlling force in the subordination of women.

Foucault, Power and Discourse

The significance of Foucault's understanding of power is central to understanding that relationships are not fixed and therefore can change. Foucault (1976) points this out in his reworking of power, introducing it as a relationship and revolutionizing traditional, static definitions of power that view it as institutionalised or as a mode of subjugation. Foucault also rejects the idea of sovereign power as absolute and consisting of two aspects, ruler and ruled, or master and slave. He moves away from the idea that power is something that one owns, and that can be re-distributed (Dahlberg et al. 1999:28). Traditional definitions of power assume an oppressor and an oppressed. Such conceptions view power in a simple, quantitative manner. It is seen as the amount of resources one has, which assumes power is attainable and accessible, yet not available to all (Hindess, 1996:137).

In contrast, for Foucault, power is a 'multiplicity of force relations', which reinforce, structure and organise themselves through confrontations (Foucault, 1976:92). Power is inevitable in human relationships. It is therefore accessible to anyone and is everywhere, but

not equally or evenly so. Power relations are unstable, reversible and dispersed (Hindess, 1996:100). There is no specific source of power, rather it seems to emanate from everywhere, always being reproduced and reinforced. It is not a structure or an institution, but rather a calculated situation within particular societal contexts (Hindess, 1996:93).

Foucault's 'modern' definition of power is a move away from traditional notions of power as sovereign. This modern power according to Bordo is

non-authoritarian, non-conspiratorial and indeed non-orchestrated; yet it nonetheless produces and normalises bodies to serve prevailing relations of dominance and subordination (Bordo, 2004:26).

There is no structured dispersion of power, which also differs from traditional conceptions of power. It is also important to understand that for Foucault, resistance exists with power. The existence of power is in fact dependent on various types of resistance. In effect for Foucault, there is a 'plurality' of resistances (Foucault, 1976:96). This is important because it reminds us that power, not being fixed, is actually fluid.

Thus Foucault declares that power cannot be held onto or acquired and it cannot be entrenched through the use of force. For him, power is exercised from countless points within relationships. Foucault views such relations as 'intentional' and 'non-subjective' (Foucault, 1976:94). It is a 'structure of actions' that relate to free individuals. If we all possess power, then we are aware of it and of our exercise of it (Hindess, 1996:141). Yet Foucault insists that while there are always aims and objectives of exercised power, it is not merely a simple decision by an individual (Foucault, 1976: 95). It is informed and reinforced by the hegemonic discourses within which an individual is situated. If an individual is seen to have power 'over' another, it is in fact due to an "inevitable imbalance" within such a relationship due to the imbalances in existence within hegemonic discourses (Weeks, 2000:116).

Foucault's definition of power stresses that power is a culmination of techniques and strategies used to influence the behaviour of people who do have a choice, but such choices are characterized by dominant discourses in society, which are essentially the instruments of power (Hindess, 1996:141). In fact, Foucault's 'disciplinary power', summarised by Ransom (1998:37), is said to

...[s]hape individuals- neither with or without their consent. It does not use violence. Instead, individuals are trained and moulded to serve the needs of power (cited in Dahlberg et al, 1999:29) (sic).

Disciplinary power shapes individuals in the sense that it pushes individuals to conform to a particular 'norm', which must be achieved. Such 'disciplines' regulate everyday life and

disciplinary power works through 'subtle coercion', which makes power unconsciously pervasive and more effective. Here discourses are the instruments through which such subtle coercion shapes individuals. By discourse, Foucault means that language is an important part of how we construct the world and such discursive practices have come to play an important part of organising, and governing our ideas (Dahlberg et al, 1999:31). Discourses are developed and instituted to become the norm according to which practices and people are regulated. What is normal and what is 'deviant' is determined by existing discourses (Dahlberg et al, 1999:29).

There is no confrontation involved, or an awareness of the power structures. Rather, disciplinary power involves an individual internalising what is at play and in a sense governing him/herself. Our lack of awareness that such structures are at play, is the very reason that they are so successful. As Foucault also points out, it is this unconscious reinforcement by men and women that is most damaging. Cealy-Harrison and Hood-Williams (2002: 181) add, "There are desirable social technologies, repertoires that regulate the conduct of conduct in these settings". The implication is that discourses and the discursive practices that follow serve to coerce people into self-regulation.

For Foucault, the individual is constituted through power relations, through "specific technologies of power or disciplinary measures" (Dahlberg et al, 1999:29). Discourses are made up of unstable and non-uniform segments and are not subservient to power (Foucault, 1976:100). They are central to disciplinary power and both convey and produce power. As Weeks points out, it is these discursive practices that regulate the social,

Discursive practices... are embodied in technical processes, in institutions, and in patterns of general behaviour. The unity of a discourse, therefore, does not derive from the fact that it describes a 'real object', but from the social practices that actually form the object about which discourses speak. The 'social' is constituted through these practices (Weeks, 2000:111).

Discourse transmits and produces power, but it also exposes and makes it possible to change it. While discourse can be an instrument of power, it is also an obstacle to it. Silence becomes a "shelter for power" (Foucault, 1976:101). Knowledge is transmitted through what Foucault refers to as 'bio-power', which is the process of problematisation and normalisation and requires discourse. By problematising something, one is also creating a new discourse in which one can also challenge such prevailing norms. This is how power can be reversed or challenged. Knowledge is a product of power, but can also be an instrument of power (Dahlberg et al, 1999:30). Power and knowledge are thus joined through discourse.

A Foucauldian analysis of power ceases to view power as sovereign and rather introduces the concept that people are inscribed in power. Power can, however, be opposed due to its fragile nature. To become aware of the power that exists within all relationships and in effect, in human nature, is to become truly free and able to make decisions based on knowledge. Foucault does not call for minor change, rather his definition of power is a remarkable move away from conventional understandings, and as individuals, becoming aware of such power relations is a highly political act. We ourselves are able to become sovereign and not subject to the underlying power relations that constitute our subjectivity (Dahlberg et al, 1999:34).

Judith Butler (1989) supports Foucault's definition of power as "everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault, 1976:93). She adds that power is not taken away or off limits to people, but that it is rather 'redeployed' (Butler, 1989:158). Ramazanoglu also points this out when she adds that there is not a fixed amount of power such that because one person attains power, it means that another has lost it (Ramazanoglu, 1989:178). In other words, there is not a limited amount of power in existence, we all have the capacity to experience power in a positive way, not necessarily as a negative, dominating force.

As Bordo points out, using Foucault's conception of power, one can no longer see power as a "*possession* of individuals or groups- as something people 'have'- and instead see it as a dynamic or network of non-centralised forces" (Bordo, 2004:26- original emphasis). Such forces do not exist randomly, but are rather configured to assume "particular historical forms" and it is here in these forms, or what Foucault would call discourses, that certain people or groups dominate. This dominance comes about through a series of constructs that reinforce and continue to structure such discourses so that these groups continue to dominate. Here, Bordo (citing Foucault, 1977:138) states that this dominance is sustained

Through multiple 'processes, of different origin and scattered location,' regulating the most intimate and minute elements of the construction of space, time, desire, embodiment (Bordo, 2004:27).

Such a description of power and domination is important when one considers the power relations between men and women and how these constructs serve to 'keep women in their place', ensuring that a patriarchal hierarchy exists so that women cannot reach their full 'power potential'. Patriarchy is an institutionalised ideological system that is inherently disadvantageous to women. As Schwartz and Rutter point out,

Patriarchy literally means rule of the father. It refers to political and social systems that confer power and opportunity to men, often at the expense of women (2000:230).

Thus within patriarchy there is a manipulation of power to subordinate women. It is also important to remember that Foucault sees power as also being formed at the point of resistance. Resistance is the key here, as Foucault insists that power relations are not fixed and thus the situation of women is not a universal and determined repression (Bordo, 2004:27).

Connell (1987:107) refers to a 'structure' of power. It is through this structure of social power that men enforce social power over women. Individual acts of power, such as rape, are not actually individual at all but rather a product of the social relations of power that exist in society. As Connell points out, "Far from being a deviation from the social order, it is in a significant sense an enforcement of it" (Connell, 1987:107). It is important to remember that there is not only physical control at play here. Violent acts through the use of weapons and control of military means (which, as Connell points out, are still in the hands of men) are heinous enough. However, what is perhaps more damaging is the social control of power. The use of ideological institutions in the coercion and suppression of women are also in the hands of men who 'police' women.

Thus a new discourse needs to be created where women are able to construct their identities, not through the existing power relations that serve to subordinate them, but rather through a new realisation of the power that they too possess, that wills them to take charge of their own lives and choices that will be to their benefit and no longer to their detriment. This will require a readiness to accept that the dominant discourse of patriarchy and the control and regulation of sexuality is in fact central to the subordination of women and is continued through the acceptance and active reinforcement by both men and women. Thus the form of resistance that this requires will be the creation of alternative and oppositional discourses,

What political struggle is inevitably about, therefore, is 'reverse discourses', radically different definitions, different organisations of power relations (Weeks, 2000:120).

Before this can happen, however, one needs to expose the discourses that reinforce patriarchy in order to unveil discourses that can oppose it.

Discourses that speak patriarchy

The assumptions that help sustain patriarchy include essentialised conceptions of masculinity and femininity, the male/female binary and norms of compulsory heterosexuality leading to the control of women's sexuality to ensure women remain dependant on men for

their livelihood, physically, economically and emotionally. Such a power relation is reinforced through the control and the regulation of sexuality (women's particularly) according to heteronormative assumptions. Therefore, constructing heterosexuality as the norm and sustaining essentialist conceptions of the male/female binary serve to perpetuate this power relationship.

The term 'heteronormativity' captures the manner in which many social institutions and policies reinforce patriarchal beliefs. As Ingraham (2000:81) points out, "Heteronormativity works... to naturalize the institution of heterosexuality" and is in fact institutionalised by patriarchy. It expresses the notion that human beings are divided into two categories, male and female. Within these categories are certain characteristics that are embodied by such divisions. In other words, within heteronormative assumptions there is no distinction between sex and gender: being female implies that one is born with specifically female social behaviour as being male implies masculine characteristics. Masculinity and femininity and being male/female thus become interchangeable. This is also known as essentialism. Men and woman are assumed to complement each other. For example while men are rational, women are emotional; men the providers, women the nurturers and so on. Such a dichotomous view of society disregards the possibility that one may have a choice in one's social behaviour and in the expression of one's sexuality. Essentialism also assumes that men and women are social and biological complements, the implication of which is that heterosexuality is the norm and homosexuality is deviant. The coupling of men and women is essential for reproduction and therefore such a coming together is seen to be natural.

What this also means is that sexuality itself is described in terms of heterosexuality, which structures male dominance and female submission. MacKinnon also points out that the 'typical' model of sexuality seems to be one that is largely 'Freudian and essentialist'. That is, that sexuality is an

[i]nnate primary natural unconditioned drive, centering on heterosexual intercourse, that is, penile intromission, full actualisation of which is repressed by civilisation for its own survival (MacKinnon, 2002:35).

Heterosexuality then is socially constructed. There is nothing intrinsic to the sexual practice of heterosexuality that posits women as passive and men as active. As Ramazanoglu points out:

If the social bases of oppression in society can be changed, and if sexuality is largely socially constructed, then heterosexual relations do not *have* to be expressions of male power over women (1989:164).

Rather, these roles are socially constituted through the 'eroticisation' of the other. It is not intercourse itself that is the issue, but the meaning attached to it in society. As Jackson says,

The categories heterosexual, homosexual and lesbian are rooted in gender- they presuppose gender divisions and could not exist without our being able to define ourselves and others by gender (Jackson, 1996:27).

We have become 'sensitised' to the complexities and presence of power relations within assumptions of the norm of heterosexuality. Sex itself is defined as 'vaginal intercourse' "...in which sexual activity is thought of in terms of an active subject and passive object" (Jackson, 1996:22). She adds,

In defending sexual 'pluralism', it is often forgotten that feminist theories of sexuality began by questioning the relations of dominance and submission inscribed in conventional heterosexual practice, suggesting that such relations were neither natural nor inevitable, but resulted from the hierarchical ordering of gender (1996:23).

According to Jackson, in order to understand the different conceptions of heterosexuality, we must look at four different aspects of it:

Its institutionalisation within society and culture, the practices it entails, the experience of it, and the social and political identities associated with it (1996:24).

She points out that heterosexuality has been over-privileged in relation to other aspects of social life. She also emphasises that heterosexuality is not merely about sex itself, rather the assumption that heterosexuality is the norm has permeated society, and sex itself is certainly not "confined to the private sphere" (Jackson, 1996:24).

Desire presupposes the existence of men and women. As it is socially constituted, desire is gendered. Heterosexual desire focuses on difference, between men and women, "the sexual 'otherness' is the desired object" (Jackson, 1996:27). She does however say that one shouldn't place too much emphasis on men exerting their dominance in sex itself and ignore the other social practices of women's subordination. In other words, enforced heterosexuality incorporates essentialist assumptions in areas other than sex itself.

As Weeks points out in his reading of Foucault,

The individual subject is not a product of a single discourse, is not trapped in a prison of dominant meanings, but is in a sense, 'inter-discursive', with the potentiality for challenging and reversing the forms of definition, deploying one system of meaning against another (Weeks, 2000:114).

In contrast, social constructivists argue that one can separate sex from gender and that a biological male can have feminine characteristics and vice versa. Such a view implies that

sexuality is fluid and not static as heteronormative assumptions dictate. Butler (1989) claims that one 'performs' one's gender. By this she implies that such categories of masculinity and femininity are not static. Gender is performed rather than fixed or given (Butler, 1989:122). The form that the performance takes is determined by the hegemonic discourses and power relations in society. Gender becomes something that marks and defines one. It is often defined according to binaries. The feminine is defined according to what it is not- masculine. It is assumed to reflect the 'essence' of who people are. Butler's notion of 'gender performativity' explains gender as something that one does, therefore it is not fixed, but rather takes the form of "stylised repetition of acts through time" (Lloyd, 1999:196).

Therefore the construction of one's gender depends on the prevalent discourses in society. Should one move away from acting according to such constructions, one is abnormal and deviant, which immediately places a large number of people outside the realm of what is 'acceptable' within societal hegemonic standards. Such 'deviants' include people who may be lesbian, gay, transsexual, bisexual or intersexual.

Essentialist assumptions perpetuate patriarchy and serve to discredit women as 'equal' to or, just as capable, as men. Women are regulated according to a patriarchal system that insists on controlling women's sexuality through social manipulation. There are certain modes of control that exist. Essentialism is one such mode. Another tool of maintaining such essentialist assumptions is the construct of romantic love. Throughout the ages love has been the centerpiece of countless novels, fairy tales, poems, songs, movies and all other forms of media. The description of a certain kind of love underpinned by the heroic man and his vulnerable lover has become the only kind of romantic love imaginable, such that women especially have strived to maintain and discover such 'passion' in their own lives. It is for this reason that the construct of romantic love is important to understand and dispel if people are to find happiness in a love based not fantasy, but intimate democracy, as suggested by Giddens (1992).

The ingredients of romantic love - which began to be socially significant at the end of the 18th century - include such things as 'falling' in love, 'love at first sight' and 'eternal love' suggesting notions of love's transcendent quality which transports lovers beyond the common, everyday life to a place incompatible with worldly laws (de la Cuesta, 2001:185). Young women immersed in popular culture are exposed, from an early age, to narratives of romantic love. In fairy tales the prince rescues the princess from fire-breathing dragons and wicked witches so that they may fall in love and live happily ever after. The romantic novels that women read later in life remain faithful to the fairytale genre (Sue Jackson, 2001:306) as

do the romantic narratives in pop music, teen television dramas, fiction and magazines which present the possibility of romance as always just around the corner and the task of winning and keeping a boyfriend as paramount among life's goals (Jackson, 2001:306).

Both notions of the male/female binary and romantic love are based on an enforcement of a particular understanding of sexuality. It is important to understand this definition of sexuality in order to expose the power relations evident in sexuality and realize the political implications of such a relationship of power and the control of women's sexuality through the abuse of such power. Kathleen Gough (1975:69-70) in her essay 'The Origin of the family' highlights eight characteristics that male power takes on in order to control women and continue to subordinate them. They are:

Men's ability to deny women sexuality or to force it upon them; to command or exploit their labour to control their produce; to control or rob them of their children; to confine them physically and prevent their movements; to use them as objects in male transactions; to cramp their creativeness; or to withhold from them large areas of society's knowledge and cultural attainments (cited in Rich, 1980:638).

As Rich (1980:640) points out, these characteristics are manifestations of male power and are the actions through which male power is maintained. Such characteristics are symptomatic of enforced heterosexuality, notions of essentialism and the institution of romantic love ideologies. It is therefore important to investigate the roots of such characteristics in order to understand how a system of patriarchy is maintained. While people are situated and constructed within particular discourses, they can also create new discourses that challenge hegemonic ones. However, this requires further investigation into hegemonic discourses, such as essentialist understandings of sexuality and gender that many still adhere to.

Sexuality, Power and Politics

Many feminists see sexuality as the site of male power. Stevi Jackson (1996:16) points out that this construction of sexuality is patriarchal, "as serving the interests of men, as coercing women into compulsory heterosexuality". Ramazanoglu (1989:182) lists different places power can be found. These include: the organisation of systems of production, the social construction of gender and sexuality, the organisation of reproduction, the scaling of certain social differences, and lastly the 'ideological legitimization' of power relationships that develop as a result of these different power sources. This is significant because it shows the extent to which power pervades social relationships and how each of these categories serves to subordinate women.

Sexuality itself, as Ramazanoglu (1989:154) points out, is integral in theorising and understanding the power men exercise over women. What is particularly significant for feminists is the political aspect of sexuality, which is why the phrase, 'the personal is political' largely brought out by the work of Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970), still has meaning today. Millett suggested that 'politics' refers to,

...power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another. By way of parenthesis one might add that although an ideal politics might simply be conceived of as the arrangements of human life on agreeable and rational principles from whence the entire notion of power *over* others should be banished... (1970:24- emphasis in the original).

In her book, Millett (1970:24) also wanted to prove that "sex is a status category with political implications". Dworkin (1976:11) insists Millet "showed us that everything that happens to a woman in her life, everything that touches or moulds her, is *political*" (original emphasis). Essentially this also implies that the hegemonic discourses within society influence and affect the relationships between men and women. In a patriarchal society where the institutionalisation of discourses of patriarchy serves to subordinate women in the public sphere, women will also be subordinated privately, on an individual level.

Sexuality has been the focus of study because it is a highly contested area and has different meanings for various people. It has been central in much political activism in the last century, as well as within the feminist movement. Harding comments,

Sexuality is the object over and through which control and liberation have been sought in conservative and radical campaigns... (1998:1).

An increase in studies of sexuality lately is based upon the notion that sexuality forms an important part in constituting the subject and connecting the individual to the social body. In fact, as Harding (1998:1) points out, "...the individual is integrated into the social order through the regulation and control of sexuality". Sexuality has thus also begun to occupy a political space. As Jackson (1996:15) says, by making sexuality political, feminists have also conceptualised it as something that can be changed and used to challenge hegemonic discourses that assume that certain characteristics of sexuality are inherent and natural.

Ramazanoglu (1989:155) says that sexuality is a political issue in the relations "...between women and men, the individual and the state, the acceptable and the criminal". Bartky adds to this and says that the subordination of women by men enters into all spheres of life, and is in fact pervasive. Relations between men and women are then ordered and

...A sexual politics of domination is as much in evident in the private spheres of the family, ordinary social life, and sexuality as in the traditionally public spheres of government and the economy (Bartky, 1990:45).

This implies that sexuality has to be understood as part of a larger form of subordination and includes everything that is contained within sexuality- sexual desire, sexual behaviour and sexual fantasy. Bartky also points out that,

The deformed sexuality of patriarchal culture must be moved from the hidden domain of 'private life' into an arena for struggle, where a 'politically correct' sexuality of mutual respect will contend with an 'incorrect' sexuality of domination and submission (Bartky, 1990:45).

Harding also says that one is never either in the public or private sphere, rather one is in elements of both. Sexuality is 'dissected and judged' by a very public eye, yet has the guise of being "exquisitely private" (Harding, 1998:3).

Sexuality is thus central to the subordination of women. Butler refers to Foucault and how he describes sexuality as not being able to be constructed 'outside', 'before' or 'after' power (Butler, 1989:39). Sexuality is embodied by power at every turn. It is through the boundaries of power that sexuality and the sexual subject are constituted. Women particularly are struck by this dominant discourse of power relations because they are immediately subordinated by this sexual construction. Even essentialist conceptions of what it means to be embodied as female or male, reinforce hegemonic stereotypes that serve to subordinate women. According to MacKinnon (2002:33), "male dominance is sexual". For MacKinnon, sexuality is constructed within a theory of gender inequality, which takes place within the dominant discourse of social hierarchy. Such a theory of sexuality thus "treats sexuality as a construct of male power- defined by men, forced on women, and constitutive in the meaning of gender" (MacKinnon, 2002:33). She adds,

To explain gender inequality in terms of 'sexual politics' is to advance not only a political theory of the sexual that defines gender but also a sexual theory of the political to which gender is fundamental (2002:35).

She goes on to say that this defines male power as what men want sexually, which implies that power is itself 'socially defined'. This is precisely what Foucault (1976) wishes to point out. Sexuality is thus defined according to power,

Masculinity is having it, femininity is not having it. Masculinity precedes male as femininity precedes female and male sexual desire defines both. Specifically, 'woman' is defined by what male requires for arousal and satisfaction and is socially tautologous with 'female sexuality' and 'the female sex' (MacKinnon, 2002:35).

Sexuality is central to the construction of what Connell has termed 'hegemonic masculinity'.

He refers to hegemonic masculinity in Gramscian terms:

In the concept of hegemonic masculinity, 'hegemony' means (as in Gramsci's analysis of class relations in Italy from which the term is borrowed) a social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organisation of private life and cultural processes (Connell, 1987:184).

For Davies, hegemonic masculinity is an 'idea' of masculinity. She suggests,

No one individual stamps another individual in the mould of society. Rather, the society provides, through its structures, its languages, its interactive forms, possible ways of being, of thinking, of seeing (Davies, 1989:14).

Connell suggests that coercion through the enforcement of hegemonic masculinity implies a certain emphasised femininity in order to be successful. He adds, "Hegemonic masculinity is constructed in relation to women and to subordinated masculinities" (Connell, 1987:186), which ensures heterosexuality as the norm. Thus hegemonic masculinity itself is exclusive and dominant through its exclusion of other masculinities, and acceptance of emphasised femininity, as inferior, but necessary to sustain such a prevailing masculinity.

One is not born thinking in masculine or feminine terms. As children we are socialised into assuming certain gender roles. While we are by no means unable to break free from such roles, those that do are seen as different and labelled as the 'other'. Bronwyn Davies (1989) discusses the impact of gender socialisation in her work on how and why children become masculine or feminine. She comments on the insistence of society to label one either male or female, a duality that is confirmed by one's physiological make-up and is seen as consistent with certain characteristics. Davies shows how children learn to be either male or female as though it were an innate part of them and they adopt the attitude that being male or female, one must act according to hegemonic discourses of gender. Such discursive practises are taught and maintained throughout the development of children in media such as nursery rhymes, fairy tales and schooling, which structures the behaviour of children according to their sex.

Davies (1989:17) relates the story of Catherine, a young girl whose doll was stolen by a boy in her class. She is playing dress up and is wearing a skirt. She tries to get her doll back, but is unsuccessful. Caroline digs up a man's waistcoat from the cupboard and goes off once more to retrieve her doll. This time she is successful. It is only when Catherine sheds her femininity by ridding herself of the skirt that she is able to assert herself and show enough strength, dressed as a man, to get what she wants. This is an example of how femininity and

masculinity and the essentialist assumptions that accompany them, serve to socialise children into adopting such mannerisms as natural.

Constructs of romantic and ideal love then also start as soon as children are born. The immediate assignment of sex roles jump starts the gender socialisation of children. Thus their interactions with each other are already gendered by the time they can communicate through speech. Fairy tales and childhood stories are highly gendered and based on strong princes and beautiful princesses who need to be rescued by their knights in shining armour. It is through this gender socialisation that the process begins.

According to Davies (1989:14), the first and easiest way of enforcing sex roles is through dress and hairstyle. Girls are taught to be feminine by placing them in dresses that restrict their body movements (they are taught to never show their underwear as it is distinctly 'unladylike'), while boys are allowed to get as dirty as they like in the rough and tumble of childhood, or rather, boyhood.

Thus dresses mark the femaleness of their wearers but they also act as part of the process whereby femaleness becomes inscribed in girls' bodies (Davies, 1989:15). Girls are then taught to be meek and accept the dominant leadership of the boys. Even if the girls are actually stronger than the boys they require symbolic masculine items (such as cowboy hats, or pants) in order to express their discomfort with a boy's leadership. Similarly boys do the same to express feminine characteristics (see Davies, 1989:17). Davies speaks of a boy in her study, George who was wearing a skirt in the playground until another boy came up and punched him. George promptly took off the skirt, tucked it under his arm and punched the boy back (Davies, 1989:40). George was unable to hit the other boy when he was wearing a feminine symbol, even though he had told Davies earlier that the skirt made him feel powerful. These children have internalised what it means to be male and female and realise what they need in order to legitimise 'behaving appropriately'.

The relevance of this to a discussion on sexuality is clear. As much as men are taught to be assertive, aggressive and deserving, women are taught to be the opposite. The dualism of sexuality is an essential feature of the subordination of women. As long as men are able to dominate and control women through the control of sexuality, women will continue to not take up roles in society that can eventually alter the essentialised assumptions of the male/female binary.

CHAPTER THREE

Essentialist Assumptions and Gender Roles

Shame, poor guy- girls are just so much maintenance sometimes (P2).

The women in this study make sense of their relationships through a largely essentialist lens. The implications of such an understanding include: an essentialist understanding of sexuality and gender; de-legitimisation of emotion and a subsequent devaluing of the feminine and claims of alleged female over-emotionalisation; gendered notions of success and, specifically, that underlying all interactions between men and women is the assumption that there are specific gendered roles each are assigned to within society. The foundation of an essentialist understanding is itself a cultural and historical discourse. How essentialism has been understood throughout studies of sexuality and gender is important to understand in order to be able to relate the participants' understanding of their own relationships and identities to their entries. This chapter thus begins with a critique of essentialism.

Renzetti and Curran (1999:5) discuss two main sociological perspectives on gender, which also highlight the differences in understandings of sexuality. Firstly *structural functionalism*, also known as essentialism, is a social system within which men and women are biologically different and have specific complementary roles to play in society. Within this system, women are biologically suited, because of their reproductive role, to stay within the domestic environment, while men are biologically suited to be the economic providers and defenders of the family unit. Men are seen to be natural leaders of the family and society. As Schwartz and Rutter (2000:21) point out, according to essentialists, "men inseminate, women incubate".

The scientific study of sexuality had its genesis mainly in the West in the 1940s and 1950s, when studies of sexuality and gender were largely conducted by men, taking male sexuality as the 'norm'. Such a 'science' of sexuality was purportedly conducted from an objective and neutral standpoint. This approach to sexuality was deemed scientifically acceptable because it was seen to produce work that was impartial and would contribute to more knowledge about sex; as Harding (1998:10) puts it, work that would lead to 'human betterment'. Though scientists did acknowledge that certain practices differed between cultures and according to other social factors, they maintained that the nature of sexuality remained the same. Men and women were seen as *inherently* different with regards to sexuality. For structural functionalists, there is no separation of sex and gender, they are

interchangeable concepts. Sexuality is a natural, instinctual force that drives both the individual and society. Sexuality is kept in check by 'social, moral, medical mechanisms' (Harding, 1998:8). The individual is the object of study.

As Dworkin points out, universally there are believed to be only two sexes, male and female. These sexes are "not only distinct from each other, but are opposite" (Dworkin, 1976:97). Men are "active, strong and courageous", thus women are "passive, weak and fearful" (Dworkin, 1976:98). This depicts a binary; women are what men are not. According to this, all females are feminine and all males are masculine. These gender 'borders' fail to recognise that seemingly masculine characteristics can be found in women and some men can be feminine (Neal and Collas, 2000:15).

Hester Eisenstein refers to Millett's definition of male characteristics as active, female as passive (see also Birke, 1986:14). According to Eisenstein, Millett (1970) demonstrated that masculinity implied instrumental characteristics, "tenacious, aggressive, curious, ambitious, playful, responsible, original and competitive" (Eisenstein, 1984:8). Women's traits were thus expressive: "they were affectionate, obedient, responsive to sympathy and approval, cheerful, kind and friendly" (Eisenstein, 1984:8). As Schwartz and Rutter point out essentialists,

...take a biological, socio-biological, or evolutionary point of view [and] believe people's sexual desires and orientations are innate and hard-wired and that social impact is minimal (Schwartz and Rutter, 2000:21).

However for Millett, such traits were not a result of biology, but of social regulations that reinforced patriarchy.

Developments in feminism during the 1960s encouraged new approaches to sexuality and a 'paradigm revolution' took place (Renzetti and Curran, 1999:8). Such a feminist paradigm rejected essentialist findings and approaches of structural functionalism and opted for a more constructionist approach to the study of sexuality and gender. Sex and gender are thus two separate issues, one's sex being one's physiological make-up and gender becoming characteristics of masculinity and femininity, not bound by biology (Lipman-Blumen, 1984:2). This is how sexuality is viewed in this study. While not ignoring biology entirely, emphasis is placed on the meanings that are ascribed to sexuality and how these are socially constructed:

While people do share a genetic inheritance, and so have some common physical characteristics as males or females, we are socially constituted as human beings in ways that differentiate us from each other (Ramazanoglu, 1989:155).

Rather than seeing sexuality as inherent, biological and therefore inevitable, yet different for men and women, the approach here is to claim sexuality as a social phenomenon, constituted through historical and social factors (Harding 1998:8). This study, taken from a constructionist perspective, is concerned with the study of power and politics, specifically, “[t]he ways in which the construction of the sexual has the effect of privileging some sexual forms and denigrating others” (Harding, 1998:9). Sexuality is constituted through socially constructed forces, which are generated and reinforced by social power relations. The focus of study therefore, is those relations and norms, as well as the culture that enforces them. These constructions tend to operate as a series of binary oppositions, as Tickner (1998:431) points out:

In the West, conceptual dichotomies such as objectivity vs. subjectivity, reason vs. emotion, mind vs. body, culture vs. nature, self vs. other, or autonomy vs. relatedness, knowing vs. being and public vs. private have typically been used to describe male/female differences by feminists and non-feminists alike.

Such binary conceptions of gender assume that masculinity is associated with autonomy, rationality, sovereignty etc. and the feminine is the opposite of these things. This has the effect politically, as True (1996:236) points out, of reinforcing hegemonic masculine assumptions and therefore reinforcing the status quo. Constructionism then, is able to point out how sexuality is constructed and deconstructed. Masculinity is no longer exclusively male, femininity no longer exclusively female. Rather, these are conditioned traits. What is evident within constructionism is that the consequences of an essentialist understanding of sexuality and gender serve to reinforce patriarchy in specific ways. Some of these, and other consequences of essentialism and coercive tactics, will be discussed in relation to extracts from the participant diaries.

Participant Two (P2) says:

I often wonder what he thinks, we talk about it, but men express themselves differently, and I read into things, this may pose a problem or two or three.

Participant Eight is discussing how her boyfriend took care of her when she was sick,

He was really sweet about looking after me though, and never complained too much! I don't think he quite know what to do in terms of being my mother and looking after me. Guys just don't have that talent, but he tried his best.

One can see from these entries that certain conceptions about women and men appear in the participants' thinking, particularly that women do certain things and men do other things. This

binary is part of the dominant discourse of gender. They are assuming that men and women are born with certain abilities. For Participant Eight it is the ability of women (specifically mothers) to nurture and care for others that men just inherently do not possess. Furthermore, while this extract shows how she has internalised essentialist ideas, it also shows how these ideas work to her detriment. Her boyfriend makes little effort to care for her and is excused due to nurturing not being 'natural' to him. His paltry efforts are excused and she suffers as a result.

This seems to extend to the kitchen for some of these participants, who almost always end up with the 'domestic' tasks in their relationships. Participant Three says,

My boyfriend and I cooked brunch for some friends... all he did really was make toast and attempted to slice up the tomatoes. He says I look sexy when I cook, he loves my cooking. I love it when he tells me I look sexy...

Within essentialist assumptions certain gender roles dictate who does what tasks. Women are said to take on domestic tasks with more ease, being more biologically adaptable to such tasks than men. Men are the economic providers, while women are the nurturers (Renzetti and Curran, 1999:4). This can cause conflict when some women realise the implications of specified gender roles and the stereotyping that results, but remain locked into such discourses nonetheless. Participant Five repeatedly mentions that she is always the one who ends up cooking,

We then decided to cook dinner. He said that he would cook but guess what, I ended up cooking. (I think I'm getting used to that now!- although it did really annoy me).

On another occasion she was forced once again to cook:

He was whining cos neither of the girls had cooked dinner for the digs (can't the guys cook?!).

The acceptance that there are specific gendered roles plays out in the interactions between these participants and their boyfriends. By acting out these roles, the participants often position themselves in situations that are disempowering and have negative consequences. Connell refers to the seemingly strong Western cultural belief in essentialist assumptions and specific gender roles:

Women are supposed to be nurturant, suggestible, talkative, emotional, intuitive, and sexually loyal; men are supposed to be aggressive, tough-minded, taciturn, rational, analytic, and promiscuous (Connell, 2002:40).

Central to such an understanding is that masculine traits are positive, and those characteristics that are not (e.g. sexual promiscuity) are seen as uncontrollable and therefore not men's fault.

P4 points out another 'inherent difference' between men and women. She states,

One of my best friends is in ICU and he said 'shame, life's shit' but that he couldn't visit today cos he had work- if I cared about much other than her right now I'd be shocked beyond understanding that he didn't come to me straight away. If his friend was struggling for his/her life I'd be there even if I 'had work'. The difference between men and women is frightening.

Here P4 is once again unable to understand how men and women can be so different. She is willing to drop everything for one of her friends and would also support her boyfriend if it was one of his friends in trouble. Yet in another entry she says, referring to her boyfriend,

He always come through for me, he's incredible.

This is evident throughout the diaries. P4 particularly focuses on what she believes to be fundamental differences between men and women, yet she is often insistent of her boyfriend being her 'rock' and needing his advice because he is so 'sensible'. Yet here, when she needs him the most, he is unable to come through for her. She sees this as a male characteristic however, and not a flaw with her boyfriend in particular.

However, she does not let herself off the hook quite so easily. While similarly she may not be able to help her own limitations (by her own admission she sees certain 'female' characteristics as shortcomings) she still punishes herself for possessing them. For example,

*She [her mom] says I'm happy and that's all that matters, but I'm **female** and if I can't sleep at night I use the time to worry endlessly about things. It's so dumb. Even I think it's dumb and I do it (Original emphasis).*

Here she admits that she thinks worrying about things is 'dumb' implying that she is dumb, yet she also says it's a female characteristic. This does not stop her from judging herself and demeaning her own emotions and thoughts once again. Feminine traits are thus seen as negative and controllable and women are often punished or traumatised when they display these characteristics:

I didn't tell him what I wrote, mainly because I was probably being female and over-reacting and stuff.

Here Participant Four (P4) fears being labelled as 'being female', something she herself views as negative. She de-legitimises her own feelings without even expressing them anywhere else but in the diary. She reiterates this when she says,

More than that I want my issues to impact on his life the way his issues impact on mine. This seems so male! Shame, he hasn't done anything wrong really and here I feel so frustrated with him.

She excuses her boyfriend's behaviour, while punishing herself for her own. When the participant does assert herself she once again de-legitimises and undermines her own emotions,

Told him I realised he was stressed BUT that things have to work both ways. He seemed a bit stunned, definitely had that 'you sound like a woman with PMS' tone but I feel better. I then promptly told him that I was now too busy to deal with it and we'd sort it out on Monday. I know that was that 'female irrational' thing but I didn't care.

She stands up for herself, but at the same time has to add excuses for why she is acting this way, she has PMS or she is just being irrational because she is female. She should be able to control her emotions, but when she cannot, it becomes an hormonal issue. Participant Three also does this when she says,

I was tired and annoyed, but that's irrelevant.

The expression of emotion is coupled with a sense of guilt. There also seems to be shame involved with expressing emotion. Bartky remarks that feelings of shame and guilt are more common in women, not because there is a difference in the emotional capacities of men and women, but rather that it is a result of "the 'generalized condition of dishonour' which is women's lot in a sexist society" [Hussein Abdulahi Bulhan (1985:122) cited by Bartky (1990:85)]. Bartky continues to remark how "profoundly disempowering" such a manifested sense of personal inadequacy such feelings are for women. Here,

[t]o be ashamed is to be in the position of 'passing judgment on myself as on an object, for it is as an object that I appear to the Other' [Sartre (1956:221-222) cited in Bartky (1990:85)].

Participant Five hates crying in public because she feels 'weak'. She also excuses her emotions as 'female' implying that it is something negative;

I must admit that I was in a bit of a mad mood (hormones etc) so I wasn't feeling all that patient and happy.

Participant Two also struggles with forgiving her own 'femaleness', yet does not hesitate to forgive her boyfriend for his 'maleness'. He is male and therefore impossible for her to communicate with and to even begin to comprehend what he thinks. Similarly, there's no way he could begin to understand her; a natural, by birth impasse. She continues to excuse him for

this by stating that because these differences are biological, their misunderstandings are by no means his fault.

However, she goes on to say,

Shame, poor guy- girls are just so much maintenance sometimes.

This implies that although she excuses him for not understanding she does not excuse herself, referring to herself as high maintenance because of her inability to communicate with him.

She continues,

I know I don't ask much or even expect much- but the little that I do expect I feel should come so easily but it doesn't, he just doesn't understand! Which probably means that I do expect too much?

Here again, she excuses her boyfriend from any wrong-doing and turns all the blame on herself. This is evident when she suggests it is women who are 'high maintenance'.

When things go awry, and women find themselves making demands on their boyfriends for communication or emotional availability which are not met, they construct themselves as 'high maintenance'. Not wanting to be seen to be 'high maintenance' emerges as a high priority for many young women:

It upsets me that I am becoming one of those high maintenance girls. I actually don't know if he thinks I'm high maintenance or not. We've never discussed it (P2).

Not being viewed as 'high maintenance' means not complaining, not demanding too much, not expressing needs, not having expectations for emotional openness or fulfilment – in effect, not making any of the demands which are the necessary requirements for intimacy based on relations of equality and mutuality. While on the one hand feeling the need for greater genuine intimacy, women quickly pull back from these demands, making excuses for their boyfriends and blaming themselves instead:

Shame, he hasn't done anything wrong really and here I feel so frustrated with him. It's just in my life I'm always looking after everyone and tonight I just want him to basically pick me up and look after me (P4).

Later, this participant describes her entry here as 'rambling nonsense' and 'just female' and 'tired' and 'needing someone to feel sorry for me'. Her needs are rendered illegitimate and her boyfriend's uncaring behaviour vindicated. Despite failing to fulfil her needs he retains, in her eyes, the construction of someone who:

always comes through for me he's incredible ... he's my rock It means so much to know he cares the way he does I'm so grateful I have him (P4- emphasis in the original).

Women often place themselves within the discourse of the 'weaker' female. Young points out, referring to women,

We have more of a tendency than men do to greatly underestimate our bodily capacity. We decide beforehand- usually mistakenly- that the task is beyond us, and thus give it less than our full effort. At such a half-hearted level, of course, we cannot perform the tasks, become frustrated and fulfill our own prophecy (Young, 1990:147).

This is an example of how women internalise essentialist assumptions and play them out according to the expectations of a patriarchal society. The consequence of this is the resultant identification of all things male as better than anything female. By devaluing their emotions and reactions, these participants are also expressly devaluing the feminine. They attribute feminine characteristics to being female and place a negative light on them. Such alleged female over-emotionalisation reiterates the idea that women are ruled by their emotions, while men are able to act logically.

The acceptance of all things male as good has resulted in women reinforcing their own subordination, which comes through when these participants identify the male position as normal, and appear to be able to understand masculine behaviour above their own. Rich (1980:646) quotes Barry (1979:172), who says such male-identification means,

...Internalising the values of the coloniser and actively participating in carrying out the colonisation of one's self and one's sex... Male identification is the act whereby women place men above women, including themselves, in credibility, status, and importance in most situations, regardless of the comparative quality the women may bring to the situation... Interaction with women is seen as a lesser form of relating on every level.

This idea is reinforced by Participant Three in the following extract. Referring to her boyfriend she says,

He asked me if I feel like a woman and I told him that I'm still trying to negotiate which things I should keep from being a girl and how to fit those things into being a woman; not a girl, not yet a woman I guess. He says I'm a woman! I love that... He says that I have a maturity that is so rare in 'women' my age... He says that very few of the women/girls he's known have been able to hold their own in a crowd of guys but I'm like that. I always thought it's because I've been a tomboy for most of my life, it's still nice that he thinks of me that way.

Here it is almost as though to be a woman is better than being a girl, yet still not as good as being a man. In her answer to his question it is almost as though she feels there are specific

criteria that are required to become a woman. She then, unable to decide for herself, is ecstatic when her boyfriend decides for her and calls her a woman. She is only able to affirm this in herself after he affirms it for her. This type of situation reinforces male/female stereotypes, not to mention reinforcing the man as the dominant in the relationship. The next statements clarify this further. As a man/boy of her age, he assumes he is capable of identifying what maturity is, not to mention what a mature woman is like, assuming that maturity is something absent in most women her age. The interesting thing here as well, is that she herself places 'women' in inverted commas, still uncertain as to whether she is in fact a woman and whether females her age can actually be called women.

Furthermore, while making her 'love him' even more by calling her a woman, he continues to put her down or put her in her place so to speak by giving her backhanded compliments. He compliments her as an individual by calling her 'mature', but then puts women in general down by saying that it is so rare. He also states "*very few of the women/girls he's known have been able to hold their own in a crowd of guys*". This implies that it is difficult for women to keep up intellectually and verbally (or seemingly in any sphere) with men and that it is something to be proud of if one is a woman who is able. P3 seems to value what her boyfriend is saying and takes it as a compliment. However, he is in effect saying that women are inferior to men and it takes an exceptional woman to be able to even have a conversation on her own with men. She is happy to be thought of in this light, saying how nice it is that he thinks of her this way.

Added to this, she says that the reason she is so mature and capable of 'holding her own', is because she was a tomboy for most of her life. This implies that the only way a woman can relate to a man is if she behaves like one and what makes her a 'good woman' is her 'boyish abilities'. When her boyfriend sees her being able to communicate with men, it is something special about her that requires some sort of 'congratulations', implying that it is difficult for men and women to communicate. Yet she makes the effort and is rewarded by his praise, while he gets away with making very little effort whatsoever.

Wendy Hollway (1984a) discusses her own experience of the notion of 'equality' as put forward by early modern feminists. She learnt 'masculine' tasks like servicing her car, or wiring electronics etc. and viewed herself outside the category of 'woman' which she depicted derogatorily. However, she came to realise that the difference between men and women is by no means a neutral one. Instead, "...it is based on the principle of 'otherness'. In many practices, to be like men I had to be not like women" (Hollway, 1984a:231). She adds that to maintain her femininity she positioned herself according to men, due to the societal

value placed on being a man. Thus, while she may no longer see 'woman' as a negative category, she still judges herself according to 'man' due to the implications of masculinity in an essentialist, patriarchal society (Hollway, 1984a:230). For the participant, the value being placed on her being able to converse with men, brings her to a societal state of masculinity and posits her outside the realm of what is commonly thought of as 'feminine', subsequently maintaining essentialist assumptions of femininity.

Another consequence of an essentialist understanding of gender roles is the notion of success and what it means to live a successful life. Success is largely defined according to achievements in the public realm, the value placed on commodities. Therefore success is determined by economic achievements. It is defined by the type of car one drives, property one owns etc. Macklem refers to the notion of conventional success as "marked by wealth, celebrity, or the like" (Macklem, 2003:22). He outlines his definition of a successful life:

I take such a life to be composed of valuable projects and activities that are endorsed as one's personal goals. Lives are unsuccessful if they are restricted to activities that are not valuable... (Macklem, 2003: 23).

However, the idea of 'value' is itself a cultural construction. Patriarchy places a larger value on the role of men in the functioning of a society, while women are tasked with the domestic realm. Thus success becomes gendered. For men, it is the ability to be the economic providers and for women, it is the ability to master the art of domesticity. In a study conducted by Jean L. Potuchek (1997) on dual-earner families, results indicated that men and women seemed to have different interpretations of what it means to work outside the home. According to Williams, referring to Potuchek's study:

In only twenty percent of the dual-earner couples studied did the women consider themselves co-breadwinners or committed workers; these women were also less likely to have children at home (2000:27).

Most women in the study thus fitted into the role of *employed homemaker*, women who do not view their jobs outside the home as playing a central role in their families (Williams, 2000:27). It seems that if a woman is able to bear and raise children and nurture them and her partner, she is a successful woman. Women who may have success in an economic sense are still not seen as successes in life if they do not have families to care for.

Even before women have children or co-inhabit with a man, issues of value and success are on their minds. The participants do not seem believe it is possible for a woman to be a successful career person and a successful mother. Participant Three says,

I told him I would love to be a housewife for the first few years of my kid's lives. He thinks that's an appealing quality, "I love that about you" he said. He says it's because although I have high aspirations I also have high aspirations to be a devoted mom.

Here it seems that both of them have internalised hegemonic discourses and think that having high aspirations for a woman in general, do not include having a family. Rather, a woman needs to have separate aspirations to be a mother. The separation here also implies that in order to be a devoted mom, one cannot have a desire to succeed in one's career. The two are seemingly incompatible. Her boyfriend reinforces this when he says "I love that about you". Her desire to be a devoted mom takes preference over her own career achievements, meaning that she would stay at home looking after the children, yet this is not included in the general definition of success. The gendered implications of this mean that it goes without saying that her partner would be able to have a family and a career. Nowhere is it mentioned as a father, his high aspirations to be a devoted dad would keep him at home and away from his career.

While gender distinctions were used in the past to refuse women the vote, or allow women into universities, today they serve to control women in other ways. The notion of 'natural' gender differences has stayed within society, and the idea that women will act according to their biological nature is something that is regulated and maintained. For example, women are said to want above all else motherhood and to have a family. There is a supposed 'maternal instinct' in women that drives them to desire to be mothers and only see themselves as real women if they are able to express such motherly characteristics (Birke, 1986:13). As a result, women who are either unable to bear children or who do not have such desires, question themselves and often feel abnormal. Women are also taught that to be good mothers implies not leading lives of their own, and that by having careers they are neglecting their children. The participants have internalised what it means to be woman and in effect, what it means to be a mother. There is an either/or attitude when it comes to motherhood and careers:

Participant One says,

And a future means living with someone, marrying the person, having their kids. Settling down is something so anti all my career aspirations but it is still SO appealing. I look at him and I just think, 'Wow, let's leave varsity and have millions of children'. I could do that with him, I really could, but that wouldn't make me that successful would it? I really don't know why I want to achieve so much, I just always have. I want to be so many things and being a wife seems like such a cop out, selling out, giving way to romance and stability. But ja, so a summary of what I was saying is that to be successful a woman needs no man or no romantic ties or whims in her life. Why? Because it means too

much to us, it consumes our lives and therefore we have no space for other stuff.

Once again, the idea of success does not include a family. Here again, to be a successful mother does not imply being a successful person. A woman is either one or the other. 'Settling down' implies giving up on one's dreams, having children is a burden placed solely on the mother, and it becomes her life. She is not an individual, she is a wife and mother.

Furthermore, this participant questions her desire to succeed. It seems unnatural that as a woman she wishes to be more than a wife and a mother. In the beginning she asserts that being married to someone, one is obliged to have "their" children. She doesn't see it as the two of them having children together, but as if she would be raising her husband's children and would merely be the caregiver. She concludes that there is no way a woman can be successful if there is a man in her life. This implies that women are too caught up in rearing a man's children and 'serving' him, leaving no space for their own dreams and aspirations.

For Schwartz and Rutter (2000:123), marriage has a social function that in fact *relies* on gender difference. This is reiterated by Okin (1989) who discusses the idea that wives are exploited, not just by their husbands but also "in the world of work outside the home" (Okin, 1989:139). She adds:

To a great extent and in numerous ways, contemporary women in our society are made vulnerable by marriage itself. They are first set up for vulnerability during their developing years by their personal (and socially reinforced) expectations that they will be the primary caretakers of children, and that in fulfilling this role they will need to try to attract and to keep the economic support of a man, to whose work life they will be expected to give priority (1989:139).

The notion of marriage seems far from liberating to these participants:

Also, with the whole marriage thing, the reason I feel that is because of this whole 'female empowerment' I feel like I have stuff to prove. I feel like I have to prove I can support myself well! Then travel on my own, grow as a person and only then can I settle down. I feel like we can't get married young cos it'll be frowned upon cos we have to prove we can do things, not just take a 'cop out' and get married (P4).

This participant has been exposed to discourses that do not necessarily position women as naturally domestic. Yet this contradicts with patriarchal assumptions that assume heterosexual marriage is inevitable. Marriage represents a woman being dependant on a man. This participant wants to 'prove herself' before she takes up her gendered position in marriage. Furthermore, what it is like to be a mother also comes with certain characteristics. Within

marriage, even if both partners have full time employment outside the home, it is still the woman who bears the brunt of domestic tasks,

Half of married couples are dual-earners, but income and household data demonstrates that husbands end up the primary bread-winner and, when children are present, wives the primary parent in charge of the home (Schwartz and Rutter, 2000:125).

What it means to be a mother then, is largely to nurture others:

I have also learnt if I don't do stuff this year etc. it doesn't get done. So in a way I've taken on a mother type role. Maybe this fits into my whole perception of what a female is. E.g. I worry if things don't get done, or aren't done properly or on time. I hate letting people down. I see this as a female thing even though I can see that most of the girls I'm friends with don't do it. It's weird then to still see it as a female thing but I think that came from my mom. She's always worrying and planning etc that I suppose that was my first and most important impression of femaleness.

Okin discusses the double-bind that women are faced with:

They are rendered vulnerable by the actual division of labour within almost all current marriages. They are disadvantaged at work by the fact that the world of wage work, including the professions, is still largely structured around the assumption that 'workers' have wives at home. They are rendered far more vulnerable if they become the primary caretakers of children, and their vulnerability peaks if their marriage dissolves and they become single parents (1989:139).

These issues weigh heavily on the minds of these young women. Coupled with this are notions of what is and isn't considered 'femaleness'. These characteristics are assumed to be inherent to women, so much so that the intensified devaluing of the feminine places strain on women who feel they cannot escape from such characteristics, but cannot place any value on them either.

Conclusion

Essentialist assumptions serve to trap both men and women into an ideological mindset that is anything but empowering. By believing and accepting that humans have an inherent nature beyond their control is not only to undermine the progress achieved by many women world wide, it is also devaluing women's potential and possibilities. Opening a platform where such myths can be discussed and dispelled is one way people can move towards a society accepting of the 'other' and embracing all its members as equal citizens.

However, this is not a simple process. There are further consequences of essentialist assumptions that subordinate women. Women have internalised methods of control that result

in them regulating their own behaviour, as well as the behaviour of other women. This process of self-regulation is a result of the controlling mechanisms within hegemonic discourses that reinforce the subordination and consequent self-subordination of women. Once this has been exposed as a debilitating process in the everyday lives of women, society can begin to understand more how embedded the subordination of women is.

CHAPTER FOUR

Control and Regulatory Practices in the Subordination of Women

The world could fall apart and I'd still feel safe as long as he's around (P3).

The Panoptican

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977) discusses Jeremy Bentham's notion of the panoptican as a disciplinary measure. Essentially, the panoptican is based on the following principle:

At the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower... (Foucault, 1977:200).

This is the construction of a prison designed to keep watch over inmates. The prisoners are aware that at any moment, they may be watched. They cannot see the supervisor, but any movements they make, reflect as shadows on the walls of their cells that can be seen from the tower. This mechanism arranges 'spatial unities' that make any movement immediately and constantly recognisable.

The consequence of such a structure is, in essence, that the inmate is induced into a "state of permanent visibility that ensures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, 1977:201). Whether or not the prisoner is in fact being watched is irrelevant. The inmate realises that at any moment there is the possibility that his movements are being noted. The role of the supervisor is thus almost immaterial. The inmate begins to regulate his own behaviour under the fear of constantly being observed. Thus the panoptican ensures the automatic and regulatory function of coercive power. The prisoner becomes inscribed in such a power relationship and becomes "the principle of his own subjection" (Foucault, 1977:203).

The relevance of the panoptican to a discussion on gender is clear. In the same way the prisoner is under the constant gaze of the warden, similarly, women are under the constant gaze of men and other women. Such a power relationship is then internalised and women become their own supervisors. This form of control and regulation is very effective in ensuring the continued subordination of women. Here discipline is identified,

...neither with an institution, nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, compromising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures,

levels of application, targets; it is a 'physics' or an 'anatomy' of power, a technology... (Foucault, 1977:215).

Within society no one individual forces the self-regulation of women. It is the result of a continued hegemonic discourse that posits women as the 'objects' of men's gaze. This discourse is based on the assumption of heterosexuality. Women are under the gaze of men because a male/female relationship fits with the essentialist notion of the naturalness of such a relationship. As such, they are also under the gaze of other women because they are seen as competition for men's attention. Tolman et al, largely influenced by the work of Rich (1983) on compulsory heterosexuality, posit heterosexuality as a

...universally pervasive institution organising male and female relationships... This institution of heterosexuality is comprised of unwritten, but clearly codified and compulsory conventions by which males and females join in romantic relationships (Tolman et al, 2003:160).

Thus within a discourse of compulsory heterosexuality, what it means to be a man or a woman comes with certain expectations. Women thus internalise these expectations placed on them and regulate their behaviour accordingly.

According to Bartky (1990:72) this is an inevitability within contemporary patriarchal culture, "Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous, patriarchal Other". The very anonymity of this form of disciplinary power is itself a form of control. If there is no specific institutional origin of disciplinary power, the resultant self-discipline is seen as either voluntary or natural (Bartky, 1990:75). This serves to reinforce, within society, essentialist assumptions of the 'naturalness' of female inferiority. This is expressive of a larger system of subordination and an example of the patriarchal culture of 'othering' that women are subjected to.

The reinforcement of essentialist and patriarchal ideas presents itself in various ways. By internalising notions of what it means to be a woman, and as a result, feminine, one also internalises the negativity placed on femininity. Bartky, referring to emotions 'common' in women and asks:

What patterns of mood or feeling, then, tend to characterize women more than men? Here are some candidates: shame; guilt; the peculiar dialectic of shame and pride in embodiment consequent upon a narcissistic assumption of the body as spectacle; the blissful loss of self in the sense of merger with another; the pervasive apprehension consequent upon physical vulnerability, especially the fear of rape or assault (1990:85).

The consequences of this are multiple: women internalise negative conceptions of their bodies and regulate their movements; women fear their own sexuality which also results in fear for their physical safety; women identify more with men and learn to distrust other women; women have internalised a masculine definition of success thus devaluing their own accomplishments, as well as internalising patriarchal ideas of the family and what it means to be a mother; women feel guilt and shame as a result of not living up to the ideals that society has set up, which include what it means to be the 'perfect woman', wife/lover, mother and citizen.

This disciplinary mechanism of internalisation is said to produce "subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies" (Foucault, 1977:139). The resulting aim is to control the female body by controlling the female mind. Gesture, movements and appearance are all governed by self-disciplinary procedures that serve to subordinate women (Bartky, 1990:65). Bartky continues:

The disciplinary practices... are part of the process by which the ideal body of femininity- and hence the feminine body-subject- is constructed; in doing this, they produce a 'practiced and subjected' body, i.e. a body on which an inferior status has been inscribed... The technologies of femininity are taken up and practiced by women against the background of a pervasive sense of bodily deficiency (1990:71-72).

Thus while the process of self-discipline through internalisation is part of women's subordination, the consequences of this internalisation are ultimately negative. Women are thus key participants in their own subordination, albeit unconsciously.

The modern manipulation of the principles of the panopticon relies on such unconscious internalisation. While Foucault (1976) redefined power as accessible to all and infused within relationships, the invasiveness and restrictiveness of social and psychological control means that power is more advantageous to men within patriarchy. As Bartky points out,

The gaze which is inscribed in the very structure of the disciplinary institution is internalised by the inmate: Modern technologies of behaviour are thus oriented toward the production of isolated and self-policing subjects (1990:79).

There are no longer institutionalised forms of control to keep women out of the public arena. The 'modern' woman has the right to vote, access to education etc. Therefore women are subjected to different forms of social control.

Foucault points out three main objectives of such a disciplinary practice. These are also relevant to the discipline of women within patriarchy. Firstly, discipline is a technique for ensuring a specific social order (Foucault, 1977:218). In patriarchy, discipline keeps women

from realising that they are inscribed within forms of domination and to keep women bound by essentialist agendas.

Secondly, such self-discipline maximises the intensity of coercive measures (Foucault, 1977:218). Not only are the hegemonic discourses in society constructing both men and women's identities and reinforcing them through institutions etc, but now women are also regulating their own behaviour. The self-discipline technique extends this coercion to its extreme and cannot fail as long as women keep internalising hegemonic discourses. Finally, such a form of discipline ensures the docility of its citizens, and maintains the utility of the various roles played by members of society (Foucault, 1977:218). Women continue to feel pressure to have a family and maintain their domestic role in society, despite the availability of alternatives. As Iris Marion Young points out,

The female person who enacts the existence of women in patriarchal society must therefore live a contradiction: as human she is a free subject who participates in transcendence, but her situation as a woman denies her that subjectivity and transcendence (1990:144).

Despite being humans and therefore 'free subjects', the participants reflect in the diaries how they are positioned as 'docile bodies'. Two examples of this can be seen in how the participants construct themselves as physically 'weaker', thus needing male protection, as well as rendering their 'femaleness' as something negative, something they need to distance themselves from, resulting in constant antipathy towards the feminine.

Physical safety and women's negotiation of public space

According to Nancy Henley (1986) in her study of nonverbal communication, women's environment and spatial access is largely man-made and controlled by men. She adds that this environment is often threatening. Man-made machines, even large vehicles, are usually designed for use by men. Even the kitchen, which has been set up as the supposed domain of women, is built by men often with cabinets and shelves etc. out of the reach of women (Henley, 1986:61). However, the control of women's environment is most damaging when the threat comes in the form of possible direct physical attacks.

As Young (1990:155) points out, "the woman lives her body as *object* as well as subject" (original emphasis). She identifies the source of this as a patriarchal society that continuously defines women as objects, "mere bodies". Part of being a woman in a patriarchal society is the constant possibility that she will be looked on as an object, "as shape and flesh that

presents itself as the potential object of another's subject's intentions and manipulation" (Young, 1990:155) instead of as an agent of "action and intention". This is also a result of the 'inherent' heterosexual contract within patriarchy. Women are the objects of men's gaze because women are the passive recipients of male attention in a heterosexual ordering.

Compulsory heterosexuality is political in nature due to the way it benefits men within patriarchy. It requires various forms of coercion in order to remain instituted. These include subtle processes with far-reaching consequences, the internalisation of these processes results in women regulating their own behaviour. According to Tolman et al, Rich (1983) outlined the following as some of these processes:

...the socialisation of women and men to feel that male sexual 'drive' amounts to a right, the denial and denigration of female sexual pleasure and agency, and the objectification of women. Violence against women and the constant threat of it (including sexual harassment and rape), coupled with incitements for women to devalue their relationships with other women, sustain and perpetuate this institution to insure that it functions unconsciously and imperceptibly for most individuals (cited in Tolman et al, 2003:160).

Heterosexuality then does not only subordinate women in the cultural construction of heterosexual intercourse. The very essence of being heterosexual has been constructed to 'police' the relationships between men and women, specifically to ensure the continued subordination of women. As Holland et al state, "...heterosexuality is not a balanced (or even unbalanced) institutionalisation of masculinity-and-femininity, it is masculinity" (Holland et al, 2000:327). The very ordering of heterosexual relationships is detrimental to women.

Such a 'policing' of women results in their access to space being limited. Informal curfews are set on many occasions:

...in few families are women of any age, but particularly young ones, 'allowed' to walk freely in city streets, or use public transportation, after dark. Many single and independent women also observe this curtailment of activities (Henley, 1986:62).

Certainly, there are real forces that are threatening to women. There exists within society a high rate of sexual violence against women. However, often preventative measures are gendered to disadvantage women. For example, in Israel a curfew for women was instituted to try and prevent attacks. While one can assume the perpetrators were likely to be men, it was women who were confined and men who were able to roam freely (Henley, 1986:63).

Henley refers to three patterns of control- confinement, protective and normative control. The first two are self-explanatory and refer to measures such as curfews or chaperones. However, the latter implies self-control through the "internalisation of values and

norms” (Henley, 1986:64). According to Greer Fox (1973, cited in Henley, 1986:64) normative control is largely more effective and covers a wider range of activity.

Thus women are conscious of their vulnerability to the extent that the fear of sexual violence results in women ‘policing’ themselves, only entering into public space when they feel safe and comfortable to do so, generally when accompanied by a man. Jackson (1996:25) adds that, “Here the macro-level of power intersects with its micro-practices”. She points out:

The institutionalisation of heterosexuality also works ideologically, through the discourses and forms of representation which define sex in phallogocentric terms, which position men as sexual subjects and women as sexual objects (Jackson, 1996:25).

Women are thus often reliant on men for physical protection, and their movements are restricted to ‘safe’ zones. This also leads to women being psychologically dependent on men for protection. Participant One talks about how her and her boyfriend got to know each other after she was raped,

He became a best friend who guarded me and supported me when I went out. Two weeks later we were going out.

The rape has reinforced the idea that she needs to be protected. Her boyfriend becomes her protector, she is able to feel safe when he is around. She has identified him with safety, being without him as feeling vulnerable. By linking her safety to him, she also opens herself up to become dependent on him. Participant Three says,

The world could fall apart and I'd still feel safe as long as he's around.

This participant also links her security to her boyfriend, almost allowing him to be her shield against the realities of life. Her dependence on him here is clear when she says that as long as he is around, she can feel safe. This participant often mentions how she waited for him to fetch her from places. Her movements are thus reliant on him and his protection. She also says,

I was raped as a child... He organised an anti-rape march for anti-rape awareness week... I think a huge part of him wishes he could've been there to protect me as a child that instead he tries to protect me in everything else.

Participant Six also identifies her boyfriend with such feelings,

Last night I heard the most horrific story about a gang rape that occurred on campus... He was the first person I thought to call and he arrived and I just felt safe and secure.

While these participants are reliant on the men in their lives for their physical safety, it is ironic to note that the very people they are being protected from are men:

Since the threat is mainly one of attack by men, and since the main defence is a male escort, such an arrangement has been called a 'protection racket' of the type employed by criminal gangs (Henley, 1986:63).

By identifying safety with men, many women place themselves in vulnerable positions. While fear of rape by a stranger predominates, many women are attacked or sexually coerced by people they know. Dominant discourses on sexuality within a patriarchal society rely on women being positioned as passive subjects, thus often this passivity extends to a "submission to male initiatives or demands" (Gavey, 1993:93). Many perpetrators actually rely on women's false sense of security in order to successfully take advantage of women or children. However, this is not to say that all men are perpetrators of sexual violence. Rather, the way these participants position their dependency on men is an example of how they have internalised the hegemonic and essentialist discourse that equates women with weakness and men as strong, courageous and protective (Dworkin, 1976:98). Women are not able ideologically to position themselves as their own protectors, without feeling vulnerable.

Furthermore, a 'feminised' environment (that is, the physical space within which women are able to negotiate themselves) positions women as passive observers of their own lives (Henley, 1986:65). Women's vulnerability to attack, while a realistic possibility, is also a way of alienating women from their environment and from seeking protection from each other. Women look to men rather than seeking emotional and physical support from other women. Part of the reason for this rests with a culture in which the feminine is undervalued and positioned as inferior.

Lack of identification with other women

Evident throughout the diaries is the degree to which these participants do not identify with other women. This also came through in a study of early adolescents in heterosexual relationships conducted by Tolman et al. (2003). They report how often girls spent time criticising each other and displaying characteristics of distrust in relation to other girls. Even girls, who they described as friends, were distrusted when it came to potential competition for boys (2003:171). Similarly, Holland et al, in a study of young heterosexual interactions, reflect continuously the 'man in the head' syndrome that women seem to have. Even women who tried to resist discourses on the 'docile feminine' did so from a dominantly masculine perspective, "Where the 'female in the head' could be, we find no discourse, no existence, no vacancy" (Holland et al, 1996:254).

Participants in the current study reflect similar attitudes. Participant Two does not seem to paint a good picture of women in general.

I enjoy spending time with my guy friends far more than with my girl friends. Girls are difficult; they can be bitchy and petty... I live with five guys. I just prefer them- well obviously.

This participant makes excuses for men. She constructs women and herself in rather a negative way, yet maintains she finds it difficult to understand men while stating that she prefers their company. Yet the same participant says the following,

I have an inherent problem- I cannot trust men! Men cheat and women don't and that's one of the essential differences. Well, at least men find it easier to cheat in my opinion.

She depicts men as being far more likeable than women, yet she cannot trust them. While she has internalised feelings of discomfort with the company of other women, she has also internalised a masculine permissive discourse where men are unable to control their sexual drives (Hollway, 1984b:234). She is thus caught in a double-bind. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, male-identification is encouraged more than women-identification is, thus the participant continues to identify more with men than with women (see Rich 1980:647).

Participant Seven has just broken up with her boyfriend and turns to her friends for comfort,

I was sad, but this whole experience made me realise that my friends are very selfish in their friendships with me... I felt angry and alone in this whole experience.

If women have internalised what it means to be a woman in largely negative terms, it seems unlikely that there would be anything her friends could do that would help fill the void she feels she has now been left with since her break-up. A woman is no substitute for a man. Therefore, she can only feel whole again once she is able to fill the void with male and not female company. As Rich points out,

... Woman-hatred is so embedded in culture, so 'normal' does it seem, so profoundly is it neglected as a social phenomenon, that many women... fail to identify it until it takes, in their own lives, some permanently unmistakable and shattering form (Rich, 1980:658).

The participants identify other women as competitors for men or for their time and attention. Participant Six touches on this and says that her boyfriend's female friends are an issue between them:

I used to have a big issue with one of his female friends when we first got together but as I've got to know her I've gotten over that. However, I do still get jealous when he chooses to spend time with them over me... It has become really bad of late, to the point where I see his female friends and my stomach lurches because I know that it's going to result in an argument between us.

She admits that her jealousy extends to him spending time with his female friends, yet none of the participants seem to have a problem with their boyfriends taking time out for their male friends. A 'night out with the boys' seems to be acceptable, and while some may get irritated with their boyfriends, it is more tolerable than them spending time with other women.

Participants live in fear of their boyfriends leaving them for another woman, their constant fear of not measuring up leads them to often wonder if they are 'good enough' for their boyfriends:

Like why did he pick me? What is it about me? Maybe he is being an asshole because he found someone better than me? Prettier, skinnier, whatever, just better (P3).

Another way women-hatred is enforced through the larger process of self-discipline is through the discipline of their bodies. Many women experience what Sandra Bartky refers to as an 'inferiorized body' brought about by "a variety of cultural discourses and practices" (Bartky, 2002:20). She goes on to point out that, along with the constant media messages and social pressures encouraging women to invest in beauty routines in order to be 'perfect', is also the constant gaze, not only of men, but of other women too. While women "stand perpetually before his gaze, subject to his evaluation...women dress for other women" (Bartky, 2002:21):

*Insofar as women live within the constraints of compulsory heterosexuality, we know for whom this game is played: we know that a pretty young woman is likelier than a plain one to become a flight attendant or to get the requisite amount of attention in the singles' bar. This interiorized witness which is, after all, *myself*, has put me under surveillance. It is disempowering to be perpetually under surveillance... (Bartky, 2002:21- emphasis in the original).*

The gaze then comes from within. The regulatory practises of the beauty routine, supplemented by pressure to diet and exercise, force women to constantly have feelings of inferiority (Bartky, 1990:66). Yet despite constant pressures to have the perfect body etc. the

very pursuit of this is seen as 'trivial'. If women do spend time, energy and money on things that are said to enhance their beauty (and, in a heterosexualised society, their chances of attracting a man) they are "ridiculed and dismissed for the triviality of their interest in such 'trivial' things as clothes and make-up" (Bartky, 1990:73). The continual societal gaze on women is ultimately then, continually disapproving. In a culture of enforced and compulsory heterosexuality, the very act of being heterosexual encourages male-identification. Holland et al point this out in reference to heterosexual intercourse, but it is relevant for the broader societal rejection of the feminine and the institution of heterosexuality itself. They ask,

How can an active female sexuality, positive female desire and performance, feminine prowess, power and empowerment be conceived when we have an available only negative, deviant or subordinated conceptions of the desiring woman? (1996:254).

The participants' entries demonstrate Rich's (1980) argument, that society has encouraged male-identification, but condemned women to alienate themselves from each other. Holland et al (1996:254) add that the very act of having a 'female in the head' lies outside discourses within patriarchy. However, Rich highlights the ways in which women could support each other when the men in their lives fail them, as well as in general. She points out that such "women-identification is a source of energy, a potential springhead of female power" (Rich, 1980:657), which is perhaps one reason why it cannot be allowed in a male-dominated society.

Conclusion

By problematising the issue of enforced heterosexuality, one begins to 'unmask' its social and historical implications that bind women into a specific, subordinated positioning. According to Ingraham, compulsory heterosexuality is "one of the primary roots of exploitation and oppression" (Ingraham, 2000:83). Therefore, these participants' understanding and internalisation of the 'naturalness' of their heterosexual relationships, and its resultant implications, serve to subordinate them further.

It is also damaging for women to continuously refer to themselves as 'not good enough' implying they are not as good as men. By internalising negative essentialist ideas of femininity, women depict themselves as naturally deficient and experience difficulties they assume are personal faults inherent to them as women. Thus it becomes their fault if they are not seen to measure up; they view solutions in terms of things they can change within themselves. While being personally debilitating, this is also the deliberate positioning of women as secondary citizens in relation to men within a patriarchal culture. In fact, women's

sense of self-worth and consequently their personal power is automatically weakened in any male-dominated society (Ferguson, 1987, cited in Dillon, 1995:291).

Therefore it is this resulting loss of self-worth that is evident in the internalisation of hegemonic discourses within patriarchy that is responsible for the continuation of patriarchy itself. If, as Ann Ferguson (1987) suggests, self-respect is central to any hope for women's political empowerment, loss of self-respect is crucial to avoiding such progress for women (cited in Dillon, 1995:291).

The panoptican method of discipline is rife within men and women in a patriarchal culture and is a successful way to ensure that women continue to have feelings of low self-worth. The perpetual gaze forces women into regulatory procedures of self-discipline, which as discussed, is a gaze of continued disapproval. Thus as Foucault points out, "Visibility is a trap" (Foucault, 1977:200). The continued internalisation of essentialist assumptions, including compulsory heterosexuality, ensures a continual victory for patriarchy. A further way to consolidate these victories is through dominant notions of ideal love. What love is, how one attains and keeps it has plagued women throughout centuries. How this serves to maintain a heterosexual 'othering' of women and their resultant subordination is central to any discussion of the maintenance of a patriarchal society.

CHAPTER FIVE

Romantic Love and the Construction of the Heterosexual Relationship

How can I not be in heaven when I'm in a constant state of flight? I am forever changed and freed by this man's love. (P3)

Notions of romantic love are based on assumptions about masculinity and femininity and rely on the unequal power relations that subordinate women within patriarchy. Women construct their relationships with men around discourses of romantic love that position them automatically as passive recipients of male attention. The significance of the culture of romantic love in a patriarchal society has a number of consequences that reflect within the participant diaries. They include: romantic love centred on essentialised constructions of femininity and masculinity; the construction of boyfriends as children which results in the subsequent adopting of 'mothering' roles by girlfriends; the creation of a disequilibrium in the need and realisation of emotional closeness between men and women; having a boyfriend is seen as an accomplishment and these women feel grateful to have a man in their lives; the construction of heterosexual intercourse within a romantic love discourse is disempowering to these women; romantic love also automatically creates an unequal power relationship between men and women in heterosexual relationships. Thus how the romantic love discourse influences these participants is central to understanding how they construct their identities.

The Romantic Love discourse

Romantic love stories often have in common both a number of core features of their content as well as having a typical narrative structure. As far as content is concerned, romance is constructed as heterosexual, monogamous and permanent – as is suggested by the familiar 'happily ever after' ending to these tales. Highly stereotypical versions of masculinity and femininity are central to how these stories work. The princess is typically cast as passive, submissive and in need of rescuing while the prince is strong, brave, adventurous and capable of doing the rescuing. His kisses are literally life-giving while his sword dispatches evil. As for the classical romantic narrative structure this typically comprises the encounter or first meeting, the transformation in which passion may decline and various obstacles to love need to be negotiated and finally, the resolution of these difficulties in favour of an (inevitably) happy ending (Jackson 2001: 310).

Being in love allows one escape from mundane routines, which are spiced up through what Barthes calls the 'disreality' and Brunt the utopian aspect that ideal love constructs (Jackson, 1999:105). Connell (1987:248) reiterates this in his description of Broadway musicals that depict everyday life situations, which are romanticised by insertions of 'true love'. Jackson quotes Brunt, who says,

The script for love has already been written and is being continually recycled in all the love songs and love stories of Western literature and contemporary media (Jackson, 1999:106).

Thus the notion of romantic love persists and has found a home in the onslaught of romance novels and literature still prevalent today.

Giddens shows the separation of meaning between the sexes in the understanding of love, historically cultivated in the Victorian era.

With the division of spheres, however, the fostering of love became predominantly the task of women. Ideals of romantic love were plainly allied to women's subordination in the home, and her relative separation from the outside world (Giddens, 1992:43).

For men, marriage was about companionship and legitimacy, passion was reserved for a mistress. However, within romantic discourses, for women, attraction is about love, sex the expression of love. Romantic love is then 'essentially feminised love' (Giddens, 1992:43).

Simone de Beauvoir (1953:642) also points out that love means different things for men and women. She quotes Byron and Nietzsche who distinctly say that love consumes women and is merely one part of a man's life. Yet de Beauvoir takes it further and says that for men love is about possession, even if they do not mean it to be. While men remain 'sovereign subjects', "[f]or women, on the contrary, to love is to relinquish everything for the benefit of a master" (de Beauvoir, 1953:642). She does point out that this has nothing to do with nature, but rather with how nature has been constructed. Cecile Savage calls a woman without a man a "scattered bouquet" (cited in de Beauvoir, 1953:642) and de Beauvoir points out that the girl is "doomed to dependence" and "destined to the male from childhood" (1953:643).

The romantic love discourse is introduced at an early age to ensure the socialisation of children into adopting romantic love agendas. It is through this socialisation and story telling to encourage their appropriation of sex roles that the seeds of romantic love are sown,

The image of domestic woman is intricately tied up with the romantic imagery of beauty and of love forever... This romantic juxtaposition of love with marriage (with its implication of female domesticity) is the central subtext locating women in stories, knitting domesticity into romance as if that were an entirely unproblematic combination. The usual resolution of traditional feminine adventures and dilemmas is

to achieve the safety of a home of one's own with one's prince who loves one (Davies, 1989:73).

Ideal love situates itself as a 'one of a kind' type of love, echoed in ideas of 'The One' or one's 'soul-mate'. This typifies such a love as happening only once in a person's life, and also leaves (mostly women) yearning to find their 'One' so they can live happily ever after:

He says I'm 'the One'. I hope he's my 'one' too (P3).

Lindholm (1998:18) refers to Giddens highlighting his idea that modern love "...is unique in its 'one and only' and 'forever' qualities, and in its insistence on the beloved as a source of a mystical sense of completion for the lover". Participants often refer to their boyfriends in future terms, positioning themselves within the 'forever' discourse:

I am so in love with him that some days I can't even comprehend the emotion... I don't see myself ever without him and that terrifies me more than dying...I know this may sound overboard, but I'd seriously like to marry him someday. He'd be so perfect... I'm not unrealistic, I know there are ups and downs in any relationship, but I love him so deeply that forever with him seems like a wonderful blessing (P4).

Jackson highlights the fact that many women construct their boyfriends within the romantic love discourse,

Yet paradoxically, the other whom we love, this special person, is frequently our own creation: the 'real' individual we imagine we love may be little more than pretext around which our fantasies are woven (Jackson, 1999:104).

Yet men are less likely to adopt the romantic love discourse in such extreme ways than women. While one participant dreams of marriage, her boyfriend near mocks it,

I can't think of not marrying him one day. More terrifying is that he always jokes about thinking marriage is stupid. He says people aren't designed to have one partner. I can't think of anything we're more designed for ... I try never to think about these things and I'd NEVER tell him EVER because I'm scared he'd think I'm a freak and panic and leave me (P4- original emphasis).

This is not as a result of an inherent desire in women that positions them as needing a man, but rather because essentialised ideas about the roles men and women play are central to the enforcement and continuation of the romantic love discourse. As such men and women have specific roles to play out.

Romantic Love and Essentialised Constructions of Masculinity and Femininity

The romantic love genre has at its heart a very restricted mode of femininity. In striving to embody the truest expression of such a love relationship, therefore, young women

find themselves doing their best to exemplify precisely those restricted norms of femininity, almost as a litmus test for validating the significance of the relationship itself. As Carmen de la Cuesta found in her study of adolescent pregnancy in Colombia, hegemonic gender rules are used by women as a resource in their day-to-day interaction with their boyfriends (2001: 187). Identity is constructed through interactions in the love relationship:

The love relationship can be considered as a socialisation into womanhood. Here, the girl displays an idealized version of herself; she manages the impression she wants to give to her boyfriend. Thus, she acts according to the established feminine canons in a romantic love situation (de la Cuesta, 2001: 188).

The construction of what is desirable and what is undesirable role performance is clearly linked to prevailing gender norms. Part of what these young women understand by the notion of presenting their 'best selves' to their boyfriend is drawn from existing hegemonic patriarchal ideas about ideal womanhood. Presenting a best self thus entails actively restraining or hiding those actions and aspects of the self that are seen to be incompatible with the ideal image that she wants to portray since she believes that sustaining the love relationship is dependent upon her ability and willingness to behave appropriately. In the same way, women's expectations of the perfect boyfriend are informed by dominant conceptions of masculinity which tell us 'what an ideal man should be like'. Boyfriends are frequently described in highly idealized terms:

He is the most beautiful man you'll ever see. I call him my sculpture of David. He is perfect in every way... He always knows what to say and exactly the right moment to say it. He is my rock, my anchor. He always keeps me grounded by reminding me about what is real and what is not. I like that. The world could fall apart and I'd still feel safe as long as he's around (P3).

Very honest and noble- quite irritating actually he never really does anything wrong- I make far more mistakes (P2).

Romantic love requires the existence of the male-female binary so that each partner is seen to complete the other as a result of the inherent separation between them.

The other, by being who he or she is, answers a lack which the individual does not even necessarily recognize – until the love relation is initiated. And this lack is directly to do with self-identity: in some sense the flawed individual is made whole (Giddens, 1992:45).

Women thus commonly see themselves as being completed by the men in their lives, of being able to be themselves, contradictorily, only when they are not 'just' themselves or by themselves but with 'their' man:

I'm more myself than at any other time ... it has given me so much confidence (P3).

However, what emerges is that there are also deeply felt contradictions in the way in which women experience life with their boyfriends. As a result boyfriends are described as 'perfect' even as simultaneously their evident shortcomings are documented. One of the key mechanisms for managing the resultant dissonance is to effect a momentary switch from the princess archetype to embrace an equally powerful feminine archetype, namely that of mother. In doing so, the boyfriend's emotional and other incapacities are legitimised by characterising herself as mother in relation to his child-like foil:

Woke up in tears again but my friend came for a "comfort session" which in turn made my boyfriend feel left out. I've spoilt him by always giving him too much attention, now he gets so sulky when I abandon him for a few hours. He always comes around though (P3).

These are clearly the terms that are usually reserved for talking about children – spoiling, sulky, abandoning are not the kinds of adjectives which readily spring to mind in relation to an adult with whom one has a mutual relationship of equality and respect. These women, then, appear to occupy a peculiarly dual relationship to their boyfriends of simultaneous superiority and inferiority – they see their boyfriends as children, not quite capable of the levels of responsibility, caring and mutuality that they expect of their female friends or of themselves. They anticipate that their boyfriends will act irresponsibly and that they as women must be there to take care of them, in a maternal role which is indicative of the extent to which they regard themselves as far more responsible, mature and capable.

He's not talking to me. I wasn't paying attention to him I said sorry a million times He was crying but still wouldn't talk to me (P3).

Again, the need to 'pay attention' to someone is quite an infantilised construction of an adult relationship. We pay attention to our children, we monitor our relationships with our children to see if they are receiving 'sufficient attention' and it is children who sulk and cry if their mothers are insufficiently attentive.

A boyfriend's unwillingness to be helpful when needed is constructed as 'he knew he was being a little brat' (P4). In similar vein, boyfriends are frequently referred to as 'my



baby'. Whereas used by men this formulation appears to have a sexualized content, here it emerges as quite literate in its interpretation, connoting maternal feelings and bonds:

I tucked him into bed and sang him to sleep, he asked me to, it was quite cute (P8).

I couldn't help thinking about my baby and what a sulker he can be. I tell him that he can be such a child sometimes but he just sulks even more. As cute as he looks when he sulks, it still irritates me. We spoke about it later and he said that it's just that he's so used to having my attention all the time that he overreacts when I give him little or no attention. I love a man who figures shit out all by himself (P3).

And in reference to a conversation with an ex-boyfriend,

[He was] crying like a baby ... [and] I tried all that I could to make him feel better I'm glad that he needs me and I don't need him (P3).

While this young woman at some level enjoys constructing men as child-like – she obtains a certain power and control by doing so and is by implication discursively constructed as the adult in the relationship. On the other hand when he indeed fulfils this expectation of being child-like, showing himself to be incapable of insight, brattish and selfish, she naturally finds it irritating. The access to power on offer here emerges as highly limiting and fraught so that an appropriate, fulfilling, realistic adult relationship – what Giddens talks about as a 'democratic relationship' in the sense that it is conducted between equal and autonomous subjects- almost becomes impossible by definition.

Romantic Love and Unequal Power

One of the features of the romantic conception of love is the way in which young women depict love as all-encompassing, assailing every sense so that everything else in life becomes insignificant. Women frequently report the desire to spend more time with their boyfriends, and are happy to work around their other commitments in order to make this possible. A good deal of time is spent wondering what their boyfriends are doing and wishing they could be together. The boyfriends, on the other hand, emerge as 'stern' and 'strict' about setting boundaries and parameters in which the relationship must take place:

I kind of hoped we could watch a movie later tonight but he gave me the "it's nearly exams ... he has a test on Monday" speech and yes, I know it is and that he has a test but it doesn't change how I feel. He's so practical and devoted to his work and that's great, and I like it but I don't see how me climbing into bed with him when he's finished his work will hurt. But it seems to, he likes to feel in control in exam times, so he makes timetables and rules. Like I never sleep there during exams, that's dumb – if we have a five day gap, what's one night of

cuddling??? But he won't budge and I hate that When I'm there it's like everything's at peace and I drift into this happy, content deep sleep (P4).

This participant acknowledges that she too finds exams stressful and finds it difficult to relax when she sees her boyfriend 'because I obsess about the fact that I should be working' (P4). In fact, as her diary makes clear, she is an extremely conscientious student:

I work all day and hate any interruption. Even an hour to have tea with him which I know is nice and important I feel bad about having. I just like to focus completely on my work (P4).

The important point is that while both partners in the relationship are equally concerned to do well and work hard, it is the boyfriend who makes (and breaks) the rules of engagement:

He's convinced me to take the night off from learning tomorrow to go and have pizza at his house. I even think he wants me to sleep there. He's becoming a softy in his old age (P4).

Rather than contesting the unequal power of her boyfriend to determine the terms and conditions of their relationship and the implied relinquishing of her autonomy that this entails, he is presented as 'softening'. In this sense his behaviour is reinterpreted within the fairytale genre as evidence of how his hard exterior has come to be melted in time by her love. The unequal balance of power in the relationship is left unscathed.

Participants constantly go along with their boyfriends decisions, even if they had previous arrangements, or if they do not agree and are upset by the decisions:

I asked what time he's going to 'The Battle of the Bands' tomorrow night and he said that he's not sure, after his prac. So I said, 'could you sms me after your prac and I can meet you outside the journ department so we can go together'. He replied by saying that he's actually getting a lift with Texas (seemingly implying that I can't get a lift with him as well). Screw it- I said nothing (P5).

He always gets me to do what he wants... aaaaah! (P6).

We've been planning to spend the whole weekend together, not going out and doing moochy things for the WHOLE week. We were walking down the road to town today and he mentioned how he had to go to the bottle store to get booze for the party he was going to with a friend and, when I looked at him in surprise, said as an afterthought 'you should come'... He manages to get caught up in everything he's doing, but I feel like he doesn't want to get caught up in me... I guess he's not afraid of losing me (P6).

Although her boyfriend's plans hurt her and make her feel left out, she is still devoted to him,

He doesn't know how much he breaks my heart sometimes... I hate that I forgive him all the time. So now he's out with his friends, having a good time and I'm alone at home wishing that we could be together. Sucks really (P6).

It is also interesting to note how many of the participants spend time with their boyfriend's friends and their boyfriends do not get to know their friends:

He says they're all nice people, but not his type (P4).

It still irks me cos he often says he doesn't really know any of my friends but as soon as the opportunity arises for him to get to know them a bit better he always turns the offer down (P5).

Thus these participants adopt their boyfriend's way of life, embracing their friends, their routines and alienating themselves from their own.

Making women doubt themselves ensures they are shackled to feelings of insecurity heightened by the heterosexual construction of the couple, based largely on an unequal power relationship. Jackson also points out,

If love is powerlessness symbolised by waiting, it also holds out the promise of power, of being the loved one, of ensnaring another into this total psychic dependence (1999:105).

For Jackson it is this factor that makes love so attractive to women, the notion of being needed and one of the only ways women can reverse the power balance, and have elements of power themselves. She adds (1999:106), "In both fairy tales and romantic love fiction love tames and transforms the beast: love has the power to bring him to his knees". This is recurrent in the diaries as well. Being needed and 'taming the beast' make these women feel more in love:

My boyfriend has serious issues when it comes to trusting others- because whenever he has trusted others they have managed to use it against him and betrayed him so as a result he has grown independent and honestly believes that he doesn't need anyone but himself. I came along and he doesn't understand why he manages to trust me- he has told me this. It confuses him that someone has managed to crack through the thick wall he has built around him. I don't know how I did it myself, but I know it was hard work, but now I know it was definitely worth it (P2).

I'm not in love with my ex but... I'm glad he needs me and I don't need him (P3).

Participant Three is able to have a certain power over her ex-boyfriend despite the fact that when they were together she was largely powerless. This gratifies her, and she keeps this fact secret from her current boyfriend, making sure he does not get upset or challenged by her new found power. Participant Four says the following,

My boyfriend can be so needy sometimes, he never admits when he's in that mood but I always get extra phone-calls and sms's saying how he loves me etc and then I always know he wants me to tell him back, so he feels needed. I like it when he's like that.

Her boyfriend does not want to admit that he needs her because it will give her a certain amount of control over him, meaning that he would have to let up control of the relationship briefly, something he is not willing to do. If he did, he would no longer be the rescuing prince, but would rather need to be rescued by the princess. The hegemonic man is not encouraged to embrace too much emotion; rather it is seen as a sign of weakness, of being female, which is constructed within hegemonic masculinity as something negative. Men need to exclude themselves from the culture of romance that women embrace in order to construct their maleness and ensure their dominant masculinity (Jackson, 1999:108).

While constantly being positioned as objects of men's desire, it is sometimes within this realm that women are able to access power. One participant admits to enjoying the 'power' flirting gives her:

I worked a shift tonight and I really enjoy the power aspect of working behind the bar. I feel alive when guys flirt with me... I only flirt with them because there is a wooden bar between us... (P7).

However, she only feels powerful because she is safe behind the bar. In essence, her power is limited by her fear. If she flirts with someone, they may expect her to take it further, but because there is a physical object separating her and the person she is flirting with, she can enjoy the power she possesses. This is hardly a real actualisation of power and serves to reinforce how powerless she generally is. Another participant dressed up for a party:

I was wearing a skanky short skirt and boots in line with the theme and I knew it was turning him on. I felt so confident and beautiful and powerful and I knew that I was in control and it was great (P8).

It is when she is sexualised that she has power over her boyfriend and can gain some control of the relationship, if only briefly. What is interesting to note as well is that her boyfriend was aware of the power she possessed when she was dressed a certain way, and did not like it:

We went home first because B wanted me to change into something less skanky before I went out. He was really jealous I think of all the attention I might get and didn't want me to go out looking so skanky... out of respect for him and his needs I went home to change (P8).

He has enforced his masculinity and taken back the power that she felt for a moment, reasserting himself as the dominant in the relationship, and ensuring that he controls her

movements and her dress, thereby controlling her. She is eager to be able to meet his needs, while there is no evidence to suggest him even acknowledging that she may need to feel powerful now and again in order to gain back what little control she has access to within the relationship. The times when women feel powerful within their relationships are based on illusions of power, as opposed to the actualisation of 'real' power. It is in these moments that one can see just how unequal the balance of power is in these relationships.

Emotional Closeness

Many of the participants express problems communicating verbally with their partners. They view it as part of the 'inherent' differences between men and women, but seem to blame themselves nonetheless. There is the notion within essentialism that men and women speak different languages and cannot understand each other,

Sometimes I wish some kind of interpretive device existed so that it could breach the gap in communication between men and women. They misinterpret us, we misinterpret them and then all it results in is a big mess and confusion (P2).

There is a clear 'communication gap' between these women and their boyfriends, which they attribute to biology. Some theorists may suggest that this gap reflects male dominance and proves that social institutions have been constructed from a male point of view. According to Neal and Collas,

What we selectively see and hear in the world around us depends on our subjective vantage point, which is filtered through our personal memories and individual experiences (Neal and Collas, 2000:78).

They also suggest that the constructed boundaries between men and women in society also result in different symbolic meanings for them, women interpreting something one way, and men another.

The desire and need for greater verbal communication and emotional closeness with their partners is a common plea on the part of women. As Giddens put it, women frequently find 'emotional aridity in situations in which they expected to find love' (Giddens, 1992:148). Shere Hite's *Women and Love*, based on responses from 3500 US women, depressingly, since it was first published in 1976, echoes this finding:

Many women know they are not getting equal emotional support, esteem or respect in their relationships. And yet it can be difficult to describe definitively to a man just how he is projecting diminishing attitudes. Some of the ways this happens are so subtle in their expression that, while a woman may wind up feeling frustrated and on the defensive, she can find it almost impossible to say

just why: pointing to the subtle thing said or done would look petty, like overreacting. But taken all together, it is no surprise when even one of these incidents can set off a major fight – or, more typically, another round of alienation which never gets resolved. These little incidents cut away at the relationship, making women angry and finally causing love to dwindle down to a mere modest toleration (cited in Giddens, 1992: 149).

Yet it is unsurprising that emotionally fulfilling relationships of equality and mutuality cannot be formed with people who are constructed as children. When men are not constructed as children, they are framed according to the equally stereotypical fairytale archetype of prince: austere, strong, noble and handsome.

While at first glance the construction of boyfriends as children appears as a subversion of the traditional fairytale conception of the infallible prince, in reality storied representations of masculinity often present the hero as himself in need of transformation through the kindly ministrations of the princess. The heroine in the traditional romance novel does have an active role in one respect, namely that of the active production of love through the melting of the hero's heart, dissolving his hostility, taming his antagonism. She kisses the toad to break the spell and transform him back into a prince. Beauty's love and tenderness are required if the Beast is to recapture his true princely form. These tales suggest to women that they should look beneath the tough and seemingly emotionally sterile exteriority of men and take up the challenge of releasing the man within whom, they have faith, will reveal himself as princely. Success will in itself be a measure of their own fulfilment of the princessly ideal. If the boyfriend remains an emotional toad, unchanged by her ministrations, then her status as 'true princess' is called into question.

Women, therefore, have a vested interest in obscuring failings in their boyfriends since revealed, these failings are rendered as a mirror of their own incapacity to bring about the required fairytale denouement:

He doesn't understand and I can't explain it to him either- so in actual fact my emotional state at the moment is not as a result of him or his fault (P2).

The result is that women are faced with a double-bind: on the one hand, if they are to embody the ideal femininity of the romance fairytale, they must accept a construction of themselves as needy and pathetic, in need of protection, rescuing and looking after. On the other hand, their experience suggests that they are clearly the ones doing the looking after. While living with the appellation of useless they must perform all the work of being useful. Their emotions are freely available to their boyfriends, both in their actions as the 'dutiful girlfriend' and in their expressions of love to their boyfriends. However, they are unable to feel secure in the

knowledge of their boyfriends emotions, because their boyfriends are locked into discourses of hegemonic masculinity which positions emotionally expressive as 'feminine',

To be overly emotional for a Western male, particularly within Anglo-Saxon culture, is to bring his masculinity into question (Jackson, 1999:108).

Despite this, these women are grateful to have these men in their lives.

The accomplishment of having a boyfriend

Karin Martin's (2002) study on adolescent sexual behaviour highlights the different interpretations of sex for girls and boys. While boys would not admit liking their girlfriends, especially not to their male friends, "Girls, on the other hand, are immersed in romantic culture. They told stories of love..." (2002:143).

Martin surmises that adolescent girls are indoctrinated into the ideal love fantasy through popular culture and in their teens live out such constructions in their relationships. According to her (2002:144), "In narratives of ideal love girls often describe boys as heroes". Connell refers to this as 'naturalised hegemonic masculinity', reiterated through forms of cultural coercion, "sagas, ballads, westerns, thrillers" (Connell, 1987:249). The participants in this study construct similar narratives about their boyfriends:

How can I not be in heaven when I'm in a constant state of flight? I am forever changed and freed by this man's love (P3).

I honestly don't know how I would get through certain situations without him. He is my rock, my anchor. (P4).

Participant Five also refers to her boyfriend as her 'rock' and says,

I'm so grateful I have him.

Feelings of being lucky and grateful to have a boyfriend are consistent throughout the participant diaries:

...I don't get how lucky I am (P1).

Another consistently mentions in her entries that,

He is more than I deserve (P3).

According to P4,

He's the best thing that ever happened to me.

Their boyfriends are constructed as better than they are, being more able to handle situations that are difficult. Most of these girls wait to see what their boyfriends say about certain

situations before they make decisions. When a problem arises with one of her friends and one participant can't tell her boyfriend she is very upset,

Now I've been told this horrific thing that could have terrifying consequences and I can't talk to anyone. What if something bad happens and he could have given me advice? Oh well, at least I really understand the extent to which I value his advice and opinion (P4).

It seems as though she lacks the confidence in herself to make the right decision and needs constant affirmation from her boyfriend who she claims is her 'rock'. When P7 breaks up with her boyfriend, she says the following,

The actual reality of what I had done had settled in on Saturday and I felt very lonely. I no longer felt excited about being single; I wanted stability, comfort and companionship.

According to another participant her boyfriend is able to know her needs better than her, and knows when to 'set her straight',

He is everything I want and at the same time everything I need and don't always necessarily want, but I need it whether I like it or not (P2).

She also admits that,

Most of my feelings toward this guy are a result of admiration (P2).

She looks up to her boyfriend and he is a 'hero' being able to correct her motions should she stray from her feminine role.

Most of the participants believe their lives are much better now that they have a boyfriend,

What would my life be without a boyfriend? It would actually be pretty shit (P1).

I'm not sure what my life would be like now without a boyfriend... He's changed me and has become such a big part of my life that I think I'd be disorientated, and feel a bit lost for a while... The thought of being without him makes me feel a little sick (P5).

Martin also highlights that part of the accomplishment of having a boyfriend is proof that one is attractive and worthy of a man, thus worthy overall (Martin, 2002:146). This is emphasised when participants say time and again that they are so 'lucky' and 'grateful' to have their boyfriends.

Simone de Beauvoir alludes to something similar when she says,

The young girl dreamed of herself as seen through men's eyes, and it is in men's eyes that the woman believes she has finally found herself... The woman in love feels endowed with a high and undeniable value; she is at last allowed to idolise herself

through the love she inspires. She is overjoyed to find in her lover a witness (de Beauvoir, 1953:646).

Thus ideas of love, although not exclusively, affect women more so than men. As Giddens points out,

The ethos of romantic love has had a double impact upon women's situation. On the one hand it has helped to put women 'in their place' - the home. On the other hand, however, romantic love can be seen as an active, and radical, engagement with the 'maleness' of modern society (Giddens, 1992:2).

Young women are lucky to have boyfriends because in accordance with the binary logic at the heart of romantic love scripts a princess only becomes the dramatic focal point for a story when she exists in relation to a prince. Without him she is nothing but an ugly sister or wicked stepmother. Fairytale romances end in marriage and living happily ever after. To lose or leave a relationship is then, literally, to lose the plot. Even if staying in a relationship means being hurt, neglected, unfulfilled, harmed or abused then this, too, is anticipated in the traditional fairytale structure – after all princesses are routinely locked up in towers, poisoned or sent off into the woods to have their hearts torn out. As Sue Jackson says (2001:314) 'in romantic narrative it is "natural" for heroines to suffer, to endure pain, in the name of love'. Because one is so lucky to have love, one is prepared to endure its hardships – almost anything is better than no love at all. In Western culture to experience the transcendence of this version of love is held out as the kind of experience without which life is impoverished and it goes hand-in-hand with intensely lived demonstrations of love such as jealousy, breaking up and passionate reconciliation.

The perception of obstacles to be conquered in love's true path are part of the necessary testing ground for this kind of love and for distinguishing between 'true' and 'false' love. One of the key elements of the romantic genre's version of love is that there is one particular person who is capable of fulfilling every need and want, of making us whole and complete in every way and much of the purpose of our affective lives is about finding this one person.

Finding out whether or not the other is our 'one true love' then, becomes an item of concern requiring a great deal of thought, introspection and, crucially, observation of the other. In de la Cuesta's study of Colombian adolescent girls (2001: 186). she argues that this can be interpreted as a testing of the boyfriend's character and intentions which permits the young woman to learn if she is really loved and whether or not she has indeed found 'true love'. Given that the notion of one true love is by definition central to romance plot

construction, fidelity emerges as an important point of concern for women. Once she believes that she has found her one true love, for her part, infidelity is ruled out as a matter of course as a direct outcome of the logic of the fairytale. Since she has found her one true love it simply makes no sense to entertain romantic thoughts in relation to anyone else. Being perfect in every way, the prince by definition requires no supplementation:

How could I ever be with anyone else when he's everything I need?
(P3).

On the other hand, close surveillance for signs of infidelity on the part of her boyfriend is a necessary part of determining whether he too recognizes himself in the role of one true love.

I started another huge fight because I accused him of cheating on me, although nothing has happened to make me think that. I think its all linked to the fact lately my cheating bastard of an ex has been calling me (P3).

Because infidelity has such significant consequences in the romance plot, threatening to unravel its logic entirely, women often find themselves in need of explanations for male infidelity which act as justifications for the behaviour without undermining true love's necessarily everlasting nature. Essentialised portrayals of male sexuality provide the most convenient mechanism for doing so. Here men emerge as having urgent and difficult to control sexual desires so that fidelity is inherently problematic and difficult to achieve given the way that masculine sexuality is constructed. Ironically then, to suspect a boyfriend of cheating is to confirm his status as a true man.

Thus the very factors that construct ideal love also serve to instil insecurities within women who fear that possible infidelity or other forms of disappointment could shatter the romantic love relationship. As Jackson says,

Such ecstasy and self-absorption centred exclusively on a single other renders the lover extremely vulnerable. This vulnerability, often manifested as jealousy, is associated with the chronic insecurity of the lover (Jackson, 1999:105).

Jackson also points out that insecurity is inevitable, as it is fuelled by an insatiable desire. For these participants, there are continual feelings of insecurity:

I have never been jealous of anyone until now- I'm so paranoid and insecure at the moment (P6).

An additional justification for potential infidelity in boyfriends is to be found in the way in which women render themselves as never quite sufficient to the task of meeting all the

needs of their men – never quite pretty enough, thin enough, sexually arousing enough, emotionally self-sufficient enough or any number of other deficiencies. These help to account for why they expect men to be disloyal to them and make excuses for them when they are.

Beauty's Beast is neither instantaneously altered into a prince upon meeting her, nor does he immediately recognise in her the capacity to be his rescuer. He continues to behave in a beastly fashion for some time before a series of kindly and self-sacrificing acts of love on her part ultimately effect the transformation. Women therefore appear undaunted if their prince fails to style himself as such. It is enough that they have access to privileged insight into the dramatic potentialities in their story and they know that it is up to them to ensure that the plot unfolds as it ought to. Somehow the romantic vision is never fully abandoned and continues to exist at the level of the imagination despite the ways in which lived experience contradicts it. Awareness of the contradictory nature of their relationships is itself explained by deploying romantic love's necessary irrationality, it is not something to try to understand or analyse, it assails us in an irrational way. What also comes through in these diaries is the idea that love is so magical and unfathomable, that it is precisely these qualities that are used to recognise that they are indeed in love at all:

I love this man more than I can comprehend. I know it's right precisely because I cannot understand it (P3).

I don't think I'll ever understand love or men, but I don't think I want to understand either. The fun and exciting elements about it after all is the unknown (P6).

So if their actions seem to contradict their interests or the lived evidence of our experience then this in itself is an indication of just how in love they are.

Sex and Romance

Within the context of romantic love to engage in sex is an important part of the task of being a girlfriend (de la Cuesta, 2001: 188). A sexual relationship is seen as an important component of building intimacy and trust and therefore acting as a potential source of security and permanence, contributing to ensuring a romantic future. For women in particular, sex is understood as part of a romantic story. To be in love is to render sexual relations legitimate. Sexual desire expressed in the context of a romantic love relationship is more socially acceptable for women and women often make a distinction between 'making love' and having sex, seeing the former as integral to the romantic love story and a qualitatively different, transcendent experience as a result:

Sex always rejuvenates me. I feel so alive and ready to take on whatever may come my way. Our sex life is truly out of this world (P3).

We made love... it was really good, slow and sensual. It made me feel really close to him which was a great boost to my self-esteem and mood (P5).

Most participants thus distinguish between 'making love' and having sex, the former being noticeably different from the latter. Just having sex left participants feeling unloved and used:

We slept together and then he seemed to have the attitude of, well, that was good thanks, you can go now. I feel like shit (P6).

She expects sex to be attached to love, and is disappointed when her boyfriend does not feel the same way. She describes the difference in their sex life,

Normally when we sleep together it's an experience but lately it's just been sex. Hollow. Like an arb score. I feel crap. I just don't know what to do.

Participant Four also highlights the difference between sex and 'making love',

Even sex changes, it becomes more about 'doing it' than actually making love.

While the contemporary milieu in which these young women operate is characterised by sexual permissiveness, experimentation and informality, this, as Herbert Marcuse pointed out, is not the same as liberation.

The commodifying of sexuality is pervasive but eroticism is more or less thoroughly expunged from view. The antagonism with which sexuality was regarded in earlier phases of the development of the West is actively preferable, Marcuse argues, to 'sexual freedom' which conceals its oppressiveness beneath a gloss of enjoyment. Previously an awareness of what was disbarred was preserved; we may seem freer, but are in fact living in subjection (Giddens, 1992:168).

Myra Hird and Sue Jackson (2001, 29) have argued that young women are often exposed to non-violent sexually coercive tactics. Such tactics "appeal to romantic feelings ('you would have sex with me if you loved me') [and] constitute a major technique of sexual coercion". Moreover, Hird and Jackson point to a growing theoretical and empirical literature illuminating the relationship 'between heteronormative conceptions of sexuality and sexual coercion'. Coercion can often be very subtle but is always related to the overarching scripts of masculinity and femininity in which personal relationships are embedded:

He wants to have sex. There's no way I can have sex now. I have the worst migraine and I'm tired as a dog. I feel so bad when I say no to him about sex ... He thinks I'm not attracted to him anymore, but that's bullshit. I get so tired ... I'll definitely have sex tomorrow (P3).

One participant admits to not being physically attracted to her boyfriend. She also admits to 'pulling ploys' to get out of having sex with him. Her discomfort at having sex with her boyfriend is also centred on the fear of getting pregnant. She admits,

I never used to be worried about sex until I met up with [my boyfriend]... [He] doesn't like condoms, absolutely point blank refuses to talk about abortion... (P7).

Yet despite her fears she does occasionally have sex with her boyfriend because it is part of her 'duties' as girlfriend:

I wasn't overtly keen for a night of wild passion, but it had been way too long and we [had] been planning it. So I got drunk... (P7).

While she expressly admits to not wanting sex, she submits because her boyfriend has a right to her body for his sexual pleasure, while in turn, she needs to be drunk in order to bear it.

What young women take to be individual negotiations between themselves and their boyfriends are 'actually highly dependent upon cultural notions of femininity and masculinity and "normal" heterosexual relations' (Hird and Jackson, 2001, 41). Sexual behaviour is negotiated within a biological essentialist framework of understanding which posits 'natural' and immutable biological differences, not least with regard to sexual desire. While sexual freedom for women now exists, Giddens argues, 'the problem is to make something of it in the face of male attitudes which still carry more than an echo of the past.' (1992:51). However, as Sharon Thompson has argued (1989 cited in Giddens, 1992:52), to do so requires 'the deconstruction of sex, romance and intimacy and renegotiating the bargain between the genders'. The permissiveness of the present era is thus a phenomenon of power and is not a pathway to emancipation.

Conclusion

Young women's stories of their relationships with their boyfriends often start with fairytale beginnings, but as the relationship progresses the anticipated narrative structure of the traditional fairytale rarely materializes. Instead, in a reversal of fortune, the handsome prince is frequently revealed as an unfortunate toad. The princess, if she is to retain her claim to that title, must find ways of managing the resultant dissonance. She often does so through a variety of ingenious narrative devices which serve in complex ways to aid both her accommodation and her resistance to the unexpected turn that her romance plot has taken. At stake in this careful manoeuvring is her feminine identity which is constructed in and through

these narratives in an intricate process of having to meld discordant plotlines in order to achieve a semblance of narrative harmony.

Romantic love, given its implied stereotypical versions of masculinity and femininity, is shot through with unequal relations of power and, for women, dreams of romance often end in the nightmare of domestic subjugation. The traditional romantic fairytale has as its necessary correlate a passive and submissive femininity which is contrasted with an active, adventurous and capable masculinity. In this sense a romanticized understanding of love acts as a trap for young women who, if they buy into the ideals of romantic love, find themselves having, also, to work with a highly restrictive version of femininity. The latter seldom sits comfortably with women who emerge, in other aspects of their personal narratives, as strong, intelligent and accomplished. The result is the emergence of a further contradiction in need of careful management.

However, what emerges is that women more often than not manage the manifestations of these contradictions internally rather than through an active process of negotiation with their boyfriends. To do so would be to posit a relationship as a partnership between two autonomous and equal subjects which would be to unravel entirely the essentialism, binary logic, unequal power and archetypal role definition so central to the way in which romantic stories operate.

Writing over a decade ago, Anthony Giddens, in *The Transformation of Intimacy*, suggested that notions of romantic love need not be interpreted as inevitably or only having oppressive consequences. Rather, romantic love 'can be seen as an active, and radical, engagement with the "maleness" of modern society' (1992:2). For Giddens, then, romantic love is 'the counterfactual thinking of the deprived' (1992:45). Romantic love presumes that a durable emotional tie can be established with the other on the basis of qualities intrinsic to that tie itself. Yet, as Giddens also remarks, whether or not this radical potential can be realized is uncertain: 'nobody knows if sexual relationships will become a wasteland of impermanent liaisons, marked by emotional antipathy as much as by love, and scarred by violence (Giddens, 1992:196). Certainly, if women continue to position their relationships within discourses of romantic love, they will also continue to expose themselves to the very things they are attempting to avoid- loneliness, despair, subordination and a life of unfulfilled expectations.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

*“Love is the active concern for the life and the growth for that which we love.
Where this active concern is lacking, there is no love”*

Erich Fromm

Love is not about objectification. It is not even primarily about a relationship with another person. Rather, love is an *“attitude, an orientation of character which determines the relatedness of a person to the world as a whole, not toward one ‘object’ of love”* (Fromm, 1956:43- original emphasis). To truly love is not only to love another person, but to love all people. Having only one ‘object’ of love, only loving one person, is not love, but a ‘symbiotic attachment’ (Fromm, 1956:43). Love is constituted by the faculty, not the object. For Fromm, love is an art that needs to be understood in theory before it can be practiced, before it can be ‘mastered’. For him, love is an activity,

If I truly love one person I love all persons, I love the world, I love life. If I can say to somebody else, ‘I love you’, I must be able to say ‘I love in you everybody, I love through you the world, I love in you also myself’ (Fromm, 1956:43).

For these participants, however, love is not an activity, but is rather a labour. There is sufficient cause to argue that these women work hard at not being themselves. Their labour is a labour of acting out who they feel pressured to be, which is anyone but who they are. Who they are constructed as, is deficient and incapable. The system of patriarchy relies on women having feelings of insecurity, relies on women not embodying confidence and self-worth and relies on their continual doubt and disapproval of themselves. The gaze on women is disapproving, the internalisation of this disapproval is actualized in alleged female over-emotionalisation, continued devaluing of the feminine and in essentialised binary assumptions about gender. Thus one of the most important aspects of being able to love another, is being able to love oneself. According to Fromm (1956:55) self-love and love are not mutually exclusive. Self-love by no means implies selfishness. He adds:

...respect for one’s own integrity and uniqueness, love for and understanding of one’s own self, cannot be separated from respect and love and understanding for another individual. The love for my own self is inseparably connected with the love for any other being (Fromm, 1956:55).

Thus love without self-love is what Fromm calls, *erotic love*:

It is the craving for complete fusion, for union with another person. It is by its very nature exclusive and not universal; it is also perhaps the most deceptive form of love that there is (1956:49).

The notion of 'falling' in love incorporates a superficial emotional connection with another person. The excitement, anticipation and thrill wear off and one is left feeling awkward, unloved and unknown by the other person. Intimacy is based on sexual contact. In contrast, for Fromm,

Genuine love is an expression of productiveness and implies care, respect, responsibility and knowledge. It is not an 'affect' in the sense of being affected by somebody, but an active striving for the growth and happiness of the love person, rooted in one's own capacity to love (Fromm, 1956:55).

Thus it is almost inevitable that, if women continue to ascribe to notions of ideal and romantic love, they will continue to have relationships based on unequal partnerships, expressed more in obsessiveness, as opposed to a love based on mutuality and respect, what Giddens (1992) refers to as 'intimacy as democracy'.

Intimacy as Democracy

Giddens postulates 'confluent love' as the alternative to romantic love. Confluent love is love based on equality and on the necessity of the emotional involvement and integrity of each of the partners. Confluent love presumes equality in emotional give and take. Love here only develops to the degree to which intimacy does, to the degree to which each partner is prepared to reveal concerns and needs to the other and to be vulnerable to the other. It is not necessarily oriented towards permanence but rather towards the fulfilment of each during the time of engagement. Giddens argues that more and more women are pushing for confluent love and that the more they do so, the more male emotional dependence becomes untenable (1992:117).

In the narratives presented in this thesis, drawn from the lives of young, empowered, intelligent middle-class women, however, there seem less fertile grounds for optimism. There is little indication that women have the tools with which to reflect on their own motivations, conduct and desires in such a way as to challenge differential power. One might postulate that the absence of a vivid contemporary feminist politics offering a sustained and thorough-going social critique has meant that young women's sexual liberation has not been matched by the concomitant emergence of a critical consciousness of how they operate and construct

themselves as women, particularly in relation to the men with whom they form intimate bonds.

Antonio Gramsci's conception of hegemony (1978) concerns the development of consensus between the dominant and the dominated such that subordinate groups express approval for the very values, symbols and beliefs which effect their subordination. Clearly control is never total but is fragmentary, incoherent and inconsistent. Central to Gramsci's theory of ideological hegemony is the notion of 'common sense' which denotes the way in which an ideology becomes part of everyday thought. Romantic versions of love are part of our contemporary cultural common sense understanding of love between men and women. It is evidence of the hegemony of these ideas that we have such difficulty with genuinely deconstructing the genre.

For example, early feminist responses aimed at exposing the power relations inherent in intimate relations between men and women employed devices similar to that of the fairytale: counter-posing opposites and reverting to stereotypical extremes. In short, early feminism relied on its own big bad wolf to make its 'consciousness raising' point about the personal being political. But swashbuckling princesses who rescue ineffectual princes hardly constitutes a subversion of the genre. The creation of a truly alternative vision of intimate relations between men and women requires something more thorough-going than a simple substitution of roles.

In romantic discourse, as Magaret Wetherell has pointed out (1995 cited in Myra Hird and Sue Jackson 2001:39) the priority for women is to maintain the relationship while for men the priority is to maintain their own autonomy. Yet, emancipation, as Giddens argues, assumes autonomy of action (1992: 181) for all parties to intimate relationships. Emancipation in this context is to be understood as the radical democratisation of the personal – not only of sexuality but also of friendship relations, relations of parents to children and other kin.

Democracy connotes autonomy, egalitarianism, treating others in such a way as to recognize that the development of their separate potentialities is not threatening, operating with respect for personal boundaries, without coercion and abuse, respect for the views and personal traits of the other. As with public and institutional democracy, the democratisation of the personal sphere is concerned with the equal involvement of autonomous individuals in determining the conditions of their association. As with public democracy, democracy in the private sphere entails rights and obligations. Far from merely transposing the genders of the key protagonists in

our narratives of power and love, the genuine transformation of intimacy would be extremely subversive in its implications, as Giddens puts it, 'a social world in which emotional fulfilment replaced the maximizing of economic growth would be very different from that which we know at present' (1992:3).

The idea that 'the personal is political' is vital here. True democracy cannot be realized in a society where the democratization of the personal has not taken place. Democracy relies, not on all people being the same, but on the principle of autonomy, "[a]utonomy means the capacity of individuals to be self-reflective and self-determining" (Giddens, 2002:447). Intimacy as democracy relies on accountability manifested as qualities of trust and respect. The important issue is that without these qualities, intimacy is far from democratic. Women cannot have access to equality within society until the unequal power relations within their private dealings with men are dissipated.

The Importance of Telling Sexual Stories

The issue thus also becomes a question of 'how'. How do we begin to unravel the intimate sphere and understand how such undemocratic relationships continue? Ken Plummer (1995:5) discusses the importance of telling sexual stories and how one can take sexual stories "*as issues to be investigated in their own right*" (original emphasis). How one constructs the telling of the sexual story is itself something to be investigated. Here 'sexual stories' are seen as intimate narratives that are reflective of a broader societal trend (Plummer, 1995:6). Within the context of this thesis specifically, these sexual stories reflect certain ideologies and discourses of the patriarchal society these women live in. Their personal narratives reflect the constructions of their intimate experiences through the unconscious accessing of hegemonic discourses. As Plummer points out,

[T]he sexual stories I will be discussing must be seen to be socially produced in social contexts by embodied concrete people experience the thoughts and feelings of everyday life (1995:16- emphasis in the original).

The women in this study who have told their sexual stories, their intimate stories, allowed me to 'inspect' the social roles of their stories: how they fit in with a broader societal trend, how they adopt certain assumptions, how these reflect their positioning both within their relationships, but also within a larger political climate, within a broader societal positioning. Based on the premise 'the personal is political', these women's stories became an instrument for investigating the continued subordination of women within South African society.

The process of story-telling for some of these participants was enough to realize their own positioning and constructions of the intimate. In a feedback session, one participant mentioned the role her diary played in 'discovering' how unequal her relationship was. She was able to access power within the process. As Plummer says, "*The power to tell a story, or indeed to not tell a story, under the conditions of one's own choosing, is part of the political process*" (1995:26- original emphasis). These participants were given, through this thesis, the choice to tell their stories in their own way. They constructed their narratives within an open environment which, until this process, was not in existence for them.

For Participant Four, the act of writing in the diaries meant that she could begin to see herself and her relationship, through the eyes of another, a person separate from her life who would know of her relationship only through what she wrote. It was in this process that she began to rethink her relationship:

Thinking back on the project is a somewhat strange experience- I have changed immeasurably in the past year and find it extremely difficult to understand how I let myself get so entrenched in what was (although I hate to name it) an emotionally abusive relationship.

Such an understanding of her relationship came from her. It was not a result of an 'intervention' or any other such melodrama. Rather, it was a direct result of the process constructing her. By telling her sexual story, she was able to see it more clearly. She states:

Sometimes I get scared that if I hadn't done this project I would never have realized any of this... I wonder if- if I hadn't looked at myself through someone else's eyes- that I would have lived the rest of my life being put down by someone else. I think I was so entrenched in the relationship and was so powerless within it, that I would have... [but] everyday that I wrote in the journals and looked at myself through someone else's eyes I learnt a little more.

Her and her boyfriend did not break-up, rather she was able to assert her feelings, her decisions and her discontent in a way that she never suspected she could. As a result, she says:

He talks to me about what I want and need... We negotiate our new relationship everyday- some days are easy and some are hard... I love him still- but differently. I don't look up to him adoringly anymore...

While this process was not one of 'saving' these participants from themselves, the arena it provided for highlighting these women's specific experiences is an important one. As pointed out by Boler (1999):

For private angers and personal sorrows to remain private is useful from the point of view of maintaining the status quo while to voice these publicly, is to learn that others

feel the similarly, and to embark on a political process of revisioning social life. As Peter Lyman wrote in a 1981 essay, to do so is to transform a psychological symptom into a political issue in that it reflects a collective experience (Lyman, 1981:69 cited in Boler, 1999:114).

It is only once these issues are brought to the fore that one can begin to understand their implications. Implications that, as have been seen throughout this thesis, serve to disempower, discredit and disappoint women. Unless women continue to tell their sexual stories, their intimate narratives, they will continue to be disempowered, discredited and disappointed on a larger societal scale and as a result, true democracy will not exist.

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